

Pomponazzi's Ethics and the Aristotelian Choice of Lives

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Abstract: A number of commentators have suggested that in the final chapters of his *De immortalitate animae* Pietro Pomponazzi drew on Stoic themes in developing his ethical claims regarding the autonomy of virtue. I argue against both the claim that he was especially influenced by Stoicism here and the claim that he was asserting the autonomy of ethics from religious or metaphysical concerns. Instead I argue that we ought to take Pomponazzi's ethical reflections as a response to Aristotle's discussion, towards the end of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, of the relative status of the political and the contemplative life. We also ought to see them as a corollary to his interpretation of Aristotle's account of the soul in the earlier chapters of the work.

Pietro Pomponazzi's *De immortalitate animae*, first published in 1516,¹ argues that it is impossible by the use of reason alone to argue for the soul's immortality. Pomponazzi's targets are those who have argued that Aristotle held that the soul or the intellect is immortal (in particular, Averroes and Thomas Aquinas), as well as other philosophical positions that claim that such a thesis can be established by reason (such as that of Marsilio Ficino). After having dealt with these opponents and laid out his own view, in the final chapters of the book Pomponazzi turns to consider the ethical

¹ Pomponazzi's *Tractatus de immortalitate animae* (hereafter *Imm. An.*) was first published in Bologna 1516 and reprinted in his *Tractatus acutissimi utilissimi et mere peripatetici*, Venice 1525, which collected together all of his works published up to that date. Here I have relied on the recent critical edition by Thierry Gontier (*Traité de l'immortalité de l'âme / Tractatus de immortalitate animae*, Texte établi, traduit, présenté et annoté par Thierry Gontier, Paris 2012), which includes a list of previous editions (pp. lxxv-lxxvi). To that list one can now add the new edition of the collected works with facing Italian translation: *Tutti I Trattati Peripatetici*, Testo latino a fronte, Monografia introduttiva, testo critico e note di Francesco Paolo Raimondi e di José Manuel García Valverde, Traduzione di Francesco Paolo Raimondi, Milano 2013. I have also made use of the translation into English by W. H. Hay II in E. Cassirer – P. O. Kristeller – J. H. Randall (eds), *The Renaissance Philosophy of Man* (hereafter CKR), Chicago 1948, pp. 280-381.

implications of his project. In particular, he attempts to respond to critics who are concerned about the implications for ethics of denying the soul's immortality. He argues, among other things, that our ethical behaviour need not require threat of post-mortem punishment or reward. This has led some commentators to suggest that Pomponazzi asserts the autonomy of ethics from religious or metaphysical issues, making him in some respects a precursor of Immanuel Kant.²

Other commentators have suggested that this focus on the idea that virtue is its own reward signals a shift in this predominantly Aristotelian work towards Stoicism. Thus, John Randall described Pomponazzi's position as "a thoroughly naturalistic ethics [that] owes more to the Stoics than to Aristotle".³ Before Randall, Léontine Zanta, in her study of Stoicism in the sixteenth century, located Pomponazzi within the revival of Stoicism during that period.⁴ These claims are based, in part, on the fact that Pomponazzi refers to Seneca in his discussion of the autonomy of virtue.⁵

In what follows I argue against both the claim that Pomponazzi was asserting the autonomy of ethics and the claim that he was especially influenced by Stoicism in the *De immortalitate animae*. Although Pomponazzi did pay close attention to Stoicism elsewhere, in his *De fato, de libero arbitrio et*

² See A. H. Douglas, *The Philosophy and Psychology of Pietro Pomponazzi*, Cambridge 1910, pp. 257, 267.

³ J. H. Randall, *The School of Padua and the Emergence of Modern Science*, Padova 1961, p. 99. (This remark is reprinted in Randall's introduction to Pomponazzi in CKR, p. 274.)

⁴ See L. Zanta, *La renaissance du Stoïcisme au XVI^e siècle*, Paris 1914, pp. 33-46.

⁵ As we shall see, Pomponazzi refers to Seneca just once, at *Imm. An.* 14 (Gontier 205, CKR 374), where he mentions *Ep.* 54 and *Cons. Marc.* Editors of *Imm. An.* have noted what they take to be allusions to Seneca at various other places in the text, but none of these are close textual parallels.

de praedestinatione,⁶ his single reference to Seneca is hardly enough to show a Stoic influence here. Paul Oskar Kristeller argued, perhaps rightly, that when Pomponazzi referred to Seneca in the *De immortalitate animae*, he was merely using Seneca as an example. Yet Kristeller went on to claim that there was a Platonic influence at work there instead.⁷ On this issue, of course, there is no great distance between Plato and the Stoics, but both suggestions distract us from the central preoccupation in the final chapters, namely a discussion of the competing ideals of the active and contemplative lives that we find towards the end of the *Nicomachean Ethics*. As we shall see, Pomponazzi comes down resolutely in favour of the former – the active life – and sees this as the natural corollary of his strongly biological reading of Aristotle’s account of the soul earlier in the text. I shall argue, then, that what we find in Pomponazzi is not a turn to Stoic or even Platonic ethics, but rather a somewhat heterodox reading of Aristotle’s ethics that does to the *Nicomachean Ethics* what the earlier parts of the work have done to the *De Anima*, namely offer a thoroughly naturalistic interpretation that insists on interpreting Aristotle as a whole rather than focus on the letter of particular passages taken out of that much wider context.

Let us now turn to Pomponazzi’s text. In Chapter 13 he lists a total of eight objections that might be raised against his central claims regarding the soul. These are: i) if the human soul is mortal, there will be no final end for man, and thus he will be incapable of happiness; ii) if the soul is mortal, no one

⁶ This work was completed not long after *Imm. An.* but was only published posthumously in 1567. For a modern edition see *Petri Pomponatii Mantuani libri quinque de fato, de libero arbitrio et de praedestinatione*, edidit Richard Lemay, Lucani 1957. On its discussion of Stoicism see J. Kraye, *Stoicism in the Philosophy of the Italian Renaissance*, in J. Sellars (ed.), *The Routledge Handbook of the Stoic Tradition*, Abingdon 2016, pp. 133-44, at pp. 140-42.

⁷ See P. O. Kristeller, *Aristotelismo e sincretismo nel pensiero di Pietro Pomponazzi*, Padova 1983, pp. 10-11. Note also the comments on Kristeller’s interpretation in M. L. Pine, *Paul Oskar Kristeller on Renaissance Scholasticism*, in J. Monfasani (ed.), *Kristeller Reconsidered: Essays on his Life and Scholarship*, New York 2006, pp. 213-21, at p. 220.

would ever be courageous; iii) it implies that God either does not govern the world or that he is unjust; iv) it goes against all religions, which teach that the soul remains after the body; v) it goes against many experiences that suggest the soul is immortal; vi) it is contradicted by the fact that some people are disturbed by demons, which are the souls of dead men; vii) it contradicts Aristotle, who thinks that souls are immortal; viii) only the impious have claimed that the soul is mortal. In Chapter 14 he goes on to respond to each of these in turn. Here I shall focus on his responses to three of those objections, for it is in these that he makes his central points. These are:

1. A discussion of human function that establishes the centrality of virtue in human life, in reply to Objection 1.⁸
2. A discussion of the claim that virtue is its own reward, in reply to Objection 3.⁹
3. Examples of ‘virtuous atheists’, in reply to Objection 8.¹⁰

Pomponazzi opens his discussion by insisting that while each thing must have its own end, its end must be suitable to its nature.¹¹ Although it would be better to have sensation than not, that does not mean that sensation would be suitable for, say, a stone, for it would be against its nature. Likewise for humans: although it might seem preferable to attribute divine properties to humans, it would in fact be a mistake, for it would be against human nature. At the same time, Pomponazzi insists that it is important to think about the end of the human race as a whole. He compares the human

⁸ *Imm. An.* 14 (Gontier 159-75, CKR 351-9).

⁹ *Imm. An.* 14 (Gontier 181-3, CKR 361-3).

¹⁰ *Imm. An.* 14 (Gontier 203-9, CKR 373-7).

¹¹ *Imm. An.* 14 (Gontier 159, CKR 351); *non tamen quod est magis bonum debet unicuique rei pro fine assignari, sed solum secundum quod convenit illi naturae et ei proportionatur.*

race to a human body, comprised of different organs with different functions, each contributing to the wellbeing of the organism.¹² This enables Pomponazzi to claim that different humans can fulfil some functions better than others, and that this diversity of abilities in fact contributes to the wellbeing of the human race taken as a whole.¹³ All human beings have a share of the theoretical (*speculativo*), practical (*practico seu operativo*), and productive (*factivo*) intellects, at varying degrees of perfection.¹⁴

Of these three intellects, Pomponazzi claims that the theoretical intellect, although shared by humans to some degree, properly belongs to the gods. The productive intellect, the lowest, is something shared by both humans and animals. That leaves the practical intellect, which Pomponazzi says is “truly fitting for man”.¹⁵ It is only according to this practical intellect that a human being can be called *unqualifiedly and absolutely* (*simpliciter et absolute*) good or evil; according to the other two intellects, one can only be *relatively* (*secundum quid*) good or evil. Thus, a virtuous person is an absolutely good person, but an excellent metaphysician is merely that and an excellent builder is merely that; neither are automatically good examples of human beings. To be called a bad metaphysician does not challenge your integrity as a good human being, but to be called a liar or a thief does, Pomponazzi suggests. It is good for the human race as a whole that there are some people who excel at metaphysics, but we ought not to confuse that perfection of the theoretical intellect with the function of human beings in general. They are

¹² *Imm. An.* 14 (Gontier 163, CKR 352): *Universum namque humanum genus est sicut unum corpus ex diversis membris constitutum, quae et diversa habent officia, in communem tamen utilitatem generis humani ordinata.*

¹³ As R. Ramberti, *La fondation de l'autonomie morale dans le De immortalitate animae et dans le De fato de Pietro Pomponazzi*, in J. Biard – T. Gontier (eds), *Pietro Pomponazzi entre traditions et innovations*, Amsterdam 2009, pp. 135-52, notes (at p. 137), this has echoes of Plato's *Republic*.

¹⁴ *Imm. An.* 14 (Gontier 163, CKR 353).

¹⁵ *Imm. An.* 14 (Gontier 167, CKR 355): *Operativus autem intellectus vere convenit homini.*

rare exceptions rather than a model to which all human beings should aspire.

So, Pomponazzi suggests that while the human race collectively ought to aspire to the perfection of all three intellects – the theoretical, practical, and productive – each individual human being ought primarily to aspire to the practical intellect, which is most fitting for human beings (and, unlike the other two, unique to human beings). This will also contribute to the wellbeing of the human race as a whole, for human society requires that all its members act virtuously if it is to function well. By contrast, it would be highly undesirable for the human race as whole if everyone were a metaphysician, or, for that matter, a builder. The human race requires a diversity of talents in order to flourish. He writes:

The universal end of the human race is to participate relatively in the speculative and the productive intellects but perfectly in the practical [intellect]. For the whole would be most perfectly preserved if all men were righteous and good, but not if all were philosophers or smiths or builders.¹⁶

The proper end of human beings, then, is practical, and not theoretical or contemplative. For if everyone were engaged in the contemplative life, human communities would soon collapse. Moreover, although theoretical speculation might be the highest activity someone can engage in, it is not the foundation for human happiness. A farmer or a builder can, if he or she leads a moral life, genuinely be said to be happy.

¹⁶ *Imm. An.* 14 (Gontier 169, CKR 356): *Quare universalis finis generis humani est secundum quid de speculativo et factivo participare, perfecte autem de practico. Universum enim perfectissime conservaretur si omnes homines essent studiosi et optimi, sed non si omnes essent philosophi vel fabri vel domificatores.*

Pomponazzi concludes his discussion of human function by insisting that the ideal of a life devoted to contemplation is simply not appropriate to human beings in general, even if a handful of individuals might pursue it. Taking such individuals on their own, one might be tempted to say that they are following the best form of life to which a human being can aspire, but as soon as we place them within human society as a whole, we quickly see that this cannot be the best form of life for humans in general. The only form of life that benefits both human beings individually and human beings collectively is an active, practical life devoted to virtue.

It is at the very end of this thoroughly Aristotelian discussion of human function and the choice between the active and contemplative lives that, it has been claimed, Pomponazzi echoes a passage from one of Seneca's letters.¹⁷ Whether or not Seneca is in the background here, Pomponazzi simply makes the point that mortal human beings must at the end of their lives give back the goods they have received from Nature.

Having insisted that the proper function of human beings is a practical life devoted to virtue, Pomponazzi goes on to argue that the essential reward of virtue is virtue itself.¹⁸ This is, as Gontier notes, a “thème caractéristique du stoïcisme” and he along with others note another parallel with Seneca here,

¹⁷ *Imm. An.* 14 (Gontier 175, CKR 358): *nam et purgatoriam antiqui appellaverunt, cum ea lege receperit ut sciat naturae concessurum. Gratias deo et naturae aget, semperque erit paratus mori, neque mortem timebit, cum vanus sit timor de inevitabilibus, nihilque mali conspiciat in morte.* The edition of *Imm. An.* by Mojsisch (*Abhandlung über die Unsterblichkeit der Seele*, Übersetzt und mit einer Einleitung herausgegeben von Burkhard Mojsisch, Hamburg 1990) and the Italian translation by Compagni (*Trattato sull'immortalità dell'anima*, A cura di Vittoria Perrone Compagni, Firenze 1999) both note *Ep.* 30.10 as a parallel here (so too Raimondi and Valverde cit., p. 2608), although it is not especially close. This and other echoes of Seneca (to be mentioned later) are not noted in earlier editions (e.g. *De Immortalitate Animae*, a cura di Giovanni Gentile, Messina – Roma 1925, and *Tractatus de Immortalitate Animae*, a cura di Gianfranco Morra, Bologna 1954), so perhaps they originate with Mojsisch.

¹⁸ *Imm. An.* 14 (Gontier 181, CKR 361): *Praemium essenziale virtutis est ipsamet virtus, quae hominem faelicem facit.*

this time from *De beneficiis*.¹⁹ Some have gone further in claiming that “Pomponazzi adopted the Stoic position that virtue was its own reward and vice its own punishment”²⁰. However, this is by no means an exclusively Stoic position.²¹ A further passage has also been claimed as a second echo from Seneca’s letters,²² which we find alongside an explicit quotation from Plato,²³ both of which are sandwiched between two references to Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics*. On this point, all these ancient philosophers follow Socrates in claiming that virtue is inherently beneficial and vice is its own punishment. Pomponazzi elaborates on this by saying that it is always better to act virtuously without hope of any reward, rather than to do so with the hope of some other benefit.²⁴ To seek any reward other than virtue itself in some way diminishes a virtuous act. Even to receive accidentally a great reward for a virtuous act might seem to diminish the purity of the act in some way. (Here one can see why some might take this to prefigure the view of Kant.) Pomponazzi concludes his fairly brief discussion not by turning to Seneca or Plato, but rather to Aristotle, to give authority for his claim that the noblest motivation is the love of virtue itself, and nothing external.²⁵

¹⁹ See Gontier cit., p. 283. Both he and Mojsisch (cit., p. 251) direct readers to Seneca, *Ben.* 4.1.

²⁰ J. Kraye, *Pietro Pomponazzi (1462-1525): Secular Aristotelianism in the Renaissance*, in P. R. Blum (ed.), *Philosophers of the Renaissance*, Washington DC 2010, pp. 92-115, at p. 101.

²¹ As Compagni notes (cit., p. 96), one might equally think of Plato, *Gorg.* 506e-507e.

²² *Imm. An.* 14 (Gontier 181, CKR 362): *poena namque vitiosi est ipsum vitium, quo nihil miserius, nihil infaeliccius esse potest*. Mojsisch (cit., p. 251) and Compagni (cit., p. 97) compare this with Seneca, *Ep.* 87.24 (also Raimondi and Valverde cit., p. 2609), although again the parallel is not especially close.

²³ Pomponazzi names the *Crito* (Gontier 181, CKR 362), but in fact the passage he quotes comes from the *Apology*, 41d.

²⁴ *Imm. An.* 14 (Gontier 183, CKR 363).

²⁵ Pomponazzi quotes from Diogenes Laertius’s biography of Aristotle, in *Vitae philosophorum* 5.20, at *Imm. An.* 14 (Gontier 183, CKR 363).

It is because virtue is its own reward that Pomponazzi thinks he can challenge another potential objection. He denies that belief in the mortality of the soul necessarily leads to moral corruption. It is here that we do see some potentially Stoic themes appear. First, he says that there have been many people who did believe in the immortality of the soul who have acted viciously, usually due to the negative influence of emotions.²⁶ Then, he says that there have been many examples of virtuous people who did hold the soul to be mortal,²⁷ and here we touch on the theme of the virtuous atheist. Pomponazzi focuses on virtuous pagans rather than contemporary atheists, and it is here that we find Pomponazzi's explicit references to Seneca,²⁸ whom he presents as someone who held both that the soul is mortal and that virtue is its own reward. But it is worth noting that although Seneca is singled out, he appears at the end of a list of names including a number of Greek and Arabic philosophers, and if he is singled out for a reason, it is not because he is a Stoic, but rather because Pomponazzi takes him to be one of his own countrymen.²⁹

It is in this discussion that we find a key passage that brings together all three themes that we have touched on:

For since happiness is naturally desired and misery shunned, and by what has been said happiness consists in virtuous action, but misery in vicious action [...] we ought hence to strive with all

²⁶ *Imm. An.* 14 (Gontier 203, CKR 373): *Manifeste enim videmus multos pravos homines credere legibus, verum ex passionibus seduci.*

²⁷ *Ibid.*: *Multos etiam viros sanctos et iustos scimus mortalitatem animarum posuisse.*

²⁸ See *Imm. An.* 14 (Gontier 205, CKR 374), where he names Seneca, *Ep.* 54 (cf. 54.4) and *Cons. Marc.* (cf. 19.4-5).

²⁹ Pomponazzi ends his list with Pliny and Seneca, whom he calls *nostratibus* (Gontier 203), and which has been translated as 'countrymen' (CKR 374). One might read this as claiming that they were both Italians (ignoring Seneca's Spanish origins) or, more loosely, that they were writers of Latin (as opposed to Greek or Arabic).

our powers to acquire them. But on the contrary, thefts, robberies, murders, a life of pleasures are vices, which make man turn into a beast and cease to be a man; hence we ought to abstain from them. And note that one who acts conscientiously, expecting no other reward than virtue, seems to act far more virtuously and purely than he who expects some reward beyond virtue. [...] Wherefore those who claim that the soul is mortal seem better to save the grounds of virtue than those who claim it to be immortal.³⁰

Thus, rather than underwrite virtuous behaviour, belief in rewards or punishments in an afterlife actually undermine the purity of virtuous acts. By contrast, belief in a mortal soul in no way undermines virtue, so long as one combines it with the sort of function argument we have already seen Pomponazzi deploy. A life devoted to physical pleasures might be appropriate to an animal, but it is not a fitting life for a human. If vice is its own punishment, then no one – not even an atheist – will deliberately choose vice.

In these ethical reflections, we can see the way in which Pomponazzi weaves these three arguments together to form a single, coherent position. There is a function appropriate to human beings alone, and that is a practical life devoted to virtue. The virtue that is the appropriate end for a human life is its own reward, and to pursue it with some other reward in mind as well compromises the purity of the virtuous act. Consequently, it is not necessary

³⁰ *Imm. An.* 14 (Gontier 205-7, CKR 374-5): *Nam cum naturaliter faelicitas appetatur et miseria fugiatur – et, per dicta, faelicitas consistit in actu virtuoso, miseria vero in actu vitioso [...] ideo debemus totis viribus inniti ad acquisitionem istorum. E contrario vero, furta, rapinae, homicidia, vita voluptuosa sunt vitia, quae faciunt hominem transire in bestiam et desinere esse hominem: ideo ab his abstinere debemus. Et animadvertas quod studiose operans, non expectans praemium aliud a virtute, longe virtuosius et magis ingenue videtur operari quam ille qui, ultra virtutem, praemium aliquod expectat; [...] Quare perfectius asserentes animam mortalem melius videntur salvare rationem virtutis quam asserentes ipsam immortalem.*

to believe in an immortal soul – in fact, in some ways it may be better not to do so – in order to be a virtuous human being.³¹

How does all of this fit with Aristotle? Famously, Aristotle drew a distinction between three forms of life in the opening book of the *Nicomachean Ethics*: there is a life devoted to pleasure (ἡδονή), followed by most people, a political form of life (πολιτικός), and a contemplative form of life (θεωρητικός).³² Aristotle rejects the life devoted to pleasure out of hand, leaving just the practical, political form of life and the contemplative form of life, deferring discussion of the contemplative life until the end of the work, in Book 10.³³ There, despite having spent much of the intervening space discussing the sorts of virtues that would constitute a practical, political form of life, we find the contemplative life presented as the highest ideal for humans.

The activity of the highest virtue for humans is, he says, contemplation.³⁴ This is the most pleasant and the most self-sufficient of human activities. It is better than the political life because it is solely for its own sake and it is a life of leisure. Therefore, it offers complete happiness for humans. Although Aristotle then says that such a life would be too high for humans, more appropriate to a god than a human,³⁵ I take this to be him entertaining an objection to his position, to which he then responds by saying that “we must not follow those who advise us, being men, to think of human things, and,

³¹ Belief in an immortal soul might compromise the purity of one’s virtuous actions if it leads them to be motivated by either desire for reward or fear of punishment in an afterlife.

³² See Aristotle, *Eth. Nic.* 1.5, 1095b14-19. I have relied on the Oxford Classical Text edition by I. Bywater, Oxford 1894, and quote from the translation into English by W. D. Ross, Oxford 1925.

³³ See Aristotle, *Eth. Nic.* 10.6-8.

³⁴ See Aristotle, *Eth. Nic.* 10.7, 1077a12-18.

³⁵ See Aristotle, *Eth. Nic.* 10.7, 1177b26-8.

being mortal, of mortal things, but must, so far as we can, make ourselves immortal, and strain every nerve to live in accordance with the best in us”.³⁶ He then adds, “this would seem, too, to be each man himself, since it is the authoritative and better part of him”,³⁷ adding that it would be strange not to choose this contemplative form of life. While he acknowledges that a practical life of virtue will also be a happy life, it will not be the happiest life because, he says, “perfect happiness is a contemplative activity”.³⁸

All this has struck many commentators as paradoxical: the best form of life for a human is in some sense higher than human. Aristotle’s prioritization of the contemplative life depends upon the claim that there is an element of the divine within us (the active intellect), and that in a sense this is who we really are – the activity of reason. But Pomponazzi has of course rejected this version of Aristotle’s psychology, insisting that while the human soul may be said to be relatively immortal (*secundum quid immortalis*), it is nevertheless unqualifiedly mortal (*simpliciter mortalis*).³⁹ For Pomponazzi, humans are unequivocally embodied biological creatures,⁴⁰ social animals who are by nature parts of a community. For creatures such as these, the best form of life, as he has argued, is a practical life of virtue. Although he differs from Aristotle’s explicit statements in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, this can hardly be

³⁶ Aristotle, *Eth. Nic.* 10.7, 1177b31-4: οὐ χρεὶ δὲ κατὰ τοὺς παραινούντας ἀνθρώπινα φρονεῖν ἄνθρωπον ὄντα οὐδὲ θνητὰ τὸν θνητόν, ἀλλ’ ἐφ’ ὅσον ἐνδέχεται ἀθανατίζειν καὶ πάντα ποιεῖν πρὸς τὸ ζῆν κατὰ τὸ κράτιστον τῶν ἐν αὐτῷ.

³⁷ Aristotle, *Eth. Nic.* 10.7, 1178a2-3: δόξειε δ’ ἂν καὶ εἶναι ἕκαστος τοῦτο, εἴπερ τὸ κύριον καὶ ἄμεινον.

³⁸ Aristotle, *Eth. Nic.* 10.8, 1178b7-8: ἡ δὲ τελεία εὐδαιμονία ὅτι θεωρητικὴ τις ἐστὶν ἐνέργεια.

³⁹ *Imm. An.* 9 (Gontier 79, CKR 313). For further discussion see J. Sellars, *Pomponazzi contra Averroes on the Intellect*, “British Journal for the History of Philosophy” XXIV (2016), 1, pp. 45-66.

⁴⁰ As Ernst Cassirer commented, Pomponazzi “pays homage to Aristotle the *biologist* rather than to Aristotle the *metaphysician*”. See E. Cassirer, *Individuum und Kosmos in der Philosophie der Renaissance*, Darmstadt 1977 (repr. Leipzig 1927), p. 148; translated as *The Individual and the Cosmos in Renaissance Philosophy*, Oxford 1963, p. 140.

called un-Aristotelian. One commentator has described it as “una radicalizzazione dell’etica aristotelica”⁴¹.

By way of conclusion, then, Pomponazzi’s account of ethics remains thoroughly Aristotelian. It builds upon his own interpretation of the *De Anima* in the preceding chapters of *De immortalitate animae* and, in the light of that, opts for Aristotle’s own image of the political life over that of the contemplative life. He is, in effect, engaged in an argument *within* Aristotle rather than in one *against* him. Although his claim that virtue is its own reward might lead one to think that he is insisting on the autonomy of ethics, his own remarks at the very end of the book seem to undercut this. Pomponazzi insists in the concluding chapter that his reflections on ethics come straight out of his concerns with the immortality of the soul. As he puts it, “if the soul is immortal, earthly things are to be despised, and eternal things to be pursued; but if its existence is mortal, a contrary way is to be pursued”⁴². The mortality of the soul confirms the proper function of humankind, namely to pursue a practical life of virtue. So, Pomponazzi thinks that there are direct ethical implications from his metaphysical reflections on the nature of the soul. This is, in part, why the metaphysical question matters.

⁴¹ E. Cuttini, *Pomponazzi e Aristotele: Il problema del fine dell’uomo*, in M. Sgarbi (a cura di), *Pietro Pomponazzi: Tradizione e dissenso*, Firenze 2010, pp. 261-70, at p. 270.

⁴² *Imm. An.* 15 (Gontier 211, CKR 378): *Unde si anima est immortalis, terrena despicienda sunt et aeterna prosequenda; at si mortalis existat, contrarius modus prosequendus est.*