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### Bori, Pier Cesare, and Massimo Riva, coordinators. Progetto Pico Project. Other

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**Bori, Pier Cesare, and Massimo Riva, coordinators.**

**Progetto Pico Project. Other.**

Providence, RI: Brown University; Bologna: University of Bologna, 2001. Accessed 1 February 2022.

[brown.edu/Departments/Italian\\_Studies/pico](http://brown.edu/Departments/Italian_Studies/pico).

Giovanni Pico della Mirandola (1463–94) is often considered one of the shining stars of humanist philosophy in the Italian Renaissance. His *Oration on the Dignity of Man* (*De hominis dignitate*), composed in 1486, has become recognized as emblematic for humanist philosophical thought, as it idiosyncratically summarizes and includes most philosophical thinking of his time. Written as an opening for Pico's *900 Conclusiones* or *900 Theses* (which he was never able to argue publicly), the *Oration* has taken on a life of its own, as it seems to present a strong argument for "individuality" and human dignity, justifying centuries of scholarship on the Renaissance self. Additionally, the *Oration* summarizes and syncretizes thousands of years of philosophy, braiding Greek and Roman thought with Jewish and Christian mysticism, as Pico was among the earliest Christians to recognize and use Kabbalah, or Jewish mysticism, in his work. Addressing a dazzling array of topics, the *Oration* has continued to entice historians and philosophers of the early modern period, as it suggests a "Manifesto of the Renaissance," ("Introduction"), a description of the physical and metaphysical world, and, ironically, an esoteric evaluation and rejection of the idealized self: all in a short introduction to a much larger work.

Translations abound of the *Oration*, but a translation is not the only purpose or function of the Progetto Pico Project. Instead, as explained in its introduction, the Progetto Pico Project, or Pico Project, presents "a complete resource for the reading and interpretation of the *Discourse* within its own context" ("Introduction"). Providing an annotated text of the *De hominis dignitate* in both Latin/Italian and Latin/English, the Pico Project aims to make Pico's *Oration* as accessible to readers as possible, to provide philological analysis and photographic evidence of the source texts, and to give readers a critical edition of the *Oration* that, following the spirit of Italian humanism, is as collaborative as possible. The organizers reflect this spirit of collaboration given that this is a project supported by both the University of Bologna in Italy and Brown University in Rhode Island, and both institutions have important editions of Pico's work being cited and used for the website.

The Pico Project is an HTML-based website, hosted by Brown University's Italian Studies department. Its rudimentary programming is a positive feature, as it lets readers access the website and its many images on a wide range of platforms, browsers, and devices. The Pico Project's simplicity takes a reader directly to the critical edition and translation, or the source text, or the images of the incunabula and printed material as quickly as possible. The critical edition of the text, linked as "il modello filologico," or the philological model, provides both the typed edition parallel to an embedded-yet-expandable image of the printed edition, so one can follow the critical decisions made to present the text; the text is then used for the translations offered under the "Annotated Text" ("Testo annotato") link (in both Italian and English, with footnotes thankfully translated as well). These translations are the core of the website, giving the reader access to the entirety of the *Oration* in three languages: Latin, Italian, and English. "The Incunabula" ("Gli incunaboli") section presents the printed version of the *Oration*, with photographs of the editions from both the University of Bologna's Library and Brown University's Library along with Pico's short *Apologia* defending the *Oration*. The Pico Project thus focuses on giving the reader direct, simple, and immediate access to the original sources of Pico's *Oration* in the clearest way possible.

The direct approach taken by the authors of the Pico Project provides a seemingly complete resource for the text of Pico's *Oration* as a philological and textual project. The principal editions are provided, the text is given a critical study with references, and a few studies are provided for Pico's life and context. This could very easily be a resource for both scholars and students, as scholars have access to a critical text that is widely and easily available and translated (outside of the published critical studies, which may be prohibitive or difficult to get). The availability of a standard, critical text allows scholars to deeply delve into Pico's *Oration*, line by line, and interrogate his ideas, where they come from, and what Pico was referring to. Meanwhile students, undergraduate and otherwise, could very easily compare and contrast the text provided with the images of the printed editions, developing paleographical skills and the ability to work with a detailed edition of an early modern text, both in an early printed volume and in a standard edition. The photographs of the University of Bologna edition, the Brown University edition, and Pico's *Apologia* of 1487 provide high-quality images, and the website's simplicity allows for ease of access and sharing.

It seems that the Pico Project is now an almost-completed resource for consultation, and that is both a positive and a negative quality. A last updated date is not provided, and the bibliography reveals that the most recent study provided comes from 2000, neglecting to provide more recent and important studies on the *Oration*.<sup>1</sup> While hyperlinks are attached to a few of the names under the “Collaboratori” and “Project Participants” sections, which provide accessible information for four of the thirteen editors, there is no other way to contact the creators or editors of this resource on the website. Were this a book project or critical edition of the *Oration*, that would be fine. For a website resource of Pico’s writings, the website appears incomplete: The “Other texts of Pico” (“Altri testi di Pico”) section, provided under “Auxiliary Documents” (“Documenti ausiliari”) is not a hyperlink and is not developed. It is worth noting that Brown University provides another Pico-related project on the *900 Conclusiones* on another website entirely.<sup>2</sup> They were possibly meant to link to each other, as the *Conclusiones* project references the Pico Project, but a better programmed apparatus between the two projects would have been helpful. The Pico Project, as it currently stands, provides a critical edition of Pico’s *Oration*, translations, a list of his works in primary and critical editions, and the source material, but not much else.

In his short life, the young count Giovanni Pico della Mirandola was a dynamic philosopher, political actor, and intellectual. He had an affair with the wife of one of Lorenzo de’ Medici’s cousins and attempted to run away with her but was caught and briefly imprisoned; he planned a major conference in Rome for his *Conclusiones* (blocked by Pope Innocent VIII before it happened); and he was among one of the earliest Christian intellectuals to treat Kabbalah and Hebrew writings as valuable philosophical treatises. For a man who engaged so widely and so richly with his world, one would expect a resource to engage with his life and his many spheres of influence, both elite and vernacular. While some of this contextual information is provided under the “Chronology” section (“La cronologia della vita di Pico”), it only appears in Italian and is particularly limited to Florence. This reveals to the reader that the Pico Project, and its chronology,

1. A mostly up-to-date bibliography of both editions of Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, and studies on him, can be found on Michael Dougherty’s website, Pico in English: A Bibliography, accessed 10 February 2022, [mvdougherty.com/pico.htm](http://mvdougherty.com/pico.htm).

2. The *Conclusiones CM publice disputandae* project, accessed 10 February 2022, [cds.library.brown.edu/projects/pico/index.php](http://cds.library.brown.edu/projects/pico/index.php).

is meant for scholars of Pico to note his works along a timeline, and not for any engagement for students or those new to Pico and his works. This project would be even more helpful if it provided resources such as a map of Italy and where Pico travelled and lived, an English biography, and context for the works he used and the people he met (such as Flavius Mithridates, who helped Pico translate Hebrew and access the Kabbalah). While the programming of these resources was more difficult before 2010, they would not be difficult to add now. Engagement with the life of such an engaging philosopher would make the Pico Project much more relevant to contemporary readers, and much more accessible.

As a web resource from the early twenty-first century, the Progetto Pico Project provides a critical edition of Pico's famous *Oration* in its entirety, a powerful resource for those both new and old to the world of Renaissance studies. By providing not just the entire *Oration*, but a critical edition in three key languages along with high-quality photographs of the early printed editions, the Pico Project gives scholars and students unencumbered access to Pico's original text and philosophy, presenting this small yet mysterious document to as wide an audience as possible in our multiplatform world. While corresponding and contextual data in both its collaborative languages of Italian and English would have made this resource even more valuable for a wider readership, providing immediate access to Pico's *Oration* does realize Pico's goal of public discussion of his ideas. This is a wonderful resource for early modern scholars, both new and established, as it gives them immediate and free access to one of the most enticing and tantalizing texts from fifteenth-century Italy.

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