

## **OTIUM VS. NEGOTIUM AS THE FOUNDATION OF THE CONCEPT OF SOLITUDE IN PETRARCH'S PHILOSOPHICAL WORKS**

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**ABSTRACT.** The concept of solitude, as elaborated by Petrarch in the treatise *De vita solitaria*, develops on the antagonistic structure of the concepts *otium* and *negotium*. These, in turn, contain notions and intellectual approaches found both in Latin Antiquity and in the Middle Ages, which attribute to loneliness a special dynamism by joining it with several other concepts such as: will, freedom and friendship. Each historical stage has a specific approach to the notions of *otium* and *negotium*, and in this sense Petrarch's contribution can be considered significant, even if not entirely new, because he attempts a plenary approach to the idea of solitude.

**Keywords:** solitude, leisure, self-knowledge, liberal arts, friendship

### **Introduction**

The term *otium* has a long, ambivalent history, with definitions ranging from inactivity that encourages vice, to a state that cultivates intellectual or spiritual gifts for the attainment of virtue. The idea of leisure still refers to the idea of a withdrawal or avoidance of daily mundane concerns (or *negotium*) and involvement in cultural activities. The concept of *otium* holds a privileged place in several works of Petrarch, whose passion for antiquity contributed significantly to the reintegration

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of the ideals of antiquity into later developed Western cultures. Before becoming famous for his love poems, by writing the work *Rerum Vulgarium fragmenta*, Petrarch gained a reputation in Europe as a humanist, moralist and Latin poet. The existence of over one hundred and twenty manuscripts of *De vita solitaria* testifies to the popularity of both the subject and its author.

The work *De vita solitaria* brings to the fore a speech which, at the level of the thematic approach, presents two perspectives on solitude. The first part of the treaty takes in considering the advantages, from an intellectual point of view, of retreating into solitude, and the second raises a question related to the legitimacy of such isolation, which annuls the claims of socialization and allow the pursuit of the highest peaks of happiness. Those two parts are not entirely distinct, in the first there are also ideological and conceptual intersections, which indicate the exit or overcoming of moral convention from contemporaneity and sends towards a new cultural stage of self-awareness. In the history of moral philosophy, starting from Plato, can be identified brief eulogies about the place of solitude or the places that give man the privilege of solitude, but in his work, Petrarch makes it a purpose in itself to talk about solitude. In this regard, the author presents us with a double notion of solitude: on the one hand, a solitude of the mind - immersion in inner thought and reflection and, on the other hand, the solitude acquired from the environmental point of view, that Ciceronian retreat giver of inner peace. At the same time Petrarch in his elaboration and inspired by Augustine adopts a reduction of classes of complex notions to a basic picture of two people with contrary habits, one being *occupatus* and the other *solitarius*, thus making a heuristic device of the kind: *quod in illis vides, in cunctis existimo*.

### ***Res novas on an old subject***

Addressing to a wide audience, Petrarch characterizes the term *otium* as *leisure* defined by simple habits, self-control, closeness to nature, careful study, reflection, writing and friendship. Fully aware of the ambiguity of the term, Petrarch rejects the idea that leisure must give rise to laziness, passion or vice. In the passage comprising the dedication at the beginning of the series *De vita solitaria*, he quotes a statement from Cato, addressed to Cicero, that the usage of leisure time is a matter of great importance: “non minus otii quam negotii rationem Claris ingeniis ac Magnis le habendam”<sup>2</sup>. Knowing that a person’s manifestation is limited by his own tendencies and habits, Petrarch carefully creates his vision of *otium* in

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<sup>2</sup> Petrarch extracted this statement from *Pro cn. Plancio*, 27.66.

accordance with his own character, talent and ambitions: “Id michi quoque si vel pro ingenii mediocritate, vel pro non mediocri glorie cupiditate—si tamen hanc nondum freno animi ac ratione perdomui —providendum est, quid primum prestare nitar, nisi ut sicut ego a negotiis, sic ab otio meo procul absit inertia?”<sup>3</sup>

*De vita solitaria* carries on a tradition of the notion of *otium* that originates in ancient Greece. Aristotle, for example, considered that spending free time is an opportunity to acquire virtue capable of bringing personal happiness that society can also benefit from.<sup>4</sup> Intellectual work, which has its own intrinsic value, can prepare the individual for productive involvement in society, but leisure, which involves amusements, games, shows, theater and festivals, is incompatible with Aristotle’s liberal ideal. In Roman society, with its traditions of duty and public service, *otium* frequently implies idleness, luxury, and voluptuousness. However, the retreat into exile of some prominent figures of Stoicism, such as Cicero and Seneca, forced them to look for justifications for a retired life, developing the idea of dignified rest (*otium cum dignitate*). Although the Christian world inherited the Roman suspicion of *otium*, associating it with the sin of *acedia*, some Christian writers make *otium* an occasion to serve God through contemplation, while *negotium* would mean *good deeds*. Petrarch’s view of leisure in a withdrawn manner, as it appears in *De vita solitaria*, was partly inspired by his earlier experience at Vaucluse where he enjoyed both leisure and friendship alongside Bishop of Cavaillon, Philippe de Cabassola. His approach is based mainly on classical sources, hence a strong secular and masculine character. However, he also emphasizes the desire to follow his own path and to be inspired by the thoughts of the moment:

“In hoc autem tractatu magna ex parte solius experientie ducatum habui, nec alium ducem querens nec oblatum admissurus, liberiore quidem gressu quanquam fortassis incautius sequor animum meum quam aliena vestigia. Plura ergo audies ab his qui vel plura sunt experti, vel ab expertis acceperunt. A me nunc audies quod occurrit ex tempore.”<sup>5</sup>

Claiming these visions as derivatives of his personal experience, Petrarch apparently takes a less formal, non-didactic position of one who presents his unchiseled thoughts, in their natural form, for the benefit of a few close friends. The goal pursued by Petrarch is not, however, an eminently private one or a strictly religious or philosophical one in a noble manner, as certain interpretations indicate, nor from the category of ideals in search of a universal rule. A close examination of Petrarch’s use of the term *otium* throughout the treatise *De vita solitaria* is revealing.

<sup>3</sup> Petrarch, *The life of solitude*, trad. Jacob Zaitlin, University of Illinois Press, 1924, p. 99.

<sup>4</sup> See Aristotle, *Politics*, VII, 9 and *Nicomachean Ethics*, X, 7.

<sup>5</sup> Petrarch, *The life of solitude*, trad. Jacob Zaitlin, Editura University of Illinois Press, 1924, p. 106.

The teaching that the author presents here is somewhat eclectic, but one that will transform approaches to leisure into a secluded place that allows man to meditate on his own choices. Although he deals with another variant of capitalizing on leisure in *De otio religioso*, admiring his brother Gherrard for choosing the path of the monk, Petrarch does not seem to have considered a religious vocation as far as he was concerned.

Leisure is activity, states Susanna Barsella<sup>6</sup> in her study about the treaty *De otio religioso* referring to a work (*opus*) to be accomplished, and not a mere state of emptiness and suspension in waiting for future bliss. Petrarch's interest in *Agite otium*, which suggests a synthesis of both meanings of "otium," is visible not only in the title of *De otio religioso* but also in its opening metaphor, in which monastic activity appears as the earthly mirror of angelic alacrity.

Also, although he was preoccupied with the political and religious issues of his time, having connections with persons in power, ecclesiastical dignitaries and other writers, and enjoying a public role as a poet and scholar, Petrarch also enjoyed a life of study, reflection and literary creation, especially in the variant of retreat in the heart of nature. As a result, he acquired a property outside Avignon in Vaucluse near the Sorgue River sometime in 1337 after climbing Mount Ventoux with Gherardo, a climb that inspired the famous letter in which he scrutinizes his own preoccupation with worldly affairs, a theme continued in the work *Secretum*. He began writing the treatise *De vita solitaria* during his third retreat to this place, between the end of 1345 and 1347. As Armando Maggi emphasized, slightly expanding the perspective stated here, in an article included in volume *Petrarch - A Critical Guide to the Complete Works*<sup>7</sup>, *De vita solitaria* lies at the core of Petrarch's thought. For Petrarch solitude does not mean isolation, which he identifies with the love experience for Laura, but rather intimate dialogue with a friend who pursues the same intellectual and spiritual ideals. Dialogue is a key concept in Petrarch's "new" solitude.

Maggi explains that the physical or symbolic presence of the friend merges the two seemingly opposite facets of Petrarch's solitude: its religious character that recalls the monastic experience and the classical *otium* (leisure). And to sustain this argument he brings to the fore the fact that Petrarch argues that if a human being's life is in a constant dialogue with Christ, who lives in the deepest recesses of our soul, a friend symbolizes both the neighbor in the Christian sense, that is, the other through whom Christ presents himself to us, and the intellectual's special interlocutor, as the Latin philosophers Cicero and Seneca recommend.

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<sup>6</sup> Barsella, Susanna, "A humanistic approach to religious solitude". In *Petrarch: A Critical Guide to the Complete Works*, Kirkham - Maggi, The University of Chicago Press, 2009, p. 202.

<sup>7</sup> Maggi, Armando, "You will be my solitude". In *Petrarch: A Critical Guide to the Complete Works*, Kirkham - Maggi, The University of Chicago Press, 2009, pp. 179-195.

Through an amalgam of classical and Christian positions, *De vita solitaria* conveys a mixed message regarding the solitary life, even though Petrarch claims to be writing *res novas* on an old subject. In this writing Petrarch distances himself from the Christian mystical tradition or what Radcliff-Umstead calls “mystical humanism”. In this treatise, his humanism draws attention to life in the world, to the value of the individual, and to the classical writings as a standard of conduct and achievement. Emphasizing a refined form of the worldly, Petrarch creates a model of leisure adapted to an elite, who have acquired their education by learning from the great classical writers and can thus aspire beyond the physical, moral and intellectual limitations of the “vulgar crowd”, towards a secularized and in some places non-religious ethos. Petrarch addresses in his treatise to a select circle of readers, including Bishop Philippe de Cabassola:

“...posse tibi res meas, pater optime, placere, que ut paucis placeant laboro, quando, ut vides, sepe res novas tracto durasque et rigidas, peregrinasque sententias et ab omnia moderantis vulgi sensibus atque auribus abhorrentes. Si indoctis ergo non placeo, nichil est quod querar: habeo quod optavi, bonam de ingenio meo spem.”<sup>8</sup>

The structure developed around the notion of *otium*, both through the approach of Christian dogma and through the main ideas found in classical literature, lays the foundation for a behavior that privileges the ideals of antiquity, without excluding the approaches of the Christian faith. Petrarch does not pretend that his advice suits everyone, not even the audience to whom it is entirely addressed. On a note full of apparent modesty, Petrarch points out that he is not giving general rules beyond the nature of his own observation, and that each person should guide his life according to his individual experience and nature. In opposition to the negative opinions regarding the concept of *otium*, Petrarch argues in favor of it because the solitude associated with creation was often the basis of civilizing achievements. And viewed in this way, free time becomes a workshop for creation, literary or philosophical reflection, suitable only for those dedicated to the field of letters:

“Sunt enim quibus solitaria vita morete gravior sit et mortem allatura videatur. Quod precipue literarum ignaris evenire solet, quibus si confabulator desit, quid secum, quid ve cum libris loqui valeant non habent, itaque muti sunt.”<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Petrarch, idem, p. 97.

<sup>9</sup> Ibidem, p. 131.

Thus, his audience includes only those interested in acquiring virtue through study: “Neque enim ego aliis quam literarum și virtutum studiosis loquor; Reliuis salubre consilium nullum habeo, nisi ut ante omnia vit mutent; Tum de loci oportunitate videbimus.”<sup>10</sup> Although exceptional intellectual gifts are not required, observance of God’s laws and rationality are essential: “Quodque nulli mediocriter erudito vetitum est, cogitando saltem legendoque placidis fotum curis et rerum vinculis explicitum animum habere, Deo et rationi subditum, cetera liberum; corpus quoque gravi iugo eductum animoque soli ser viens...”<sup>11</sup> This concern for establishing the importance of the rational approach in determining the right conduct is also found in other treatises, such as *Secretum* and *De remediis*. Charles Trinkaus, in the analysis he makes in the volume *The poet as philosopher*<sup>12</sup>, considers that Petrarch does not see his own moral concern as being built on the opposition between the pagan position and the one found in Christian doctrine, as is the case with many theologians of the Middle Ages:

“Thus Petrarch, with all the inadequacies and defects of his knowledge of classical philosophy, manages to intuit and to adapt to the needs of his own religion and age perhaps antiquity’s greatest moral insight – the idea of self-sufficiency or *autarkeia*. In a sintetic way, Petrarch was able to unify opposing schools of philosophy, and even Sophists, rhetors and philosophers, through the writings of Cicero and Seneca. [...] Petrarch himself thus became a paradigm for posterity and thereby guided the transformations of late medieval culture into that of Renaissance.”<sup>13</sup>

And at the base of this synthesis, Petrarch places the interpretation he gives to the concept of *otium*, which, through the demonstration found in the treatise *De vita solitaria*, establishes the conditions for the coexistence of some doctrines often seen as competing, something made possible by their common goal in becoming human in general, respectively its elevation beyond the mortal status, because by correctly assuming leisure and through involvement in creative work, immortality can be achieved.

### ***Otium* must be associated with the liberal arts**

The objects of leisure include the service of God, the development of the intellect, the attainment of virtue, and the acquisition of fame through writing; each individual can pursue either just one or more of these goals. Always emphasizing

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<sup>10</sup> Petrarch, Idem, p. 162.

<sup>11</sup> Ibidem, p. 166.

<sup>12</sup> Trinkaus, Charles, *The poet as philosopher: Petrarch and the formation of Renaissance consciousness*, Yale University Press, New Haven and London, 1979.

<sup>13</sup> Ibidem, pp. 25-26.

the correct use of reason, the leisure proposed by Petrarch involves, above all, the training of the intellect. Arguing in favor of spending leisure time in a scholarly manner, Petrarch cites Cicero, who proclaims the sweetness found in *otio literato*, and Seneca, author of the famous phrase *otium sine literis mors est*. It also touches on the meaning of the Aristotelian statement that the arts have their origin in leisure time, and that leisure time (*skolé*) is a necessary experience for the man involved in politics. To support the idea that literary achievement and fame are worthy goals, Petrarch discusses Plotinus' conception and classification of virtue into four categories. Although the so-called purgatorial virtues, peculiar to those who enjoy both leisure and philosophy, stand above the political virtues, yet they do not reach the level of those practiced by minds completely freed from human passions and focused on divinity. However, literary pursuits are worthy because they come from this fourth and highest category, that is, the exemplary virtues that exist only in the mind of God. In this way, Petrarch justifies a pattern of *otium* that reflects his own abilities and preferences.

If one hopes to gain fame through literary endeavors, during leisure time, one must avoid both idleness and involvement in worldly affairs. Like his predecessors, Petrarch contrasts the terms *otium* and *negotium*, while promoting the paradoxical notion of leisure through work. At the beginning of the treatise *De vita solitaria*, the author makes a comparison between his leisure activities and those of the good and hard-working Virgilian farmer, who reaps while he sows. He tells Philippe: "Accedit quod ex more institutoque meo veteri, nunc in rure tuo positus, ut frugum ceteri sic egotibi dicimas otii debere videor primitiasque vigiliarum."<sup>14</sup> Being fully aware of the traditional perspective of the concept of *otium*, as a source of vice, Petrarch emphasizes the possibility that leisure can become particularly fruitful from an intellectual point of view, with effects both on individual moral behavior and on the good found at the level of society. Of course, the typology of leisure thought by Petrarch does not resemble the modern meaning of the idea of recreation; rather, it envisions the development of an intellectually enriching time that proposes a moderate and useful study program focused on exercises in self-discipline, study, discussion, and writing. The advantages that Petrarch associates with respite, from an individual perspective, are contained in the following passage: "Nec me tu vacui recessus et silentium delectant, quam que in otium et libertas habitat..." Freedom is a vital benefit of solitude, which makes it possible to break away from the turbulence of urban life and the habits of the crowd to achieve that serene and orderly *otium* which perfects the intellect, restores the body, harmonizes the soul,

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<sup>14</sup> Petrarch, *idem*, p. 99.

stimulates virtuous behavior and inspires valuable writing. Although the poet admits that a person with good habits can have leisure even in a crowded city, he naturally supports the leisure found in the silence of nature. In this argumentative approach, Petrarch appeals, on the one hand, to Quintilian's authority to refute the argument that literature and virtue cannot be learned or practiced in solitude without good teachers, and on the other hand, he contradicts Quintilian to the effect that rural beauty would turn the mind to mindless pleasures. Petrarch's predilection for rural spaces, where forests and places with running water are found, is part of another affiliation with the world of Latin antiquity and the bucolic landscapes as described by Cicero or Virgil. And to connect his practices to the Christian tradition, Petrarch compares his own literary experiences with those of Saint Bernard:

“Solebat enim dicere: omnes se quas sciret literas, quarum nescio an alius sua etate copiosior fuerit, in silvis et in agris didicisse, non hominum disciplinis sed meditando et orando, nec se ullos unquam magistros habuisse preter quercus et fagos. Quod ideo libenter refero, quia siquid et michi nosse datum esset, idem de me vere dicere vellem, et nisi fallor possem.”<sup>15</sup>

Unlike the inhabitants of the city, preoccupied with the gratification of their own senses and burdened with material things, the man who retires to peace is filled with peace and master of his appetite and passions, ready to devote himself to the highest studies. For this reason, Petrarch clearly admires Horace's statement (from Epistles 1.7.36) that he values the peaceful freedom of the countryside above all the wealth of Arabia. Based on the *auctoritas* of Horace, Petrarch deauthorizes urban writers, and even more, as Kark Enekel<sup>16</sup> affirms that Petrarch's location of the writer as being outside of towns is a highly ideological statement. He seems to deeply disagree with the whole development of intellectual life from the twelfth century up to the middle of the fourteenth century. It includes a firm stand, *inter alia*, against scholastic philosophy and theology, Aristotelianism, medicine and physics, jurisprudence, university education in general, lawyers and notaries, teachers at grammar schools, secretaries and other administrators of towns, the mendicant orders, teachers and preachers alike, and vernacular literature. Furthermore, it also included an ideological statement against Avignon as the place of the papal curia. This means that Petrarch, as an author, locates himself deliberately outside of those intellectual mainstream developments.

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<sup>15</sup> Petrarch, *idem*, p. 224.

<sup>16</sup> Enekel, Karl, “Petrarch's constructions of the sacred solitary place in ‘De vita solitaria’ and other writings”. In *Solitudo. Spaces, places, and times of solitude in Late Medieval and Early Modern Cultures*, Enekel-Gottler, Brill, Leiden-Boston, 2018, p. 34.



In the Book 2 of the treaty *De vita solitaria* we find a long list of famous people who come to support Petrarch's view of solitude by making the same choice themselves, but also the careful and diverse selection of characters, contributes to Petrarch's demonstration that the practice of solitude is universal. While the list of the great solitaries is predominantly Christians, by a ratio of about two to one, a contextual analysis shows that the term *otium*, which appears in about fifteen significant passages in Book 2, it is only rarely associated with biblical characters or Christians. The use of the term *otium* in these *exempla* remains consistent with Petrarch's understanding of the use of the term by his favorite Roman authors. The references to *otium* in Book 2 reveal to the reader Plotinus, Horace, Seneca, Cicero, and the two Scipios alongside Moses, Elijah, Elisha, Saint Ambrose, Peterus Damianus, and Petrarch himself, as those solitaries who truly touch in state of *otium*.

This apparent balance between Christians and pagans is misleading, as Petrarch discusses biblical figures and church fathers in the classical terms of the concept of leisure, or presents them, without much elaboration, to justify a life devoted to leisure, in a manner that follows to propose it to the bishop of Cavaillon. *De vita solitaria* describes Ambrose as a follower of Cicero, who emulated the elder Scipio's concept of productive leisure in the company of friends. He characterizes Peterus Damianus' *otium* as a necessary addition to his dynamic life, including his ecclesiastical responsibilities and theological pursuits. Similarly, Celestine, who, by abdicating the papacy, brought about Dante's condemnation to the Inferno, receives Petrarch's appreciation as a seeker of leisure, whose retreat is followed by a miracle that gives him divine approval of his choice regarding leisure and to the detriment of ecclesiastical honors. Among the Roman philosophers and political leaders, the most important practitioners of *otium* are Seneca and Cicero. Petrarch claims that Seneca, whose reputation as a Roman senator endangered him and exiled him to Corsica, remembers his solitude with great affection: "illam otiose exilii ignominiam presenti occupate glorie haud immerito anteponit." Although Petrarch depicts Seneca enjoying the freedom of his philosophical studies, he also finds his Roman customs too harsh. Cicero, who had also been sent into exile, practices leisure in a variant that fits better with the model thought by Petrarch. The preference for the manner of practicing *otium* in the Ciceronian sense is also justified by his achievements: the establishment of an academy, the complex work consisting of treatises on rhetoric, politics, religion and philosophy, and also the development of his own Stoic theory convincingly arguing that virtue is a good in itself. Admiring Cicero's many writings, not only for their substance, but also for their beauty and eloquence, Petrarch concludes that the *otium* enhanced his great achievements: "Non colligo singula; ex his enim vides, ut amator ille urbis et fori et amata oderit et literatam solitudinem

rebus omnibus anteponat".<sup>17</sup> Enlarging the sphere of his own perception of the idea of solitude, Petrarch states that both good friends and good books are indispensable. Books can provide relaxation, consolation, counsel, knowledge, and lessons in eloquence and style; they can also present ideas useful in debates and alternatives that provoke careful reasoning. With a sense of humor, Petrarch notes that while books don't require food, drink, or much space, they instead provide recurring and immeasurable benefits. Yet the right friends, he reminds us, offer the pleasures inherent in human nature found in conversation and in each other's company: "Admitto et in solitudinem amicos, dulce genus de quo multa premisimus, sine quibus truncam ac debilitatam vitam, et quasi luminibus captam puto".<sup>18</sup>

And so, through leisure, life becomes a valuable one, dedicated to studies and friendship, both of which are inspired by the liberal arts. To answer those who might argue that the active life of the *negotium* is superior to that of the *otium*, he asserts, with some irony, that he has yet to see any of his contemporaries successfully contribute to the public welfare. In his view, those who devote themselves exclusively to public service risk losing control over their own lives, minds or hearts. In the admonition at the end of *De vita solitaria*, Petrarch calls upon Philippe to join him in leisure in a fit and virtuous manner that can add brightness to both private and public life. "Tibi, pater, si te ipsum, tua si bona noveris, nichil deest quod gratam solitudinem et dulce otium possit efficere."<sup>19</sup> The leisure conceptualized by Petrarch can find its fulfillment especially in rural areas: "locum et libertati et quieti et otio et scientie et virtuti".<sup>20</sup> Those who are truly capable of reaching the highest level of experiencing *otium* are those who can find pleasure in the midst of nature, among forests, mountains, meadows, or streams, where they can devote themselves to liberal studies. However, it also does not exclude occasional physical activities such as farming, hunting or fishing, as long as the goal is moderate exercise rather than agitation or waste. In this ensemble governed by nature and moderation, prayer and introspection complete the ritual of becoming the man who chose to capitalize on leisure through creation. Man in such seclusion "ad naturam respicit, hanc ut ducem ut parentem sequitur".<sup>21</sup>

With echoes from the writings of Cicero and Horace, Petrarch's concept of *otium* is a way of life closely linked to the ethics of moderation, respect for the rules of nature, and a deep sense of responsibility for the development of the intellect and creative faculties. It is a life unalived by idleness, anxiety, or undue interest in

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<sup>17</sup> Petrarch, *idem*, p. 279.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 291.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 293.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 299.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 90.

material things; rather it is one devoted to thinking and writing. This vision of free time allows the individual to become more himself, more human, more creative and wiser. This apparent narrowing of perspective of living a secluded life becomes, intellectually, an expansion in the best sense. Even if Petrarch's withdrawn man does not get involved politically or militarily - like a Cicero or a Scipio - he does not withdraw from the rest of the world either. By including his friends, he has already begun to create a small community that can have a positive influence on the outside world, for which he serves as an example. Even if Petrarch does not always succeed in reconciling the tension between Christian and classical mentality, he nevertheless undoes a certain medieval habit of mind by refusing to despise this world for the sake of the next and also by refusing to neglect the intellectual aspect of the spirit. In this way, he gives an impetus to the secularization of the European values that underlie the Renaissance.

### Conclusion

Petrarch offers a new vision to the valorization of personal experience in relation to the already existing theorizations. In this respect, he not only enters into debate with his sources, especially classical writers, when their ideas do not conform to his ideal, but also embarks on the path of knowledge, taking into account his own talents, preferences, experiences and thoughts. Thus, at the end of the treatise he emphasizes that his ideas are the product of a person who remains in the pose of the student and the researcher: "Hec ergo non diffinitor, sed scrutator vestigatorque tractaverim".<sup>22</sup> As a last thought we can mention that in *De vita solitaria*, Petrarch clearly seeks the spiritual but secular vision of a free time organized around the idea of literary creation, as it would later be elaborated by Montaigne, Rousseau, Marx, Cardinal Newman and Josep Pieper, in whose works leisure is described as that power to transcend the boundaries of the world of work and reach the superman, the life-giving existential forces that revive and renew us before we return to our daily work. Only in genuine time does a gate open to freedom. In free time truly human values are saved and preserved. With Petrarch, the ethos of *otium* involves a transformation of the purpose of everyday life into one involving self-knowledge and the cultivation of individual talents.

The inherent tension between public action and solitary contemplation pushes the ideal of *otium* away from the Platonic and Aristotelian view that leisure has a predominantly communal purpose with a significant contribution to the individual.

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<sup>22</sup> Petrarch, *idem*, p. 315.

This imaginative adventure of spending time depicted by Petrarch allows individuals, in a private, not necessarily contemplative, and religious or philosophical sense, to devote time to the cultivation of virtues, thus tending to a higher life of mind and spirit. Although the purpose of the Petrarchan *otium* cannot be reduced to the theme of gaining self-confidence, this concept includes the individualism and humanistic naturalism also characteristic of the Renaissance.

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