“Thus the actions, manners, and poses of everything match [the figures’] natures, ages, and types. Much difference and watchfulness is called for when you have a figure of a saint to do, or one of another habit, either as to costume or as to essence. Saints also should match their types, so that when you have a Saint Anthony to do, he is not to be made timid, but alert, and likewise Saint George, as Donatello did, which is truly a very good and perfect figure, it is a marble figure at Or San Michele in Florence, and so too if you do a Saint Michael killing the devil he ought not to be timid; if you have a Saint Francis to do, he should not be bold, but timid and devout, and Saint Paul should be old and strong, and so with judges and their poses…”

— Antonio Filarete, *Treatise on Architecture*¹

In this essay, we will consider some moral aspects of stance in Italian Renaissance art, stance to be understood broadly as comprising such matters as posture, gravity, and contrapposto, that is, everything that concerns bodily position and the relationship of the figure to the ground. It will be argued that artists used weight, stability, and firm stance to convey a sense of goodness or virtue, and they also did the opposite, having weakness of stance or instability connote moral weakness. In Renaissance art, gravity affects all figures to some extent, but certain artists took pains to indicate that the solidity and gravitas of stance echoed the firm character or grave personhood of the figure represented, and lack of gravitas revealed the opposite. These ethical aspects of physical stance in Renaissance art have not been discussed thoroughly enough in the literature to date; although there exists an abundance of imagery that relates to this issue, the writings that offer an ethical interpretation of stance appear in isolated places and deal with the subject only in desultory fashion. A reassessment of this question will involve the thorny practice of interpreting images made in a culture whose extant texts throw no direct light on or offer no unequivocal explanation of the matter. Such interpretation has long been a contentious area of study, and it would be useful to address briefly the question of text and image before looking at the works relevant for our discussion.

For any period of art history, iconographic analysis is particularly problematic when the supporting texts are indirect or lacking. Broadly speaking, there are three situations for interpretation. The first is when there is indeed a direct text, as with the presence of a saint’s attribute that is known from legend, or when the narrative illustrates an obvious biblical source or a clearly identifiable historical subject. The second situation comprises works for which there is only an indirect written

source. In this group, the meaning is not patently clear, and
texts must be adduced in order to supply a plausible inter-
pretation. Much religious iconography from the Renaissance peri-
od is in this category, and it might include, for instance, the
passing of light through a vase in an Annunciation (symbol of
Mary’s virginity), or the sleep of the Christ Child as a prefigura-
tion of his death; for these two examples there are theological
writings or inscriptions on pictures themselves that aid in the
interpretation. The third category is when there is no clear, writ-
even, and the imagery—viewed in light of only general verbal con-
iderations—carries the significance. This group
might comprise creative, solipsistic additions to traditional reli-
gious scenes, or the representation of isolated, enigmatic
iconographic motifs in a secular painting. For some art histori-
ans, the first and second areas constitute the only legitimate
province of interpretation, with specific written evidence lead-
ing to or at least assisting in analysis. The subject to be treated
here, though, hovers between the second and third categories,
and our interpretation must rely on broader considerations and
indirect texts as well as on the recognition of patterns of repre-
sentation found in Renaissance art. The meaning of stance is
best gleaned from patterns perceptible in works of art them-
selehes, which can be viewed in light of the relevant but indirect
writings that we do possess. Fortunately, there is a wealth of
visual material for us to draw from, and the early texts that
exist, while not exactly specific, do throw light on the matter.

Instances of gravity of stance in Renaissance art are usu-
ally explained in the art-historical literature as expressing three
chief aspects of art from the period: naturalism, the reliance on
antiquity, and stylistic variety. In the first regard, the very pres-
ence of weight and weighshift would seem to be the fruit of an
accurate observation of Nature, and in the hands of
Renaissance artists comes across as a concomitant part of
the overall project of the time, which was to represent a picto-
rial and sculptural world that mirrors as well as improves upon
reality. Thus, gravity/contrapposto in art has been explained
as being little more than another aspect of Renaissance natu-
rnalism. This attitude found expression early, as in Giorgio
Vasari’s observation that Masaccio showed his figures stand-
ing firmly, feet on the ground, because he understood how to
paint things foreshortened (scorto).2 Secondly, since counter-
poise and figural massivity formed a central part of Greco-
Roman artistry, it is said that their inclusion in art illustrates the
humanistic spirit of the Renaissance period, during which
there was such an intense mining of the classical world for
ideas; thus, grand, wehty stance in Renaissance art is fre-
quently explained in the art-historical literature as having been
chosen because of its all’antica flavor. Finally, in addition to
the notion that stance represents the natural world and that it
echoes antiquity, it has been argued that contrapposto adds
interest to the artwork. For example, John Shearman noted
that the asymmetrical placing of weight in a figure creates
“energy, variety, and contrast,” that it is, therefore, a stylistic
feature.3 Shearman saw a purpose of counterpoise in the novel-
ity and variety that it entails. This aesthetic argument supple-
ments—without displacing—the idea that counterplacing is
naturalistic and echoes Greco-Roman models; it offers a par-
tial explanation, but skirts the possibility of moral meaning.

Contrapposto as a central feature of Italian Renaissance
art has been discussed by David Summers, who looked gen-
erally at it as a principle embodied not just in weightshift found
in individual figures.4 He broadened the discussion to include
consideration of the practice of counterplacing differences or
opposites. The placing of different types of figures next to
each other, for example, is such a counterplacing, an antithe-
sis that is like the counterpoise of a single figure. Summers
traced this principle back to the rhetorical tradition of antiquity,
when contrapositum was held to be a guiding idea for poets
and orators, whose works benefit from the placing of disparate
words and ideas next to each other for the purpose of contrast
and variety. Thus, Summers saw contrapposto as an aspect of
the rebirth of antiquity, not just as a revival of visual forms, but
as a usage—characteristic of the Renaissance—of an antique
literary tradition. Despite the differences in their approaches,
Summers, like Shearman, stressed that contrapposto forms
an embellishment, offering varietà, and stands also as a formal
component of the artwork, what he calls “antithesis as a stylis-
tic device.”5 Whether it concerns the weightshift of single fig-
ures or the counterplacing of colors, compositional masses,
or figural types, Summers called attention above all to con-
trapposto as a feature of style.

The aesthetic aspects of gravity and weightshift—the vari-
ety, interest, linear rhythms, and so forth—should not be dis-
counted. It is also undoubtedy true that Renaissance repre-
sentations of contrapposto and firmness of stance are related
to the desire for naturalism and for the revival of antiquity,
whether the revival was visual or literary (that is, whether
involving contrapposto of weight in art or contrapositum/con-
trapposto in purely written practice). But, with contrapposto
as more generally, too often overlooked is the presence of moral
meaning in Italian art. The worldview during the early modern
period, on both sides of the Alps, was shaped by the notion
that the universe embodied antitheses of good and evil, sin
and salvation, religion and irreligion, and the merest events of
daily life were often seen as marking some aspect of the
greater struggle between darkness and light. To be sure, ethi-
cal judgment colored daily life in the secular sphere as well. It
would indeed be strange if the posture of human beings could
have somehow escaped the moralizing bent of the day, especially considering that much of the art of the time concerned narrative events derived from biblical or later Christian legend. Although, undoubtedly, the poses of figures in Quattrocento or Cinquecento art often lack moral meaning, it is argued here that it is best to regard certain representations of stance as carrying an ethical significance. Not surprisingly, since more thoughtful painters are more liable to make distinctions of whatever kind, the more incisive narrative artists were more likely to use contrapposto to bear moral meaning.

It is relevant that the very language used then (and now) to describe a strong, sustaining stance could also refer to moral weight. The word grave in Italian has long connoted seriousness and importance as well as physical weight. Similarly, the Latin gravitas implies physical gravity in addition to spiritual gravity, as do the English "gravity" and "substance." To stand fermo connotes in Italian what it means in English ("firm" or "determined"), and costanza (constancy) has a similar moral significance, just as phrases to "take a stand," "stand up" for one's rights, "stand firm," and so forth imply some strength of character or moral resolve. In art of the Renaissance—an age when language was used precisely, and when the relationship between artistic style and language was widely recognized and appreciated—it would be surprising not to find a visual manifestation of a notion that was well established in current language.

It is important not to overlook the moral significance attached by Italian artists and viewers to one aspect of physical appearance, namely, beauty. This concerns not issues surrounding stance, but rather the broader concept of the correspondence of inside and out of a person, the kind of issues that arise in contemplating the moral aspects of posture and weight in art. It is clear from the imagery of early modern times in Italy that comeliness was equated with high moral standing. This was true in religious as well as in secular art, and in portraiture as well as narrative. We have at least two pieces of verbal evidence for this that we can draw right from inscriptions on pictures themselves. On the back of Leonardo da Vinci’s Portrait of Ginevra de’ Benci (Washington, National Gallery of Art), we are told, following an adage invented by the Venetian Pietro Bembo, that “Virtutem Forma Decorat,” that is, that “Beauty adorns Virtue.” The idea that external beauty somehow reflects inner virtue is alien to twentieth-century minds, and the two seem to us unrelated, but in the fifteenth century there was little hesitation in attaching ethical significance to personal attractiveness. Similarly, in Domenico Ghirlandaio’s Portrait of Giovanna Tornabuoni in the Museo Thyssen-Bornemisza in Madrid the inscription states “O that it were possible to reflect morality in a painting, for if it were then this would be the loveliest picture in the world.” That the moral “beauty” of the sitter can be conveyed by the loveliness of her person was an idea accepted by Ghirlandaio and his patrons. Likewise, no one could reasonably doubt that the ugliness of the torturers of Christ, the executors of a Saint Catherine, or Judas was intended to stand as a moral indicator. Nor is it accidental that Christ is usually taller and handsomer than Judas, or that the soldiers who pepper Saint Sebastian with arrows are uglier in appearance than the protagonist. In short, in Italian art one should scrutinize a picture to see whether there is a pattern of any kind that would indicate that artists were using elements of quotidian reality to convey an ethical message, having the inner character mirrored in the outward appearance. A firm stance can be thought to be one aspect of beauty in a broad sense, and we might expect that a heroic or virtuous figure would merit a solid, grave posture.

The inscriptions in the portraits by Ghirlandaio and Leonardo refer especially to the comeliness of the faces represented as external signs of their inner goodness, but the same correspondence was held to occur between other bodily aspects and moral character, and here we get closer to a consideration of stance. The humanist and art collector Cyriacus of Ancona, writing c. 1445, stated of an ancient Greek sculpture that one could see a heroic lordliness in the gestures of the figure, the overall appearance, and his face. This goes beyond an analysis of facial features to include other aspects of bodily presentation, such as gesture and “overall appearance,” in which the Greek artist had succeeded in conveying a sense of seignorial character. Leon Battista Alberti asked painters to make the dead look dead right down to the fingernails, and elsewhere he recommended a number of nuances to help painters show the character and nature of their figures. This kind of advice was carried out in practice by Renaissance artists, who certainly used more than facial features to convey the inner moral essence of the persons represented. The remark by Cyriacus reminds us that Quattrocento viewers looked beyond the faces to the gestures and bodily movements and position in order to assess the intended personality or character of a represented figure. Even when, as Kenneth Clark noted in discussing reactions to Leonardo’s Last Supper, northern European viewers are embarrassed by southern expressiveness and have a certain difficulty in discerning the meaning of body movements in art, or if, for whatever reason, the subtleties of Renaissance “body language” in art now often escape us, the rewards are rich for studying Italian art from c. 1400-1600 as a repository of figural placement and weight that carries an ethical message. Alberti’s writings reinforce this point, and call our attention to the degree to which artists were expected to have posture reflect the ages, conditions, and thoughts of the figures in their pic-
tures; inner soul is shown to the viewer by outward gesture, posture, and facial expression.9

Although one must inevitably turn to the artworks themselves from the period for a sustained study of the iconography of stance in Renaissance art, the moral significance of pose is mentioned in at least a couple of places in Renaissance theory. Antonio Filarete, whose quote stands at the head of this article, discussed the iconography of stance in his Treatise on Architecture of the 1460s, noting that everything should reflect the nature of the person represented, including pose itself.10 The pose [stare] of a judge should be that of a judge, and the stance of a Saint George should reflect his brave nature. These examples chosen by Filarete are telling because they involve moral types or individuals, that is, strong saints and bringers of justice (arbitri).11 Elsewhere he indicates an awareness of the appropriate natural stances that should be represented, with old men, for example, needing to be shown as heavy and slow of movement; Filarete was sensitive to the need for the physical state as well as the moral quality to be conveyed in the mute arts of painting or sculpture.12 At any rate, one can imagine the appropriate pose for a judge to be one that is grave, balanced, and calm, and Filarete expects that artists will ponder the choice of pose for each figure and have it reflect the character of the individual.

The humanist Bartolomeo Fazio made remarks similar to Filarete’s in his De viris illustribus (1456). In a passage praising painters, Fazio stated that: “No painter has been considered superior unless he excelled in representing the qualities of real things. For it is one thing to paint a proud man, another to paint a miser... and so on with the rest... Hardly any of the manual arts demands more good judgment, since it takes for granted that not only the face and features and contour of the whole body should be expressed, but, much more, the inner feelings and emotions, so that the painting will seem to live and feel, and somehow move and act.”13 In other words, the representation of the “contour of the whole body”—an essential aspect of pose itself—is an integral part of expressing a figure’s inner state, and is important in indicating temporary emotions and also ingrained character traits such as pride or miserliness. Like Alberti, both Filarete and Fazio recognized pose as a conveyor of mental and moral sentiment.

Our attention here has been and will continue to be on the Renaissance in Italy, the site of the origins and initial diffusion of the ideas under consideration here. It is in Italy, too, that the inspiration—and burden—of the classical past was greatest, and we are dealing with a phenomenon that is fundamentally linked to the antique artistic tradition of figural contrapposto. Still, evidence that strong stance can express moral firmness appears in art of northern Europe, as is indicated, for example, in the flimsy, falling sinners painted by Hieronymus Bosch. Moreover, there is one instance where a relevant text exists, applied later in the seventeenth century to a work by Pieter Breugel, his Skaters Before the Gate of Saint George in Antwerp [Fig. 1].14 In this engraving, made after one of his drawings, the notion that skaters, many of whom are unsure of their stance, are symbolic of frail, morally weak mankind, derives from written as well as visual evidence. The question of the presence and level of meaning in genre and still-life painting in the art of the Low Countries of the fifteenth through the seventeenth centuries has been hotly disputed, but in this one instance little doubt can remain but that the slippery skaters signify the perilous, uncertain state of the human moral condition. Significantly, an edition by Jean Galle (d. 1676) of Breughel’s engraving contains an inscription explaining that the scene shows us the “Lubricitas vitae humanae,” i.e., the “slipperiness of human existence,” confirming what one might have guessed from the difficulties faced by the buffoonish participants: that the skating action and clumsy, shifting postures of the human figures indicate the changing, volatile state of mortal existence.15 The inscription on Galle’s edition of the border of the print was not put there by Bruegel, and one might be tempted to think this is an example of seventeenth century moralizing applied to a more straightforward, earlier work. Yet, such an intention was likely Bruegel’s own, for a similar message is apparent from such works as his Skaters with
a Birdtrap in Brussels, where the small size of the people, the lumpy figural style, the visual similarity of humans to the birds in the tree, and the presence of the trap indicate the vulnerability of humans to sin and corruption. In the painting, as in the engraving, the people slide and have difficulty supporting themselves, and they are ready to fall into the devil's snare.

In considering Brueghel's engraving of skaters we have already moved from text to image; now we might turn more fully to poses in artworks that do, as it were, stand on their own, lacking texts but offering meaning that we can glean from the artistic context of the motif. To be sure, not every Renaissance artist used pose in a thoughtful or meaningful way. Yet, many did so, and—as artistic innovators often make

the most thoughtful iconographic contributions—it is hardly surprising that it was the better artists who made significant distinctions of pose in their works.

As in so many other matters, Giotto di Bondone was a precursor to the Quattrocento in the representation of moral gravity. He ushered in a style in which figures occupied a convincing, palpable place in the real world, and they often stand or rest firmly on the ground. Before Giotto, a strong physical presence of weighty figures hardly existed in art, and even later in the Trecento, painters and sculptors only rarely concerned themselves with natural or all'antica counterpoise. Nearer to 1400 and soon thereafter, protagonists were more likely to receive in the hands of Italian artists graceful, swaying

Gothic poses that indicate their ease and inner grace rather than their substantial human presence. Nor, more obviously, were medieval artists (with Giotto being an exception) as concerned as post-medieval painters with matters of decorum, the later artists eagerly seeking to make the kinds of fine and varied distinctions that Alberti recommends in his treatise on painting. Of all Italian painters before the fifteenth century, Giotto is unusual in that he was sensitive to the ethical/narrative significance of stance and gravity. In his Virtues in the Arena Chapel, as Howard M. Davis pointed out,—even beyond the obvious case of Inconstancy, whose fallible nature is reflected in the slippery stance on a great ball [Fig. 2]—Justice rests on a solid, squared base of support defined by the lowest part of the composition [Fig. 3], while Injustice, who is seen from a slightly higher (and therefore more unstable) point of view, rests on the jagged edge of the rocky bottom that is defined in an irregular, unstabilizing way [Fig. 4]. In the Meeting of Joachim and Anna at the Golden Gate [Fig. 5], the blessed couple is standing firm, locked into place like a mountain, while the incidental, rustic fellow on the left is cut off at the frame and the suspicious, dark-cloaked woman who had predicted continued bad fortune for Anna is obscured in her personal presence. Giotto even seems to have been well aware of the possibilities of the “heroic landscape”—a concept usually associated with High Renaissance and, especially, Baroque periods—as in such works as the Flight into Egypt, where the mountain behind anchors the Madonna into place and expresses her resolve, moral status, and heroic actions. Despite this vivid use of weight and stance, it seems that Giotto was not readily followed in the Trecento in his moral use of gravity for individuals or in his grave, ponderous compositions. Giotto recognized that, as in the art of Greco-Roman antiquity, gravity and substance add moral worth to his paint-
ed figures, but—as with many of his innovations—it would take fifteenth-century artists to carry out this classical idea and make it a principle of their artmaking.

One of these artists was Masaccio, who during his short life was a seminal artist for later painters, as his narrative pictures embody ideals that inspired painters for the rest of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. The representation of varied gestures and facial expressions, the clarity of composition, the application of single-point and aerial perspective, and the convincing use of foreshortening help form the good istoria as discussed by Leon Battista Alberti in his treatise on painting of 1435. Given the importance of Masaccio’s paintings, it is significant that we find in them seminal uses of contrapposto and gravity as conveyors of moral worth, placing his pictures at a critical juncture connecting classical antiquity to the art of the Renaissance and later. Masaccio’s grave, substantial figures carry a kind of moral weight, and the counterpart to this is also true: that sin and vice are illustrated with insubstantial or weak stances. The wavering stances of flawed characters in Masaccio’s compositions are usually explained by narrative function, for example, as dramatic actions such as recoiling, tripping, hurrying, and so forth. Yet, the phenomenon is best regarded as one aspect of the painter’s expression of an ethical ideal: that moral substance should appear in art endowed with physical grandeur and weight, while weakness of character is best illustrated with insubstantial or weak stances. This distinction forms a leitmotif and indeed a basic principle of Masaccio’s pictorial art.

The motif appears especially where the storyline calls for the depiction in one field of both good and evil figures. For example, in his Crucifixion of Saint Peter from the Pisa Altarpiece [Fig. 6], Masaccio shows the stoical saint placed firmly on the earth with his halo serving as a base. One can explain the movement of the other figures as justified by the course of narrative events, but there is no compelling reason why the standing figure to the rear on the left should be shown in a shifting, rubbery pose, with his head slightly cocked to one side, except to contrast with the rock-solid saint. Masaccio places the solidity, weight, and grandeur of the good figure in contradistinction to the less substantial physicality of the antagonists. This is seen also in the insecure postures of the two kneeling men who hunch forward in order to hammer in the nails.

A similar contrast is found in the Execution of Saint John the Baptist from the Pisa Altarpiece [Fig. 7]: the holy figure wears long robes, and he is stable and massive, constituting a weighty presence in the picture. In contrast, the executioner is shifting back on his exposed and slender legs, the man on the far left is leaning back slightly, and the assistant entering on the right is
JOSEPH MANCA

8) Masaccio, «The Expulsion from the Garden», Santa Maria del Carmine, Brancacci Chapel, Florence.

light of foot. Saint John the Baptist is the moral center of the picture, and around him swirl the insubstantial and unstable antagonists, their movement fueled by cruel passions.

This contrasting principle is found in Masaccio’s most famous works, the Expulsion from the Garden and the Tribute Money in the Brancacci Chapel. In the former [Fig. 8], a figural instability appears in both Adam and Eve. Many observers have commented on the poorly drawn right leg of Adam, but this criticism, even if true, overlooks the apparent intention of the artist, which was to indicate the weakened posture of the humiliated sinner. Masaccio could and did draw better than this. The rubberiness of this leg is more than an error of draftsmanship; it expresses Adam’s shame and culpability. Similarly, Eve walks with one foot nearly directly in front of the other, a manner of striding that destabilizes her and gives her a wavering appearance. Her left foot is painted in a remarkably sketchy manner, adding to the weakened character of her stance. Again, in contrast, the angel above bears a tough expression and moves forward confidently and directly, a concrete presence despite his angelic nature and position in the air.

Masaccio had a splendid opportunity to depict moralizing contrasts of pose in his Tribute Money [Fig. 9]; this is more obvious on the right side of the mural, but it is also present in the central scene. Following the account in Matthew 17:24-27, which Masaccio varies somewhat in his painting, the tax collector asked Peter for the half-shekel temple tax, and Christ advised that it is best not to give offense to the officials by withholding payment. Christ told Peter that he would find a coin worth the amount of the tax in the mouth of the first fish that he caught. Although the message of the mural is that one ought to pay taxes, the collector of the levy is clearly on a lower moral plane than Christ and the Apostles. Lacking a halo and the grandiose robes worn by the holy men, he assiduously seeks the money. The Apostles, with noble countenances and stoical expressions, contrast with the open-mouthed, wide-eyed collector of taxes.

Despite the ethical inferiority of the latter, his position and gesture in the central scene seem to echo those of Saint Peter; several writers have noted this similarity of stance, a similarity that would seem to indicate a desire by Masaccio to achieve a balance of figural stance on either side to Christ. Yet, it is important not to overestimate the extent of this resemblance at the expense of recognizing critical differences. The tax collector is shown with much less of a sense of gravity and substance than Peter, an appearance brought about by the exposure of the former’s legs, by his hunching forward, and by the slight curving through his back. One foot barely touches the ground; when the raising of a foot occurs elsewhere in the Brancacci Chapel, Masaccio generally disguises the disengagement from the ground by obscuring the legs and feet with robes, but here the
viewer is given a full glimpse of the light-footed stance of the tax collector. From the floor of the chapel, one looks up and sees the bottom of this foot, and it appears to hover and sway overhead. We can already sense the greed on his face, as Vasari observed of him on the right side of the composition; we might also read his expression as a suggestion of a more generalized moral laxity and lack of self-control. In short, in this central scene of the *Tribute Money*, the tax collector is posed weakly, reflecting his moral inferiority, lacking both the grandeur and the apparent mass of the monumental Apostles who stand nearby in grave stance, gesture, and facial expression.

The differences are even more pronounced on the right side, where Peter pays the levy [Fig. 10]. The saint is as solid as one of the mountains in the background. Stocky in proportion, resolute in countenance, facing straight ahead, and standing firmly on his feet, he is a picture of moral and spiritual gravity. Once again he wears grand, substantial robes. The tax collector, on the other hand, is represented with exposed legs, his meager garments lending the impression that he is slight and insubstantial in a moral as in a physical sense. Whereas Peter’s body is locked into place by the arch behind, the tax collector has no such strong visual device to establish his position in the painting, as he stands before a broad, white wall. Bruce Cole has noted that the tax man has slightly relaxed legs, and contrasts with the forthright, imposing figure of Saint Peter. We might add to this observation that the relaxation and instability extend to his entire body, as there is a sinuous movement going from his turned foot to his rubbery, curved back. The arc through his body and the twisted back foot are characteristics of late Gothic art, and it is possible that Masaccio was making a conscious reference to the instability and elegantly decorative postures seen in the International style, which by implication stands on a lower plane to the classicizing monumentality embodied in Peter’s stance. The new Renaissance style was not just an aesthetic choice, but served as a revival of moral values, artists eschewing the showy elegance and lightness of Gothic art in favor of a more sober system in which figures stand convincingly on the ground. At any rate, even if Masaccio did not intend a reference to the Gothic style here, the wavering stance of the tax collector serves to contrast him with the solid, determined Saint Peter.

Thus, the tax collector’s poses in the *Tribute Money*, which are often referred to in the literature as examples of Masaccio’s characteristic brand of contrapposto, are best regarded
as intentional contrasts with the stances of the protagonists of
the mural. Masaccio adds a clever and telling element to the
confrontation on the right by giving the tax collector a walking
stick. He needs a staff to help him stand, an indicator of his
unsureness of pose and posture, and a symbol of his spiritual
weakness. Elsewhere in the Brancacci Chapel, Masaccio indi-
cates that the physically injured need sticks to help them walk;
in the Tribute Money it is the spiritually impaired tax collector
who is unable to stand with confidence on his own two feet.
The artist has the walking stick resting on the ground where
the foot of the tax collector might have been if he were main-
taining a forthright, solid stance such as Peter’s, the cast
shadow of the staff continuing across and touching the saint’s
feet. The contrast between him and Peter is obvious, and it is
not surprising that here Masaccio’s contrasting of gravitas ver-
sus moral corruption and physical insubstantiality is most
often observed in the literature. Just as the petrine saint looms
firmly over the cripples and collapsed figures in the Saint Peter
Healing with his Shadow and the Distribution of the Goods of
the Church in the Brancacci Chapel, so too does Peter stand
with moral rectitude before the all-too-worldly tax collector,
whose ethical character is revealed in his insubstantial pos-
ture and need to support himself with a walking stick.22

Giorgio Vasari observed that Masaccio was the first
painter in modern times to depict figures with their feet firmly
on the ground;23 this is indeed true, yet Masaccio was selec-
tive in this matter, and some stand more fully on the ground
than others. Masaccio’s art is subtle and significant, and he
endowed with meaning his representation of contrapposto,
gravity, weighty garments, and forthrightness of stance, going
beyond the earlier efforts of Giotto in this regard. Masaccio’s
contrasts of good and evil stand as important embodiments of
the notion that in art physical form and moral virtue should
 correspond, an idea that reverberates throughout the conse-
quently history of Renaissance painting.

Ultimately, the ponderation of the human figure as we have
seen it is derived from Greco-Roman practice, where it similarly
added a sense of dignity and profundity to heroic humans and
the gods represented in classical art. Yet, it is important to note
that Masaccio seems to be employing a distinction that was not
widespread in antiquity. While the solid stance frequently
assumed by figures in Greco-Roman antiquity apparently adds
to their substance of character, in antique times artists did not
seem intent on making distinctions between weak and strong
poses in order to call attention to the moral difference between
the figures. Counterpoise stance itself contributed to the natu-
ralism of the ancient figures, and shows their freedom and liber-
ty.24 In Greco-Roman art, figures—like contemporary public
architecture—are solid, revealing substance, significance, and
character, and antique heroes, whether political or divine, stand
in weighty posture, taking up the only stance that is appropriate
to them. However, it is not apparent that there is a pattern of the
opposite also being true. This is not surprising, for the kind of
moral black-and-white mentality present in the Renaissance did
not hold in antiquity, and when a “bad” human figure is repre-
sented (a military enemy, for example), the ancient artists often
gave him or her some dignity of appearance, whether of pro-
portion, beauty, or stance. In short, the kinds of differences of
posture found in Renaissance art were not a regular part of the
classical visual traditions, even though contrapposto is rooted
visually in its artistic practices. Thus, the distinctions made by
artists such as Masaccio can be seen as breaking new ground
and not merely repeating a formula derived from antiquity.

Soon after Masaccio’s departure from the scene, other
Italian painters came along who used weight/counterpoise to

10) Masaccio, «The Tribute Money» (detail of right side).
convey ethical gravity and importance. Paolo Uccello’s Flood (c. 1445-50) in the cloister of Santa Maria Novella comprises numerous elements that indicate the natural and societal chaos brought about the Great Deluge, the work showing flying debris, blowing clouds, and panic among the human figures. One man, however, sets himself apart from the others in his solid stance and stoic demeanor [Fig. 11]. He has been called a second image of Noah, Methuselah, and an anonymous bystander, and he has also been identified (unconvincingly) as a portrait of Leon Battista Alberti. The explicit iconography of the figure remains a mystery, and it is possible that in terms of the narrative itself he represents no specific character. Whoever he is in the story, however, it is most likely that this is a portrait of Pope Eugene IV, who actually lived in Santa Maria Novella during the 1440s in his own suite of rooms. Contemporaries noted how the pope appeared to hushed crowds in the piazza before the church, and the blessing gesture of the figure in Uccello’s fresco is remarkably close to a characteristic papal blessing. The presence of the man near to Noah who looks longingly towards Eugene IV indicates the pope’s importance as well as his significant place in the narrative, which involves sin and salvation.

The presence of Pope Eugene IV in the mural reminds the viewer that Noah’s Ark, symbolic of the leadership of the Church, is the only way to salvation. This is reinforced by his stance: he is not sinking, but is standing firmly on a rock, with a drowning, desperate man gripping his ankles. Like Peter, Eugene (his successor) is the rock upon which the Church is built. The pope’s stance is rock-solid as well, and here the monumentality of pose that Masaccio had explored is applied in an appropriate way, as the moral and physical gravity of Eugene IV turn the story of the Flood into a contemporary ethical lesson: that the way to salvation is to avoid sin and board the ship of the Church, which will survive the wrathful deluge.

Instances of moral stance from the Early Renaissance period appear in the works of sculptors as well as in those of painters. Before Masaccio and Uccello, Donatello employed in both free-standing and relief sculptures meaningful contradistinctions of weighty versus less stable posture. For example, in his Saint George Slaying the Dragon [Fig. 12] from Orsanmichele, the princess stands with a rubbery, Gothic-like sway, the motif that is not just a stylistic borrowing but a way of conveying her passivity and need for help from the vigorously moving hero. It is noteworthy that the artist seems to consider the historical Gothic stance—which for long had universally connoted ease, grace, and nonchalance—as ideally suited to reflect weakness. He draws from the ornate and excessive late Gothic tradition to create a posture of passivity and needfulness. The princess is not herself corrupt, but she is powerless, and this is indicated by her pose. A similar kind of stance appears in Donatello’s Feast of Herod [Fig. 13], there employed for an evil character; Salome, having just finished her dance, still retains a bit of the elegance of movement associated with her dancing performance. Her pose—decorative, sensuous, cursive, and weak—denotes her state of moral corruption, which is shown most forcibly in her melancholy, guilt-ridden facial expression and the lowering of her head. It is this kind of motif that an observant young artist like Masaccio

could have used as sources of inspiration for his own work, such as the Tribute Money. Donatello must be recognized, as in so many other aspects of his artmaking, as being in the avant-garde in the representation of ethical stance.

Donatello addressed the question of morality and stance in free-standing sculptural works as well as in narrative reliefs. Concerning one of these, his Saint Mark for Orsanmichele, we might consider a remark that Michelangelo is said to have made about it, a rare instance when, however indirectly, one can connect a verbal statement of the Renaissance period with a particular work of art in order to know of the “iconography” of stance. In the Saint Mark [Fig. 14], Donatello succeeded in conveying to a single figure, merely through stance and other aspects of the appearance, a sense of morality. That he succeeded in doing so is suggested by one viewer of the Renaissance, Michelangelo Buonarroti. One day, according to Giorgio Vasari, someone outside of Orsanmichele asked the passer-by Michelangelo what he thought of Donatello’s Saint Mark. He made no remark at all about the style per se, but only commented that he believed from its appearance that it would be difficult to find a man who has more of an air of a good man (“uomo da bene”) as does Saint Mark. This statement could perhaps have been inspired solely by the apparent character of the saint’s face. Yet, in assessing Mark’s total appearance one can hardly separate the

facial features from the total presentation of the body, which is marked by a decisive weightshift, strong, stocky proportions, and grave, bulky robes. Donatello’s *Saint Mark*, which has been called the first statue since antiquity to show contrapposto in a convincing fashion, is based in its pose on a great exaggeration of classical counterpoise, with the weight-bearing leg articulated with pipe-like, vertical folds, and the lighter side with a scattered, broken representation of the garments. It is impossible to separate any part of the work from this striking representation of counterpoise, which indeed makes Mark look like a “good man.”

His solidity of pose is an essential part of his physical presentation, and Michelangelo had the insight to see that Mark was apparently of fine character. If anybody at the time understood “body language” it was Michelangelo, and he must have recognized that the moral goodness of Saint Mark informs the entire bodily stance and bearing in Donatello’s statue.

In some other efforts, Donatello represented not so much a classical counterpoise, but rather a kind of shifting, defensive posture, a kind of stance that, unlike various aspects of moral stance discussed in this essay, has indeed been noted in the art-historical literature as indicating the inner strength and outward power of the figure. Donatello utilized an heroic posture that is a martial stance in which the weight is placed...
rather evenly on both legs and both sides of the body, resulting in neither relaxed weight shift nor Egyptianizing rigidity. This pose, found early on in Donatello’s Orsanmichele Saint George [Fig. 15], results in an imposing appearance. There, the saint’s posture is obscured by the shield, or rather anchored by it, but the position of the legs is clear enough. Donatello seems successfully to have carried out the pose for a brave saint as suggested by Filarete in the quote that stands at the beginning of this essay: George is alert, and this translates into a stance that is not one of rest, but is strong and, at the same time, is capable of quickly turning into movement.

Painters frequently followed Donatello in his use of the martial, legs-apart stance, the aggressive posturing that spreads the weight defensively across the body. Andrea del Castagno’s series of famous men and women includes this kind of forcible posture, with the warrior Pippo Spano serving as a good example [Fig. 16]. Similarly, Antonio del Pollaiuolo’s painting of David takes up this confident stance, indicating that the heroic David possesses strength, both physical and moral [Fig. 17]. Among other Early Renaissance painters, we find this posture in the work of Domenico Ghirlandaio in his fresco of Camillus in the Sala dei Gigli in the Palazzo Vecchio.


Castagno's Pippo Spano was not the only instance when he depicted moral stance. In his Crucifixion mural, now in the refectory of San Apollonia, he places Christ close to the ground, instead of having him hover up high, his broad physiognomy also reinforcing the weight of his character [Fig. 18]. Christ is kept near to the earth and to the mourners, and this adds special dignity and stability to his position. In the fresco of the Last Supper [Fig. 19], in the refectory of Sant' Apollonia, Judas, who is isolated on one side of the table, sits on a stool, and he has one foot raised up from the floor level on which his meager, flimsy seat rests, all of this offering an appearance of instability. In contrast, the other Apostles and Christ are seated on what is essentially an architectonic bench, the heavily marble of the seating built into the structure of the painted room itself. The table, too, is quite architectural and can be said to be overbuilt, and the setting as a whole for the Apostles is ornate and massive. The painter thoughtfully emphasized the dramatic, swirling marble pattern that seems to burst over the head of Judas and Christ, calling attention to the clash and discord between them; it is hardly surprising that he also considered using other details to call our attention to the physical and moral presence of the figures, and Castagno has utilized the notion of gravity and instability to highlight Judas's corruption and weakness. Judas is unstable and wavering, and his lack of faith and loyalty are reflected in his isolation and insubstantial seating. Castagno had clearly understood and applied the lessons he learned from such artists as Masaccio and Donatello in using stance and gravity to reflect the goodness or moral laxity of the figures he represented, whether warriors, Christ, Judas, or Apostles.

So far, all of the Italian artists considered here were native Tuscans, but the pattern of representation under discussion was more widespread in Italy in its application. We might at this point consider the works of Andrea Mantegna, a leading artist of the period, who was notably sensitive in his awareness of pictorial decorum and in his crafting of meaningful particulars. Mantegna, as thorough and thoughtful as any painter of the Quattrocento in his poignant distinctions, made a pointed and innovative use of figural posture in his artistry. Examples of Mantegna's use of stance as a moral marker appear in his paintings for Isabella d'Este. In the Minerva Expelling the Vices from the Garden of Virtue, he placed the Earthly Venus on top of the back of the satyr, both of them about to be chased out the garden of Virtue by the conquering Minerva [Fig. 20]. Her instability could have been compared in the same chamber (Isabella's studiolo), to the gracious, balanced pose of Divine Venus, who stands in easy, perfect harmony with Mars in the Mars and Venus [Fig. 21]. It is also noteworthy that in the Mars and Venus Vulcan assumes a very unstable, legs-apart stance, his anger and instability further echoed by the quartz-like, jagged rocks behind. His posture contrasts with that of Mars and Venus, just as theirs does with the Earthly Venus from the companion Minerva Expelling Vices from the Garden of Virtue. Another use of stance as an ethical marker is found in Mantegna's engraving of the Allegory of the Fall of Ignorant Humanity and Allegory of the Rescue of Humanity [Fig. 22]. The Vices who bring about the downfall of the anonymous woman are of particularly light and insubstantial stance, each with bended knee. Even more obviously, Ignorance is seated precariously on a great ball, ready to slip off at any moment; this relates to the long-standing notion of Fortune and the dangers presented by change. The whole atmosphere of the upper section is one of transience and moral levity, in which the fall of the woman downward is a nat-
Mantegna had another way of conveying a similar idea: by representing corrupt figures in partial form, their rootedness to the ground eclipsed by the pictorial frame itself. This practice in his art is often explained as a use of the repoussoir device and considered, therefore, to be an example of his perspective/spatial system at work. But it is surely more than that when, in addition to making the would-be murderers of Saint Sebastian ugly, he also shows only their heads and shoulders, the rest of them cut off at the lower design area [Fig. 23]. Mantegna has literally taken away their stance, and they float without connection to the ground, just as they are of suspect moral presence. The contrast with the saint is great, as he stands there noble in countenance and firm in stance. The painter used this idea in his Crucifixion from the San Zeno altarpiece [Fig. 24], a predella piece that includes Roman soldiers in the foreground who are cut off nearly completely by the lower edge of the picture, their cruelty and disinterest (others are rolling for the dice, while these two are turned away from the tragedy) signified by their partial form, and as truly without apparent standing. Mantegna’s sensitivity to issues of stance is revealed in his careful manipulation of the poses (easy or tormented) of the Good and Bad Thieves and the distinctions between the backgrounds behind them (smooth versus jagged). Christ himself is shown “resting” on the earth, his body placed appropriately against Heaven. The truncating of the soldiers in the foreground is far more than a repoussoir.
device, and illustrates ethical status through their partial and diminished presence.

Since the establishment of any tradition is so significant, we have been concerned with the beginnings of it in the Trecento and, especially, the Quattrocento. At any rate, the practice of representing weighty stance or physical stability as a moral marker certainly continued in the Cinquecento and later. Among sixteenth-century artists, Michelangelo deserves mention for the complexity of his response to this possibility of using weight as a moral signifier. We have noted Michelangelo’s remark about the grave figure of Saint Mark by Donatello [Fig. 14], and considered the implications that his statement had for the inter-
interpretation of the counterpoise stance of that saint. As for his own representations of stance, Michelangelo took an ambiguous approach to stance and weightshift. In many instances, he indeed carries out the idea that weakness of stance indicates weakness of character, and vice versa. For example, in his Bacchus, the drunken, glassy-eyed, and soft-skinned god is given a wavering stance that mirrors his inebriation and his indulgence in his passion for wine [Fig. 25]. Conversely, the firm and aggressive stance of the David is clear enough, while the embarrassed twisting and falling of the bathing soldiers in the Battle of Cascina show the sloth and moral disarray that made the troops lax and unprepared for battle.
22) Andrea Mantegna, «Allegory of the Fall of Ignorant Humanity and Allegory of the Rescue of Humanity» (detail), British Museum, London.

Still along these traditional lines, in the Doni tondo the nude male figures in the background, who are best interpreted as homosexuals awaiting baptism and salvation after the coming of Christ, use the wall for support, pull at each others’ cloaks, and lean against each others’ bodies; what most Renaissance viewers would have regarded as a weak moral state is expressed in their need for physical support [Figs. 26 and 27]. Rather than stand in the open in firm stance, their moral turpitude is expressed in their slothful postures, as they rest against what can symbolically be read as the wall of a baptismal fons or piscina. While the coherent, weighty, and stable foreground group of the Holy Family represents the world under Grace, and Saint John the Baptist stands for the era sub iure, the world ante iure is expressed in the ethical weakness of figures who rest and tussle indulgently.30

All of this so far in Michelangelo’s work is consistent with what we have seen in the art of many other Renaissance masters. Yet, the question of contrapposto in Michelangelo is more complex. An ambiguity in his art arises from his belief in the fundamental division between body and soul, action and inaction, animation and material essence, earthly and divine. Thus, in the representation of Rachel and Leah from the tomb of Pope Julius II, Leah—who symbolizes the active, earthly life—is shown in a solid, mundane pose, her person rooted to the earth itself [Fig. 28]. Rachel, on the other hand, is characterized by a contemplative state, and the contemplation of the divine is causing her to lose her worldly solidity [Fig. 29]. She seems to spiral upwards in a flame-like posture, her stance revealing her

religiosity, her nostalgia for God. Thus, the more inspired and
divinelyMoved figure is the one with the less substantial pos-
ture, while the solid stance is on a somewhat lesser moral plane
than its opposite, reversing what we have seen in the work of
other artists and in some of Michelangelo’s own efforts.

This principle of motion and animation as symbolizing
inspiration is so frequently found in Michelangelo that it
frustrates any attempt to find a consistent pattern of “moral
gravity” in his art. Indeed, one frequently sees in his work
a controverting of classical and Renaissance principles of
contrapposto. Whatever he thought of Saint Mark, or whatever
his (mostly earlier) practice, Michelangelo established a new
paradigm for artistic stance, in which goodness and godliness
are conveyed by spinning, turning, and the elevating of physi-
cal persons, whether seen in the Ignudi in the Sistine Chapel,
the slaves for the tomb of Julius II, or the saints in the Last
Judgment. In a final work, the floating, ghostly presence of the
dead Christ in the Rondanini Pietà establishes the idea of heav-


27) Detail of Fig. 26.

enly insubstantiality, as the physical form of the Dead Christ reverses the heavy, heroic, grave type of the Savior seen in his earlier Pietà (now in the Museo del Opera del Duomo). Here, as in works such as the Rachel and Leah, Michelangelo added a new approach to the all’antica tradition of representing a heavy, substantial protagonist, and he often infused an unstable spiritualism to his figures that works against the fundamental nature of some of his classical sources.

It is important in this discussion to turn to Raphael, who already during the Renaissance itself was thought of as epitomizing the artist who practiced decorum, who painted every movement and expression just right. Thus, it should be expected that, if there was indeed a pattern in Renaissance painting in representing stance as a moral marker, Raphael would have carried out the idea in his own art. In general, Raphael clearly has his greatest heroes and protagonists in monumental poses. For example, in the tapestry cartoons (London, Victoria and Albert Museum), as in the Saint Paul Preaching at Athens [Fig. 30], there is little doubt but that Paul’s stance, like the thick proportions of the architecture, echoes his inner character. In the Galatea [Fig. 31] and the Sistine Madonna, Raphael recoils from having figures sink into the water or the clouds, and he unnaturally has them reside on unsolid surfaces. Even in secondary works, Raphael is careful to compose his protagonists in strong counterpoise stance, as in the grisaille under the Parnassus, his Alexander the Great Preserving the Works of Homer, where the exaggerated, classicizing hip-shot contrapposto of the great ruler and patron is clearly rendered, conveying a sense of authority, confidence, and inner ease.

The most famous instance of his representation of stance as a carrier of meaning—and one widely recognized—comes in his School of Athens, where the worldly Aristotle is given a feet-on-the-ground stance and the idealist and otherworldly Plato is shown standing on his toes [Fig. 32]. This contrast is really one of metaphysical and epistemological differences as well as broader ethical considerations, and certainly Plato is not shown as morally weaker than Aristotle in the sense of
moral corruptness that we have seen in other Renaissance images. Yet, this contrasting pair does indicate the desire by Raphael to use weightshift to make a distinction—in part an ethical one—between two figures.

The School of Athens fresco by Raphael introduces to this discussion another aspect of gravity in Renaissance art, and that is what we might call gravity of composition. With all of the figures on the lower level, and with the use of more open, and purely architectural elements above, the figures themselves seem to benefit from a kind of compositional gravitas that lends them stature and moral weight. This pictorial device was recognized by Howard M. Davis as having been invented by Giotto and used in his Ognissanti Madonna Enthroned, now in the Uffizi [Fig. 33]. In this work, Giotto rejected the practice as set out by Cimabue of spreading the figures across the picture surface and having them rise vertically. Instead, he grouped them in the lower part, and he depicted a figurally blank area above. Davis recognized this as a new kind of compositional strategy, and he noted that it was used by later artists such as Masaccio, whose Trinity and Tribute Money embody this principle of having a void in the upper section.

Davis attached no special ethical aspect to Giotto’s use of compositional gravity, although it is argued here that such a device contributes to the moral climate of the work. Like the so-called “heroic” landscapes of Annibale Carracci and Nicolas Poussin, in which the very gravity, grandeur, and breadth of the setting echo the greatness of the protagonists represented, Giotto endowed his pictures with a sense of gravitas that functions for both individual figures and the compositions as a whole. By building on a firm pictorial foundation,
these artists contrived to have the substance of the compositions reflect the moral substance of the subject matter. This practice, clearly exploited in such later works as Jacques-Louis David’s Oath of the Horatii and Death of Marat, was utilized for the first time by Giotto, whose seminal model was, characteristically, explored further by Masaccio and then by later Renaissance artists such as Raphael, their collected works forming a link from Giotto to the High Renaissance to Neoclassicism. Whether for single figures or for entire gravitational compositions, it would be easy to show that the use of gravity as a moral marker appears widely in post-Renaissance art, especially in the seventeenth century and in painting of the later eighteenth and nineteenth century, but it is significant for our purposes to note that the principle was well-established in the Trecento through the Cinquecento and beyond.

In addition to weighing down the composition, Raphael saw the possibilities of compositional contrapposto, and he employed it frequently in his works as a kind of overall ponderation, in which one side of the composition gives off weight and another side receives it [cf. Figs. 30 and 31]. This subtlety goes beyond what Giotto and Renaissance artists had achieved before. As in the Mass of Bolsena or the Cardinal Virtues in the Stanza della Segnatura, the whole composition stands like a virtuous person, at ease but in balance, in harmony yet in slight dynamic posture, ready to move if necessary. This arrangement was a hallmark of Raphael’s style. Like the placing of heavier elements near the foundation of the composition, it is more difficult to claim a moral meaning than it is with the counterpoise of individual figures. The sense of the pictures indicates, though, that everything about them—as with the coloring, shading, gestures, and so forth—helps to reinforce the meaning of the subject matter, and the employment of compositional counterpoise, in addition to lending grace, dignity, and dynamic balance, also contributes to the moral worth of the protagonists of the picture.

The endurance of the use of gravity as a moral indicator beyond the generation of Raphael was not continuous, and the later applications of it in the seventeenth century and thereafter are the revival of the idea as set forth in the High Renaissance and earlier. The art of the maniera in the Cinquecento tended to dull such fine distinctions of pose and weight, as everything becomes swept up in stylization, and the imitation of Nature (and therefore, gravity) is less highly prized. Moreover, the distinction between good and evil figures in art became subsumed under a figural ideal that supersedes any simple application of traditional decorum. For example, Raphael sought to achieve a perfect balance between form and meaning, whereas the painter Giorgio Vasari was often happy enough to let form has its own way.

When swimmers by Vasari reside on the surface of water, one gets little moral sense from this [Fig. 34], but when it occurs in Raphael it somehow reflects on the character of the figures, especially the central protagonist [Fig. 31]. For Raphael, the concreteness of the surface of water lends dignity to the swimmers, but for Vasari the motif of the surface swimmer is a decoration and a delightful distraction. Like much else about Italian art from the post-medieval world, the mannerist ideals clouded the significant distinctions of type, story-telling, and appropriateness that had taken over a century to establish. The recognition that moral gravitas can be expressed in physical gravity flourished from Giotto to Raphael, during a time when style was seen as a reflection of the interior states of the figures represented, when the depiction of actual gravity was a widespread artistic goal, and when moral gravity mattered.
Many writers see some kind of deformity or instability in the representation of the tax collector on the right side of the Tribute Money, but R. Fremantle stressed instead the classical, balanced equilibrium of his stance, which he traced to ancient prototypes; see Fremantle, “Masaccio e l’antico,” Critica d’arte 16, no. 103 (1969), pp. 43 and 45.

That the tax collector, as indicated by the walking stick, is in need of both spiritual and physical healing was argued by E. Wakayama, “Lettura iconografica degli affreschi della Cappella Brancacci: analisi dei gesti e della composizione,” Commentari 29 (1978), p. 74.

Joannides, Masaccio and Masolino, p. 175 rightly emphasized the “severe rectitude” of Peter, whose vertical stance contrasts morally with the horizontal, prone Aniasias.

22 See note 2.

24 That counterpoise began in Greek art to express the independence, self-consciousness, and freedom of the human figure is a recurrent theme in D. Haynes, Greek Art and the Idea of Freedom, London, 1981.

For an identification of this otherwise enigmatic figure as Eugene IV (in the guise of a beardless Noah), see E. Wakayama, “Per la datazione delle storie di Noè di Paolo Uccello: un ipotesi di lettura,” Arte lombarda 61 (New Series) (1981), pp. 103-104. The identification of this figure as Leon Battista Alberti was offered by F. Ames-Lewis, “A Portrait of Leon Battista by Uccello?”, Burlington Magazine 116 (February, 1974), pp. 103-104, and was also supported by C. Eisler, “A Portrait of Leon Battista Alberti,” Burlington Magazine 116 (September, 1974), pp. 529-530. A. Grafton, in a lecture given at Rice University in the Fall of 1997, hypothesized that this is a portrait of Alberti in the guise of Methuselah.


27 Vasari, Vite, VI, p. 116; his remark appears in the editions of both 1550 and 1568.


31 For the origins of compositional gravity in Giotto’s art, see Davis, Gravity, pp. 142-159.