Humanism Study Guide

Humanism

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Introduction

Humanism is an educational and cultural philosophy that began in the Renaissance when scholars rediscovered Greek and Roman classical philosophy and has as its guiding principle the essential dignity of man. Humanism was the intellectual movement that informed the Renaissance, although the term itself was not used to describe this discovery of man until the early nineteenth century. Humanist thinking came about as a response to the scholasticism of the universities. The Schoolmen, or scholastics, valued Aristotelian logic, which they used in their complicated method of defending the scriptures through disputation of isolated statements. Humanists accused the scholastics of sophistry and of distorting the truth by arguing philosophical phrases taken out of context. By contrast, humanists researched the historical context and lives of classical writers and focused on the moral and ethical content of the texts. Along with this shift came the concept that "Man is the measure of all things" (Pythagoras), which meant that now Man was the center of the universe in place of God. In turn, the study of man and human acts on Earth led humanists to feel justified in entering into the affairs of the world, rather than leading a life of monastic asceticism, as did the scholastics.

The first humanist, Francesco Petrarch coined the term "learned piety" (*docta pietas*) to indicate that a philosopher may love God and learning, too. The common thread between all Renaissance humanists was a love of Latin language and of classical (Roman and Greek) philosophy. The humanist interest in authenticating classical texts would become the field of textual criticism that still thrives today. Humanism, too, thrives today, although it has been transformed to encompass humanitarian concerns such as providing aid to others who are suffering. Today's secular humanists actively reject religion and turn their attention to charitable works and an ethical, meaningful life on Earth.

Themes

Education

Education is an important facet of Humanism. Not only did the humanists revere learning, but they disseminated their ideas through a radical change in educational methods. Humanism was primarily a movement in opposition to the traditional mode of education, called Scholasticism, of the medieval period. Scholasticism had been a new style of learning in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, which accepted as a maxim that God existed and that God's Truth was a given that did not need to be proved. The Schoolmen (as the scholastics were called) merely had to refute attacks on the Truth, in a sort of legalistic argumentation style that derived from their understanding of Aristotelian logic. It took the form of splitting hairs (that is, arguing over minute details), according to seventeenth-century philosopher Francis Bacon. The flaw in scholastic thinking was that it relied too much on statements taken out of context and then disputed. Texts were treated as authorities, and each statement was disputed as either false or true, with no consideration for the context of the statement or the circumstances under which it was written. Instead, individual and unrelated statements were gathered into books of wise sayings. For example, a standard text was called the *Book of Sentences* (1472) by Peter Lombard, in which opinions by various writers were arranged by topic. St. Thomas Aquinas's *Summa Theologiae* is another compilation of opinions removed from their original context. Because individuals and their complete theories were not as important as their individual statements, scholastic education had devolved into argumentation over minutiae, seriously considering such questions as how many angels can dance on the head of a pin. Scholars wanting to prove such a point would pick through the available statements in works like the *Book of Sentences* to find those that supported their own ideas. Rhetorical skill was disdained by scholastics as inclined to appeal through emotions, rather than the intellect.

Scholasticism came into being because of the recognition in the medieval period that people must be trained to understand and accept Christian theology. The scholastics believed that humans were lost and could only be redeemed through God's grace, not through their own efforts, and that they should revere God. Therefore, monasteries, schools, and itinerant teachers flourished during the socalled Dark Ages, spreading the word of Christianity using the scholastic method of education. This method consisted of the *trivium* of grammar, rhetoric, and logic, along with the *quadrivium*: arithmetic, geometry, astronomy, and music. The goal of these studies was to support the study of theology. Of the few classical philosophers whose ideas supported Scholasticism, Aristotle is primary. Aristotle said that theoretical knowledge could be substantiated by beginning with core principles and deriving further truths from them, as one proceeds in mathematical reasoning. His form of syllogistic reasoning (deductive reasoning from established premises or principles) lies at the heart of Scholasticism.

On the other hand, the humanists, or as they were sometimes derogatorily called, the *Umanista* (little grammar teachers), chose the curriculum of the study of humanities, or

the liberal arts. The humanists sought to understand a writer's complete theory. They also looked at ancient writings in their historical contexts, in order to discover the nature of the writer as well as the historical import of his words. Humanists, too, studied grammar and rhetoric but did so in order to identify and master eloquence in Latin expression. In addition, they studied history, poetry, and moral philosophy. Humanists opposed Scholasticism because of its limited scope, since isolated statements taken out of context could be easily misunderstood and misrepresented. They also objected to the Aristotelian method of deductive logic, that is, inference from a general to a specific statement, on the same grounds, that it could easily be distorted. Humanists preferred Platonic and Neoplatonic philosophy over scholastic logical disputation.

Revival of Classical Learning

The humanists of the early Renaissance initiated a revival in appreciation for ancient classical Greek writers. While the scholastics included the thoughts of Aristotle in their learning, the humanists leaned toward those of Plato. However, they transformed his ideas to fit with Christian ideology as well as with some of the ideas in Gnosticism and Judaism. In this, the humanists participated in a long tradition of philosophical thought known as Neoplatonism. In the third century A.D., Plotinus, perhaps the most well-known of synthesizer and proponent of Neoplatonic thought, merged Platonic ideas with the goal of personal salvation that came about through Christianity. In other words, Plotinus took an essentially philosophical idea and merges it with religious ideology. Neoplatonism started with Plato's doctrine of innate knowledge, the concept that the human soul has true knowledge that will be awakened through proper questioning. This idea fit well, according to some humanists, with the idea of personal salvation, a tenet of Christianity. Neoplatonism also adopted Plato's distinction between knowledge and opinion, as elucidated in his *Republic*. In Neoplatonic thought, the only way to find God (or the One) in the physical world is to shun worldly life through ascetic privation in order to contemplate pure ideas and thus rise to oneness with the divine mind. Neoplatonists were inclined toward mysticism, and they approached theology through analogy and metaphor rather than logic. The humanists adopted Neoplatonist thinking because it emphasized human intellect and contemplation and because it seemed to provide a spiritual link between the ancients and Christian theology. They believed that classical philosophers were divinely inspired to write their philosophies to pave the way for Christianity.

Style

Love of Language

As the humanists discovered neglected or lost classical manuscripts and distributed them through printing, they developed a discerning taste for those classical writers who expressed their thoughts in the most elegant forms of Latin. They also discovered errors in transcription as they compared different versions of the same text. Philology, the love or study of language, grew out of the humanist desire to perfect their translations of ancient texts and to write textual commentaries on their newly discovered texts. Writing in Latin themselves, they sought to express themselves in the most elegant forms of this language. Thus, ancient Roman writers such as Cicero and Caesar became models of Latin prose, replacing the medieval Latin of scholastic Latin grammar texts. In many ways, philology lies at the heart of the humanist movement, since it engendered a focus on the historical context in which ancient texts were written as well as on textual criticism. In fact, the early humanists invented the concept of textual criticism. Philology is central to historical study because it is a valid means of authenticating records of historical events and thinking.

Oratory

Rhetoric and oratory□in Latin□were important skills to the humanists. They disapproved of the scholastic style of disputation, which they considered a show of superficial knowledge as opposed to true wisdom or virtue. The scholastic method of disputation involved searching through texts to find statements to use as evidence to support a given opinion, even to the point of taking statements out of context. The scholastic method of teaching Latin and rhetoric was through rote memorization, with corporal punishment for poor performance. Students learned how to imitate the classical Latin writers but often had no idea of the meaning of the words they said. In contrast, the humanists wanted their students to follow Cicero's three duties of the orator: to teach, to please, and to move (appeal to emotions). Humanist oration was not a recitation but a speech that considered the audience as well as the choice of material. In addition, humanists wanted their students to learn the subjects so that they would speak with authority. They followed the adage to teach students to "Grasp the subject, the words will follow." To do so would lead students to acquire real understanding of subjects, and this knowledge would help them make good decisions and become better citizens. This method is consistent with another of Cicero's rules, which proposes that students not try to master "absolute truth" but look to their own virtue instead. Thus the teaching of oratory was linked to character education. Erasmus wrote several works designed to help students acquire a mastery of Latin. His *Adages* contained thousands of worthy sentiments elegantly phrased in Latin. He also wrote a work called *Formulas for Friendly Conversation* (printed in 1518) to help students converse rather than simply repeat Latin sayings. Ultimately, advanced students of Latin would need to master skills of "oratorical abundance" or *copia*. By this was meant the ability to speak at length on a

topic, to layer their speech with numerous pertinent sayings, and to choose adages that fit the occasion. The latter skill is referred to by Shakespeare's Hamlet when he tells the troupe of actors visiting his castle to "suit the action to the word, the word to the action." That Shakespeare echoed the humanist program of oratory is testimony to the extent to which their program of oratory and rhetoric had filtered down to public schools such as the one that Shakespeare attended in his small town of Stratford-upon-Avon in the sixteenth century.

Biography

The humanist interest in biography and autobiography stems from the father of Humanism, the Italian poet and scholar Francesco Petrarch. Petrarch deplored his own age and felt that classical Roman times and people were more virtuous than his. He became obsessed with reading works of ancient Roman writers in the original Latin. He also searched for lost manuscripts so that he could piece together a society that he felt was far superior to fourteenth-century Italian society. When he found collections of personal letters written by his favorite classical writer, Cicero, he pored over them, trying to get to know the man and the culture that produced him. Petrarch even wrote fictional letters to some of his best-loved Roman writers, in which he praised the classical period and talked about his dissatisfaction with his own time. Then Petrarch wrote a set of biographies, which he called *Of Illustrious Men* (*De viris illustribus*) (1338). These twenty-four sketches are a model of classical scholarship and insight into human behavior. His friend Boccaccio wrote a parallel work on the lives of over one hundred women, called *Famous Women* (*De mulieribus claris*) (1362). Little did either of these two scholars and literary geniuses know what impact their obsession with classical Rome and Greece would have on posterity in fostering the genre of biography, which would remain popular for centuries.

Historical Context

The Renaissance

The Renaissance constituted a major shift in focus from God to the human. It started in the middle of the fourteenth century, after the Black Death (plague, 1347-1377) killed almost one-third of the population of Europe. Although the economy suffered, the remaining population earned higher wages and quickly filled in the gaps in the market. A renewed interest in classical literature, language, and philosophy fed the intellectual movement of the Renaissance: Humanism. Humanism was responsible for raising man to a level of dignity and intellectual importance that actually threatened the viability of the Church. As humanists worked to integrate pagan classical philosophy with Christian, Jewish, and gnostic theology and mysticism, they developed the notion that man can achieve redemption through his faith, independent of the grace of God. This change accompanied a growing awareness of and discomfort about the extensive corruption of the clergy. The practice of selling indulgences began to be questioned by an emerging and somewhat educated middle class that did not share the traditional values of the ruling elite. Knowledge and ideas were more widely available due to the invention of the printing press (1457-1458) and a gradual urbanization of society. The Church still maintained its political, social, and economic power, but the Protestant Reformation was questioning its theology, and a new branch of Christianity was in its formative phase. A Counter Reformation helped to refine Church procedures and reduce corruption, but the schism between competing models of individual salvation led to the formation of Protestant denominations. Although the Church sanctioned persecution of witches and instituted the Spanish Inquisition as a backlash against the Protestant Reformation, Europe was divided along religious lines, and nations such as England went back and forth between Catholocism and Protestantism until leaders were able to stabilize society and appoint a national religion or manage to incorporate a policy of religious toleration. In this hotbed of social and philosophical turbulence, a new mode of critical thinking allowed for significant discoveries in science. New respect for individual achievement, the scientific revolution that allowed open scientific inquiry, and an established wealth led to the revolutionary discoveries of Copernicus, Galileo, Kepler, and Newton and set the stage for innovations in art such as the application of the golden mean in architecture, the portrayal of visual perspective in drawing and painting, and the realistic modeling of musculature in human sculpture. Niccolo Machiavelli explored human psychology to develop a theory about the role of power in politics that became the basis for modern political realism. In drama, playwrights such as Shakespeare portrayed intimate psychological studies of the human mind as it undergoes a crisis. In these and other ways, the Renaissance surpassed the achievements of classical Greece and Rome that it had rediscovered.

Italian City-States

The birth of Humanism occurred in the Italian city-states during the fourteenth century, when Francesco Petrarch decided to devote himself to the study of Latin (and later, Greek) and to search for ancient lost manuscripts of classical Rome and Greece. The Italian city-states were a perfect breeding ground for a new ideology because they were not as committed to Scholasticism as were the urban areas of the rest of Europe. Whereas universities in other parts of Europe taught theology, the universities in the Italian city-states taught law and medicine. In the rest of Europe, society depended upon the clergy at the universities to educate the sons of the elite in established Christian behavior, morality, and doctrine so that they would be able to compete for positions at court. However, the Italian city-states were either self-governing (Florence and Venice) or run by a patriarchal family, like the Medicis, and so needed only to teach young men how to use language and writing to conduct business and city matters. Italy was a locus of trade, which required that merchants be conversant in law and the cultures of the many merchants from other kingdoms who traveled there to trade. In Florence, no university existed until an institution was chartered in 1321. Instead, young men of elite families were trained to their trade in schools that contracted annually with a teacher to present a prearranged curriculum. This fluidity made it easier for the citystates to shift to the new humanist way of thinking, since there was not a philosophically or theologically oriented university faculty devoted to the promotion of a particular philosophy or doctrine. The practicality of a merchant trade culture demanded that students acquire an ethical foundation that would make them good businessmen. Furthermore, the city-state schools taught their students skill in politics and rhetoric, so that they could serve in the republican form of government and also make good heads of their family households.

The fall of Constantinople in 1453 brought an influx of expatriate Greek scholars to Italy. These scholars found work teaching the young elite of the wealthy merchants in the city-states, spawning interest in the study of Greek language and literature, so that studies of ancient Greek literature in the original language contributed to humanist thought.

The Reformation

The Reformation was a reaction to the corruption of the Roman Catholic Church, which was raising money by selling "indulgences," pieces of paper promising that the purchaser would have all of his earthly sins excused in heaven. The Reformation was a theological movement, led by Martin Luther, who in 1517 attached ninety-five theses, criticisms against the Church, to the door of Castle Church in Wittenberg. He was promptly excommunicated. However, his ideal of religious revelation through personal experience of the Bible and God through faith rather than through religious works was an idea that took hold among the growing middle class. Although scholarly humanists eventually withdrew their support from what they could see was an attack on the Church itself and not just on its corruptions, the reformist movement succeeded in creating an

alternate branch of Christianity known as Protestantism. The Reformation became a political conflict as nations began to emerge from the fiefdoms of the medieval period and the leaders of these nations, such as King Henry VIII of England, saw in the Reformation potential for making inroads into the formidable power of the Church. The Church's power to generate revenue exceeded that of the crown through money gained from services related to birth, first communion, marriage, and death. The Church also wielded authority equal to and greater than that of the crown, with its threat of excommunication, which was believed to guarantee condemnation to hell after death. The Reformation was questioning the validity of that power, in light of extensive corruption among the clergy and even within the Vatican itself. Henry VIII took advantage of the weakening of Church authority and in 1538 dissolved many of the wealthy monasteries, taking their treasuries into his own coffers. He further weakened Papal authority in England when, through his Act of Supremacy (1534), he assumed authority over the Church in England.

Printing

Johannes Gutenburg, German inventor of the printing press using movable type, produced a 1,282-page Latin Bible between 1453-1455. By 1465, two German printers had set up shop in Italy, where they produced a Latin grammar and a work of Cicero, in addition to the more popular fare of devotional books and the lives of the saints. By the middle of the fifteenth century, lost classical texts were being rediscovered by Petrarch and his disciples and Boccaccio and Salutati, among others. With the rapid proliferation of printing presses in major cities, the opportunity for a profitable business arose, and the cost of books dropped so that each student in a school could own his own Latin grammar and one or two important books instead of having to copy texts as the teacher recited them aloud. In addition, the professionalization of printing resulted in a greater reliability of the texts; not only were the texts amended by diligent humanist scholars being published, but large printing jobs reduced the number of text variants. The impact of printing on Renaissance culture was significant. New ideas spread more quickly to a populace whose literacy was increasing exponentially as schools multiplied and, due to the availability of new books, were increasingly effective.

Movement Variations

The Enlightenment Period

Some historians say that the humanist movement that began in the Renaissance did not fully flower until the Enlightenment period of the eighteenth century, also called the Age of Reason. During this period, human faith in science and rational thinking spread beyond the intellectual elite, who included most of those who espoused Humanism during the Renaissance. With a larger literate population and a booming middle class that could afford their books, the intellectual thinkers and philosophers of the eighteenth century influenced their societies with their ideas that human reason was supreme and that religion based on superstition and meaningless ritual should not dictate human behavior. Some Enlightenment thinkers were actually atheists; however, many simply eschewed formal religion in favor of the concept of a supreme being whom man could not prove definitively. A group of French thinkers known as the *philosophes*, including Denis Diderot (1713-1784), Charles Montesquieu (1689-1755), Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778), and Voltaire (1694-1778), among others, prepared an *Encyclopédie* (1751-1780) to contain all human knowledge, rationally arranged. Religion was notably missing and in fact was treated as superstition. In another of his essays, Voltaire made the scandalous proposition that religious differences should be tolerated: since God could not deny heaven to classical thinkers such as Socrates, Plato, and Solon, how could he deny it to men of other contemporary religions? Many of the contributors to the encyclopedia were imprisoned for their heretical views. Nevertheless, the massive *Encyclopédie* stood as a testimony to the doctrine of man's essential supremacy. The Enlightenment thinkers and philosophers were also fascinated by how humans acquire knowledge and, with religion losing its authority as a moral standard, morality. Many of them wrote treatises on the human mind, including David Hume (1711-1776), who considered human feeling as the source of ethical behavior. Hume also claimed that since God existed only as an idea in the mind, he did not exist. Jeremy Bentham (1748-1832) proposed that humans make ethical decisions based upon the pleasure principle: that in seeking to avoid pain, each human's ethical decision would contribute to the common good. In Germany, Immanual Kant (1724-1804) proposed that all moral actions be measured against a kind of golden rule that said that an action was moral if it could be applied categorically to all, which was another form of locating morality in the human mind rather than in divine revelation. In America, Thomas Paine (1737-1809) accused religion of inspiring the worst moral behavior, saying that "The most detestable wickedness, the most horrid cruelties, and the greatest miseries that have afflicted the human race, have had their origin in this thing called revelation, or revealed religion." The role of the Enlightenment period, in regard to Humanism, consists in taking the humanist faith in humanity step further□toward questioning and even rejecting organized religion. It was a period of the triumph of intellectual reasoning over over religious belief, and it grounded the idea of virtue on Earth for the sake of pleasure on Earth. In this thinking lay the seeds of the humanist work of the next century, that of social consciousness and reform.

Modern Secular Humanism

The social reformist thinking of the nineteenth century was an outgrowth of Renaissance and then Enlightenment Humanism. Belief in the Great Chain of Being with humankind firmly at the top both legitimized imperialism through the idea of "civilizing" undeveloped nations abroad and contributed to the sense of social responsibility that developed into better living and employment conditions at home, where working-class people led "lives of quiet desperation" (Thoreau, 1854). Robert Green Ingersoll (1833-1899) wrote "A Humanist Credo," in which he defined this responsibility:

> We are satisfied that there can be but little liberty on earth while men worship a tyrant in heaven. We do not expect to accomplish everything in our day; but we want to do what good we can, and to render all the service possible in the holy cause of human progress. We know that doing away with gods and supernatural persons and powers is not an end. It is a means to an end□the real end being the happiness of man.

After the fall of imperialism, humanist ideology evolved from a program that focused on social reform to one that embraced humanitarianism in general, and this form of Humanism dominated the twentieth century. According to humanist Corliss Lamont, Humanism is "A philosophy of joyous service for the greater good of all humanity in this natural world and advocating the methods of reason, science, and democracy." Several manifestos have been written and signed by leading scholars, scientists, and writers indicating their support of a form of Humanism that eschews organized religion and embraces human responsibility for realizing human potential. This includes such ideas as opposing nuclear war, promoting pro-choice on the abortion question, promoting organ donation after death, and accepting euthanasia under certain circumstances. With such a wide range of issues to support, Humanism of the twentieth century, also called Ethical Humanism, does not advocate any particular combination of them but rather subscribes to the notion of situational ethics, of making moral decisions on a case-by-case basis following the underlying humanist principles of respect for human dignity, faith in science and technology, freedom, and respect for nature. These principles have no regard for religious mythology but instead focus on human life on Earth. Paul Kurtz explains in his *Humanist Manifesto I and II* that "Ethics is autonomous and situational, needing no theological or ideological sanction. Ethics stem from human interest and need . . . we strive for the good life here and now." Secular humanists are those who are religiously devoted to the principles of Humanism. They are to be distinguished from religious humanists, such as the Quakers, who do not use this term but who are devoted to humanitarian concerns as an integral part of their religion and who eschew rituals, costumes, and dogma in their faith. There have been many notable people who claimed Humanism or Secular Humanism as their personal doctrine. These include the atheist American lawyer Clarence Darrow (1857-1938); the German-born

American psychoanalyst Eric Fromm (1900-1980); British biologist and grandson of Aldous Huxley, Julian Sorrell Huxley (1887-1975); pacifist and leading English philosopher Bertrand Russell (1872-1970); scientist and Science Fiction writer Isaac Asimov (1920-1992); French philosopher Jean Paul Sartre (1905-1980); scientist Carl Sagan (1934-1996), German-born scientist Albert Schweitzer (1875- 1965); Spanish-born philosopher George Santayana (1863-1952); Chinese-born writer Lin Ytang (1895-1976); philosopher Corliss Lamont (1902- 1995); among many others. The challenges faced by humanists of the twenty-first century, who include philosopher Paul Kurtz, feminist historian Riane Eisler, social journalist Barbara Ehrenreich, feminist Betty Friedan, feminist writer Alice Walker, science fiction writer Kurt Vonnegut, United Nations secretary-general Kofi Annan, just to name a very few, will involve dealing with globalization and ecological concerns.

Representative Authors

Baldassare Castiglione (1478-1529)

Baldassare Castiglione was born on December 6, 1478, at Casatico near Mantua, Italy. An Italian diplomat, knight, and courtier, Castiglione served in the court of Urbino for a good part of his life, observing and taking part in its elegance. He recorded a fictional dialogue to represent the best of court life in his *Book of the Courtier* (1528). This book was highly influential, setting the standard for the behavior of the elite, which was to comport oneself with a casual nonchalance, giving the impression that one's learning and grace are natural talents, effortlessly expressed. He explains, "Therfore that may be said to be a very art that appeereth not to be art, neyther ought a man to put more dilgence in any thing then in covering it: for in case it be open, it loseth credit cleane, and maketh a man litle set by" (as translated by Sir Thomas Hoby, 1561).

Castiglione died at the height of his fortune on February 7, 1529.

Desiderius Erasmus (c. 1466-1536)

Desiderius Erasmus of Rotterdam was born in October of 1466 or 1467, an illegitimate child whose parents died of the plague. He was put into a monastery, where he was ordained for priesthood. However, Erasmus became a scholar and one of the first humanists and did not join the priesthood. He initially supported the Reformation but abandoned the movement when it led to religious conflict. Influenced by Valla's *Book of Elegances*, a Latin grammar, Erasmus studied Latin classics of the pagan authors of ancient Greece and Rome. He also became interested in education, partly in reaction to his own brutal treatment at the hands of his early schoolteachers, and he wrote a collection of sayings, *Adages*, for use as a Latin textbook. Erasmus proposed that schools follow the education precepts of classical Roman Quintilian (c. 35-c. 99), to train orators by focusing first on their personal integrity, then on their persuasive skills. To this end, Erasmus suggested that students practice extemporaneous writing to encourage candidness, thus departing from the traditional school model in which the schoolmaster read from a single text while students copied the *lectura* (reading) word for word. With his great faith in the power of words, Erasmus considered religious feeling to stem from a direct reading of the scriptures, which he felt had a nearly magical ability to influence people to follow the example of Christ. Like Luther, whom he at first admired, Erasmus felt that the key to religious feeling was the change of heart that could occur when a person reads the scriptures, not from unthinking obedience to the rituals of a corrupt church. Erasmus was a humanist in his faith that humans can achieve piety through their own endeavors, as well as in his passion for Latin rhetoric. He combined humanist scholarship with reformist ideology.

Erasmus died July 12, 1536, in Basel, Switzerland.

Marsilio Ficino (1433-1499)

Marsilio Ficino was born in Florence, Italy, on October 19, 1433, and began his student life as a scholastic, studying the traditional Aristotelian philosophy. However, he underwent a religious epiphany during which he decided that Plato's philosophy was a divine revelation designed to prepare the pagan world for the arrival of Christ. Ficino's somewhat antithetical beliefs were symbolized in two votive candles he kept in his room: one in front of a picture of Plato and another in front of an image of the Virgin Mary. He studied Greek and read and translated into Latin the complete works of Plato as well as the works of the Neoplatonists, Greek Platonic scholars (primarily Plotinus) of the third century A.D. The Neoplatonists expanded Plato's philosophy to describe a system in which humans live in a state of "sleep" in this world and must go through several phases to reach a state of hyperconsciousness, the final stage achieved by the soul, which is beyond the level of reasoning.

During the forty years that he was translating Plato and the Neoplatonists, Ficino held informal lectures for interested scholars at his home in Florence, which became known as the Platonic Academy. Ficino's gatherings and written works helped to spread Plato's ideas among the humanists. He himself, however, was not a true humanist, since his interests lay in the philosophy of Plato; he ignored the philological aspects that preoccupied most of the true humanists, and he did not pay scrupulous attention to authenticating his sources, as most of the other humanists did. Ficino also had an interest in the occult and magic. He also studied the Jewish mystical book called the Cabala (written in Hebrew) and the hermetic tracts of the Egyptians as well as the (lost) works of Pythagoras. His enthusiastic belief that these works held divinely inspired ancient secrets that passed through Plato proved infectious to his followers. Ficino has been accused of elitism because his brand of gnostic Christianity gave his followers a sense of superiority, since it required a great amount of study to become initiated into its secrets.

Ficino died in Corregio on October 1, 1499.

Sir Thomas More (c. 1478-1535)

Sir Thomas More was born around February 7, 1478, in England. He authored the satire *Utopia*, an imaginary state loosely based on ideas from Plato's *Republic*, among other classical sources. This work was written in the beginning of More's life, before he became Lord Chancellor and then became embroiled in the king's "great matter," wherein King Henry VIII granted himself sovereignty over the Church of England so that he could command that the Church condone his divorce of Catherine of Aragon, allowing him to marry Anne Boleyn and try to beget an heir with her. More foresaw that this crisis in English history would inevitably lead to a schism between church and state and so refused to provide the public support that Henry wanted. Henry charged More with treason and ultimately had him beheaded.

More was a strong proponent of humanist ideas, having befriended Erasmus on one of the latter's visits to England. More used his significant skills in Latin oratory to defend the study of classical Greek other secular literature against Scholasticism. He felt that studying the ancient classics better promoted knowledge and virtue than did the traditional fare of Scholasticism, with its emphasis on disputation of minor points of theology. Nevertheless, More remained very much a medieval thinker and scholar, steeped in scholastic learning, despite his liberal acceptance of the new humanist ideas. Even though, as befits a humanist, More eschewed monastic study and happily entered the world of politics, statesmanship, and law, he was a product of the scholastic form of education, since he relied upon the skills he learned in scholastic disputation. Convicted of treason on false evidence, More was beheaded on July 6, 1535. He was widely admired for his sincere religious piety, especially after his martyrdom.

Francesco Petrarch (1304-1374)

Francesco Petrarch was born July 20, 1304, in Arezzo, Italy. Known as the "Father of Humanism," Petrarch promoted the study of works by Cicero (106-43 B.C.) and Virgil (70-19 B.C.) as models of Latin eloquence. He actively sought new manuscripts of their work, along with those by other classical Roman writers such as Quintilian and Seneca, and his travels across Europe uncovered a number of hitherto lost works by Cicero and others. Petrarch valued Cicero for his ideas about morality, oration, and the purpose of education as a means to train good citizens. It was Petrarch who identified the decline of the Roman Empire as a historical event, and he defined the period of history after its fall as a "dark age," or a "Middle Age" between the golden era of antiquity and the current "rebirth" of antiquity in Petrarch's own time. By this it was meant that ancient texts were once again valued for their unique contribution to human history. Petrarch is perhaps best known for his sonnets of timeless beauty inspired by a mysterious woman he calls simply "Laura," who did not return his love.

Petrarch died on July 18, 1374, in Arqua, Italy.

Count Giovanni Pico della Mirandola (1463-1494)

Giovanni Pico della Mirandola was born February 24, 1463. He was a brilliant student who gave up his share of the Mirandola ancestral property in order to pursue his education by traveling to the major universities of Europe. He, like Ficino, became enamored of the mystical Jewish Cabala, and he once bought a stash of fake Hebrew manuscripts purported to contain ancient secrets. He sought to construct a universal religion among Judaism, Islam, and Christianity, and he believed that Platonist philosophy could be reconciled to their main ideas. When he returned from his educational saga, he wrote nine hundred theses on a wide variety of topics and challenged any and all scholars to join him in Rome to dispute them. No one came, for the Church determined that some of his propositions were heretical. He had to flee to France for a time until it was safe to return. Pico della Mirandola says in his opening to the theses, which came to be known as *Oration on the Dignity of Man* (1496), that

"nothing in the world can be found that is more worthy of admiration than man." His work served as a manifesto for the humanist movement in that it promulgated the idea that man should take his rightful place as the center of the universe yet also exhorted man to give up worldly aspirations and physical pleasure to seek peace through the contemplation of God.

Pico della Mirandola died November 17, 1494.

Girolamo Savonarola (1452-1498)

Girolamo Savonarola was born on September 21, 1452. He was a charismatic monk from Ferrara, Italy, who preached fiery sermons in Florence on the subject of proper piety. An accomplished orator and rhetorician, Savonarola quickly became famous for his sermons and drew large crowds. Even though Savonarola was not a humanist himself, he influenced the work of Pico della Mirandola and Marsilio Ficino, who were in Florence when he was preaching there. His sermons called for a "bonfire of the vanities" in which were burned all heretical books, images, and objects of vice. Savonarola was charged with heresy by the Church; he was excommunicated, then tortured, hanged, and burnt at the stake on May 23, 1498.

Lorenzo Valla (1405-1457)

Lorenzo Valla was born in Rome, Italy, in 1405. He was a philologist who disputed the validity of the claim that the Emperor Constantine (306-337), who converted to Christianity and made Constantinople into a haven of Christian ideology, had donated half of his empire to Pope Sylvester for curing his case of leprosy. Valla's argument rested on linguistic evidence, the first argument of its kind. Among other evidence, he proved the donation document a forgery by exposing anachronisms (words that did not exist in the fourth century) in the Latin text. Valla also wrote *Elegantiae* (or *Book of Elegances*), a Latin grammar book that sought to improve the quality of spoken and written Latin, with over three thousand examples of correct Latin usage (elegances). Valla, along with Petrarch, sought a revival of classical Latin in its purest form; Renaissance philologists considered the classical period as a golden age of the Latin language that was followed by a period of degeneration when vernacular languages flourished and Latinists lost their interest in the pure forms of the language. Valla's legacy to Humanism was to initiate the field of textual criticism, which studies the authenticity of texts and seeks to correct errors that creep into manuscripts when they are copied.

Valla died in Rome on August 1, 1457.

Representative Works

Adages

Published in 1500 by Erasmus of Rotterdam, the *Adages* (*Adagia*) initially comprised more than three thousand proverbs from Greek and Roman antiquity. Erasmus added to the collection in the 1508 and 1515 editions. This befits the spirit of the *Adages*, for in it Erasmus speaks of the importance of the richness (*copia*) of using the right number of adages in speaking. The introduction gives specific advice on how to polish these gems and use them to enhance speech. He says, "And so to interweave adages deftly and appropriately is to make the language as a whole glitter with sparkles from Antiquity, please us with the art of rhetoric, gleam with jewel-like words of wisdom, and charm us with titbits of wit and humour." The book became one of the most influential of the Renaissance period, since it both preserved the wisdom of the ancients and served as a how to book on oration.

Book of the Courtier

Published in 1528 by Italian knight, diplomat, and courtier Baldassare Castiglione, *Book of the Courtier* (*Il Cortegiano*) describes the perfect gentleman and lady. It consists of a dialogue among typical courtiers, discussing how to comport oneself with grace. A group of courtiers led by the Duchess of Urbina describes the perfect gentleman and his talents, which range from hunting, swimming, leaping, running, playing tennis, and playing music to avoiding envy. The perfect gentlewoman is also described. For both, looks are important, but the end result of one's toilet should give no hint of effort, such as excessive plucking of hairs or too much makeup. Grace consists of "a certain recklessness," or *sprezzatura*, which involves doing things gracefully without seeming to "mind it." It means that one avoids seeming curious or angry. Talent in speaking and writing is also paramount, and the group goes into a lengthy discussion about the use of oratorical figures of speech and the need to shun antiquated sayings. The final chapter describes courtly love. Castiglione's *Book of the Courtier* was soon translated into other languages for use in courts across Europe and Japan.

Book of Elegances, or Elegances of the Latin Language

Begun circa 1435 by Lorenzo Valla (an Italian humanist, philosopher, and literary critic) and published in 1444, this anthology of three thousand exemplary Latin phrases became a standard text throughout Europe for training students in Latin philology (the study of words or language). Within one hundred years of its writing, the huge and costly *Book of Elegances* had been printed in sixty editions.

Familiar Letters

Francesco Petrarch, over a period of many years, wrote a series of letters addressed to writers from classical Greek and Roman antiquity, such as Cicero, admiring his oratorical qualities; Homer or imitators of Homer, including the talented Virgil; and Socrates. He speaks with these figures from the past about his own critics as if he were writing to living men, personal friends. Among the letters, too, is one "To Posterity" in which he describes himself and his life and works in an early version of informal autobiography. Speaking to posterity, he refers to himself in the past tense, as in this example: "I possessed a well-balanced rather than a keen intellect, one prone to all kinds of good and wholesome study, but especially inclined to moral philosophy and the art of poetry." Other letters were addressed to contemporaries: Giovanni Boccaccio, who was a friend; and Tomasso de Messina, a philosophical enemy and supporter of Scholasticism to whom Petrarch writes of his distaste for Artistotelian logic and preference for the works of Plato.

Oration on the Dignity of Man

In 1486, Giovanni Pico della Mirandola had completed seven years of classical education at various universities in Europe. He independently came up with the idea to formulate a universal religion comprising the essential elements of the major religions. He put together some of his ideas in nine hundred theses on a wide variety of topics that he wanted to dispute with other scholars in Rome, which did not occur because the Church claimed that some of his propositions were heretical, and Pico della Mirandola had to flee to France for safety. The opening oration to the theses, which came to be known as *Oration on the Dignity of Man* (published posthumously in 1496), describes man as not being constrained by the laws of nature, such that man, through free will, may determine his own limits and nature. Further, it places mankind at the center of the universe; Pico della Mirandola says that "nothing in the world can be found that is more worthy of admiration than man." The opening oration has been called the manifesto of Humanism. Although Pico della Mirandola was not a true humanist, since he held on to the Aristotelian concept of forms, a scholastic ideology, his work galvanized humanist thinking in the way that it pulled together the best of Jewish, Christian, Zoroastrian, and Arabic philosophies, expressing the intellectual freedom and dignity of humankind.

Utopia

Sir Thomas More wrote *Utopia* while on an extended diplomatic mission to Bruges and published his work in 1516. It is the story of the mythical island called No Place (*Utopia*), where the people get along through their virtue, reason, and charity. The vices of greed and jealousy have been engineered out of the society by ordaining that everyone wear the same clothes and that houses be exchanged every ten years. More based his allegory of England on Plato's *Republic*, among other classical (and biblical) sources. More's *Utopia* is a celebration of the potential for human virtue and pleasure on Earth and thus a seminal work of humanist literature.

Critical Overview

The early humanists were attacked by the Schoolmen (scholastics) and other clergy as lacking true faith. They were denounced as pagans and were considered heretical. However, the humanists in fact were quite devout. Indeed, leaders, such as Erasmus, never deviated from Catholicism, even though they disparaged Church corruption. These humanists are known as Christian humanists, for they did not question faith itself. Nevertheless, Erasmus was vilified by traditional churchmen throughout his life. Businessmen were skeptical of the humanist curriculum and did not want their sons to waste time studying nonessential topics such as poetry and philosophy. The humanist commitment to public service eventually won over those who feared that humanist study was impractical. Another means of defense happened accidentally. Many humanists found employment with the new print shops, setting type and proofreading copies. They soon discovered that they could carry out their disputes over points of philosophy quite effectively through this new medium instead of staging a formal public debate. Ultimately, their participation in the fledgling industry spurred its success, and in turn, the humanists benefited by reaching a wider audience through their printed essays, tracts, and letters.

During the eighteenth century, humanist thinkers tended to embrace the idea of empirical science developed during the scientific revolution of the seventeenth century. At the same time, scientists naturally gravitated toward a system of belief that could be developed by reason and produced measurable and predictable results. The combination led humanists further away from religious belief, and atheism became a part of Humanism. As Howard Radest explains in his book, *The Devil and Secular Humanism*, "The point of separation [between religion and Humanism] was the Enlightenment; the impulse to separation was modern empirical science." Radest sees the roots of modern secular Humanism as stemming primarily from the Enlightenment period, with its emphasis on the "Rights of Man," with only distant roots coming from the Renaissance. This is because modern Secular Humanism is openly atheistic (a concept foreign to Renaissance thinkers) and has been criticized for this by religious fundamentalists. When the first "Humanist Manifesto" was released to newspapers in 1933, it met a huge public outcry against its atheistic principles; Humanism was seen as a dangerous trend away from core religious values. In fact, many outspoken religious conservatives today blame humanists for modern consumerist culture because they see humanists as technocrats, quick to sacrifice nature for the sake of human gain. They decry Humanism as a religion without a god and without a moral framework. Humanist Paul Kurtz defends his humanist beliefs in his book, *In Defense of Secular Humanism*, in which he reminds detractors that Humanism does rest upon a set of ethical principles. Whether or not a given humanist subscribes to Kurtz's particular view of Humanism, modern humanists take on today's most difficult ethical issues, such as the teaching of evolution in schools, abortion rights, and the right to euthanasia. As humanist Jeaneane Fowler declares, "Humanism has no creed, but many convictions."

Criticism

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Critical Essay #1

Hamilton is an English teacher at Cary Academy in North Carolina. In this essay, Hamilton explores how Humanism continues to thrive as an attractive belief system in the postmodern world.

Postmodernism, the belief that reality is a social construct in which each person creates his or her own personal truth, has declared the "end of history" following Nietzsche's declaration of the "death of God." According to postmodernists, there is no possibility for a single, all-encompassing, objective belief. Everything is subjective, open to interpretation. This entails, according to postmodern French philosopher Jean-François Lyotard, the "end of narrative," or explanatory stories, as well. Lyotard claims that the "grand narrative," or universalizing belief system, "has lost its credibility." This means that for postmodernists, neither religious nor scientific "stories" can be relied upon as Truth. Instead, they say, humans act as they want to act, according to self-interest, and then rationalize their actions by espousing the tenets of a handy belief system. Some point to fundamentalist beliefs, whereas others claim to be inspired by reason or science. These belief systems provide principles that justify their actions.

Humanists, too, have been rationalizing their position by attaching it to long-held values. Because it espouses popular principles, Humanism has survived and shows every sign of flourishing in the future. This is because the humanist grand narrative has shifted over the centuries, responding to changes in the market of human beliefs. In doing so, Humanism has maintained its viability in a way that can carry it into future generations.

A survey of three of the most influential manifestos of modern Humanism demonstrates how the grand narrative of Humanism has evolved, making it attractive to followers and allowing it to address the problems of the age, specifically those that threaten human life and dignity. The humanist manifesto of 1933 attaches its agenda to the value of science. In doing so, the modern humanists who signed the 1933 humanist manifesto rejected all forms of supernatural belief, making a clear break with religion that their Renaissance founders could neither envision nor support. The 1933 manifesto outlines in no uncertain terms that "the end of man's life [is to] seek development and fulfillment in the here and now." It is a manifesto that discourages sentimentalism and seeks "social and mental hygiene" instead. This manifesto was written after the end of World War I, during the time of military build-up between France and Germany. It was the period of the Lost Generation, who had lost faith in God as well as in human virtue. Many people were stunned by the loss of life and the devastation of the world war; they saw life on Earth as bleak and unfulfilling, yet they longed for a meaningful purpose for their lives. The 1933 manifesto served as a call to the social conscience of a disaffected populace. It had an appeal to a world inclined toward agnosticism, the belief that humans are not capable of proving whether God exists or not. In this it succeeded by suggesting that it was admissible to seek happiness here on Earth.

The "Humanist Manifesto II" of 1973 shows another shift in the phrasing of the grand narrative of Humanism, this time moving it closer to the realm of a scientific rather than

a religious foundation. The new manifesto espouses complete faith in science as the dominant ideology, which now extends to technology. Humans not only understand the world better, they now have the means to control it. This concept is consistent with the Renaissance faith in man, and the Renaissance humanists also were comfortable with technology to the extent that they used the new printing press as a means to distribute their ideas. However, modern Humanism places technology in the center of its faith. The "Humanist Manifesto II" came on the heels of a successful space program and the sense that the Cold War could be evaded through nuclear deterrence. Ironically, this manifesto calls for an end to "the use of nuclear, biological, and chemical weapons," while expressing a complete faith in technology as "a *vital key* to human progress." This manifesto also declares atheism as a definitional aspect of Humanism. Religious belief is not just a point of skepticism but is vilified as dangerous because it does not partake of reason. The early humanists would have been shocked by this change in their beliefs. However, they would have been gratified by another change: the emphasis on social responsibility. And, they might have been intrigued by this manifesto's expression of hope for global governance, a new thought for Humanism. The only idea that remains consistent with early Humanism is the privileging of human dignity as a central belief.

Coming just seven years later, "A Secular Humanist Declaration" of 1980 contains sentiments quite similar to "Humanist Manifesto II." However, the demands for the future are more specific, and the underlying ideology has shifted, again. "A Secular Humanist Declaration" appeals to democracy as a necessary component of morality. This is the first instance of a political agenda for Humanism. It specifically addresses current policies of secular politics, from allowing evolution to be taught in schools to the tax status of nonprofit secular human rights associations. No such political concerns appear in the earlier manifestos. Clearly, the political uncertainly of the late seventies had left its mark on humanist thinking.

The shift in Humanism from its Renaissance basis in Christianity to one that is atheistic and focused on secular politics is progressive because belief must be organic enough to adapt to the changing social environment. Instead of relying on dogmatic statements that must be defended against competing ideologies, Humanism has, over time, changed its course to stay consistent with human needs. The humanist rhetoric about reason and scientific method is really a way of saying that Humanism intends to adapt to what is empirically true. Although it appears to rely on claims to transcendent principles, the nature of its abiding principles is fluid. One of these abiding principles is the commitment to preserving human life and human dignity. Thus, despite the evolution in rhetorical appeals to God, and then to reason, science, and democracy, the real beliefs of Humanism still have not changed. They are expressed in Thomas Paine's statement, "All mankind are my brethren; to do good is my religion."

The looseness of the word "good" in Paine's statement is a necessary aspect of humanist thought, which allows humanists to participate in the situational or conditional ethics required by the twenty-first century. While fundamentalists attempt to coerce followers through attempts to limit access to or to discredit competing ideologies, Humanism holds onto the crucial little narratives and lets the grand narrative evolve as it may. Humanists today concern themselves with the ecosystem, with globalization, and

with human rights, all issues that threaten human life, human worth, or human dignity. They also recognize and accept the postmodern distrust of consensus, seeing that universal consensus would be another form of absolutism. In this sense, most contemporary humanists partake of pragmatist philosophy, which says that ideas are measured not by their universal truth but by their practical results. In *Philosophy and Social Hope*, pragmatist Richard Rorty suggests that "we simply give up the philosophical search for commonality" because "moral progress might be accelerated if we focused instead on our ability to make the particular little things that divide us seem unimportant." Rorty advocates removal of all grand narratives from the humanist rhetoric. Another humanist, Frederick Edwords, in his essay "The Humanist Philosophy in Perspective," also acknowledges the necessity to stay flexible, saying that scientific knowledge, moral choices, and social policies "are subject to continual revision in the light of both the fallible and tentative nature of our knowledge and constant shifts in social conditions." Edwords admits that giving up the hope for a universal truth is risky, but he asserts that today's humanists

> have willingly sacrificed the lure of an easy security offered by simplistic systems in order to take an active part in the painstaking effort to build our understanding of the world and thereby contribute to the solutions of the problems that have plagued humanity through the ages.

These and other forward-thinking humanists realize that an ideology needs nothing more than the sense that an action is right and good because it benefits humanity, and that making these choices is not thereby made simple or formulaic.

Although they oppose indoctrination of any form, humanists today push for educational reforms that emphasize character education, moral virtues, and critical thinking skills. They want students to learn about evolution and other hotly contested subjects and then to decide for themselves. In this, humanists face opposition from fundamentalist religious groups. It appears that once again Humanism is facing off against organized religion in the arena of education. To do so, according to Rorty, is both inevitable and a necessary function of humanist educators, since, "the real function of the humanist intellectuals is to instill doubts in the students about the students' own self-images, and about the society to which they belong." The destabilizing effect of teaching a humanist curriculum is also necessary for the evolution of humanist thought, for, as Rorty continues, teachers "help ensure that the moral consciousness is slightly different from that of the previous generation." Allowing for change and adaptation in the future makes an idea viable and strong, and it accommodates the human need to express free will by making a choice among a competing market of ideas.

The reason that today's humanists accept the need for an evolving agenda and a changing source of authentication is that they recognize the postmodern truth that humans make decisions and then justify them through theology and philosophy. Michael Werner confirms this view in his article "Humanism and Beyond the Truth" when he says

we are not so much rational animals as much as we are rationalizing ones. Our overdeveloped powers of cognition are more often used to confirm our prejudices, maintain our power and control, and shield us from confronting our own irrational inconsistencies.

It seems clear that taking away the scaffolding of Humanism's grand narrative has had no effect on the ultimate objective of humanist thinking. Humanists continue to strive, as Felix Adler declared, to "Act so as to encourage the best in others, and by so doing you will develop the best in yourself." For today's humanists, faith takes the form of trusting that the philosophy of Humanism will evolve. As Annette Baier explains in her book, *Postures of the Mind*, "the secular equivalent of faith in God is faith in the human community and its evolving procedures." This trust amounts to faith in the postmodern condition to change and evolve. Today's postmodern humanists practice a "faith" that doing good for other humans now and in the future has its own value, one that does not require further justification. Bertrand Russell said that "The great use of a life is to spend it for something that outlasts it." Moral progress, as practiced by postmodern humanists, is a matter of gradually increasing the good of human worth, through acts that look beyond self-interest. Today's humanists know that the "death of God" and the "end of narrative" do not have to lead to the end of man.

Source: Carole Hamilton, Critical Essay on Humanism, in *Literary Movements for Students*, The Gale Group, 2003.

Critical Essay #2

In the following introduction excerpt, Martindale explores the concepts of education, wisdom, and elegance in humanist works.

Critical Essay #3

Education was one of the chief humanist interests; from the time of Vittorino da Feltre and Guarino, who had schools at Mantua (1423-46) and at Ferrara (1429-36) respectively, humanists were often involved in the teaching of children, and they wrote many educational treatises. These stress the supreme importance of education: man cannot live by the promptings of nature alone, 'doctrine' (knowledge, teaching) must be added to experience, and the mind should be formed early. Three classical works in particular influenced humanist educational ideas: the pseudo-Plutarchan essay *The education of children*, from the *Moralia*, Cicero's *On the orator* and above all Quintilian's *The education of an orator*.

Humanist treatises frequently stress the special importance of sound education for the ruler and the governing class: the *studia humanitatis* lead to knowledge and virtue, and hence to good government. The English educational writers, Elyot and Ascham, both take this up, echoing the arguments of Erasmus and Castiglione. The standard example used to demonstrate the efficacy of education for the ruler was that of Alexander the Great, whose tutor was Aristotle and whose favourite author was Homer. Humanists do seem to have contributed to bringing about a change of attitude here; the medieval idea of a different education for nobles and 'clerks' (ecclesiastics, who often held bureaucratic posts) fell into disfavour, and the upper classes began to send their sons to the grammar schools, the universities and the Inns of Court; education came to be seen as essential for public life.

Complaints about the state of education and attacks on medieval teaching methods are common in humanist authors; Batt, in *The antibarbarians*, lavishes scorn on the ignorance of schoolteachers and on the stupidity of medieval grammars. Of course, there had been schools in the Middle Ages where classical authors were studied, for example the celebrated school of Chartres where Bernard taught the classics to John of Salisbury in the twelfth century. But by Erasmus' day, there had been a decline. Classes were often very large. Generally only the master was provided with a textbook, and so everything had to be dictated and then learnt by heart. (Renaissance schooling benefited both from the invention of printing and from the spread of cheap paper, which meant that the boy could preserve copious notes on the authors he was studying.) Logic was the dominant discipline; logical disputation was begun early in the schools and even the teaching of grammar was affected by it, so that the boys learnt complex definitions of grammatical cases. This kind of thing was anathema to the humanists, as was the Latin usage taught:

All Latin adulterate, which ignorant blind fools
brought into this world and with the same hath distained
and poisoned the old Latin speech and the very
Roman tongue which in the time of Tully and Sallust
and Virgil and Terence was used, which also
Saint Jerome and Saint Ambrose and Saint Austin
and many holy doctors learned in their times□I say

that filthiness and all such abusion which the later
blind world brought in, which more rather may be
called blotterature than literature, I utterly abanish
and exclude out of this school.

Viewed by modern educational ideas, the education provided in the English grammar school of the Renaissance, which put into practice humanist ideas, was extraordinarily single-minded, perhaps even narrow-minded. The whole tenor was literary. Boys learnt to read and to write English, Latin and Greek, generally in that order and with the greatest attention being paid to Latin. Humanist educators believed that Latin grammar should be learnt not by rote but by observing and copying the practice of 'good authors.' In his influential *Elegancies of the Latin language* (1471), a study of classical usage, Lorenzo Valla had said, 'I accept for law whatever has pleased great authors.' The sentiment is echoed by English educationalists; 'without doubt,' writes Ascham in *The schoolmaster*, 'grammatica itself is sooner and surer learned by examples of good authors than by the naked rules of grammarians.' Latin literature was always read with an eye to imitating; particular authors were studied at the same time as particular kinds of composition were being mastered: for example, the relevant parts of Cicero were read while orations and epistles were being composed. The closest attention was paid to details of expression; the boy kept a notebook in which he jotted down phrases which he could employ in his own compositions. The aim of the system was rhetorical expertise, the ability to express oneself fluently on any topic. Hence all the innumerable exercises in translating from one language into another (it is worth noting that boys sometimes translated into English verse), in varying one thought in different words, in composing themes and orations.

It can hardly be chance that an educational programme of this kind coincided with a tremendous outburst of literary activity. Not only professional writers but men immersed in practical affairs could turn their hand to a poem and sometimes produce a masterpiece, as Sir Henry Wotton did in 'Ye meaner beauties of the night.' The emphasis on the cultivation of stylistic fluency had its effect. Shakespeare may laugh at pedantic schoolmasters in Holofernes (in *Love's labour's lost*), a trick of whose speech is *variatio*, the production of strings of synonyms:

Hol. The deer was, as you know, *sanguis*, in blood;
ripe as the pomewater, who now hangeth like a jewel
in the ear of *coelo*, the sky, the welkin, the
heaven; and anon falleth like a crab on the face of *terra*,
the soil, the land, the earth.

Nath. Truly, Master Holofernes, the epithets are
sweetly varied, like a scholar at the least: but, sir, I
assure ye, it was a buck of the first head,

but he is the supreme example in English literature of Erasmian *copia*, stylistic abundance. Reading habits learnt at school persisted in later life; Ben Jonson marked phrases in his books with an eye to redeployment in his own poetry. The teaching

methods of the period may seem to us soul-destroying and Latin compositions sometimes schoolboyish, but when the poets came to compose in English, they could draw on a large stock of ideas and phrases. By the time the boy had left school, he had read very widely in classical literature and learnt a good part by heart; it is therefore not surprising if we find so many reminiscences of the classics in English Renaissance literature. . .

Critical Essay #4

In the dedication of *The garden of eloquence* (1577), Henry Peacham speaks of 'wisdom and eloquence, the only ornaments whereby man's life is beautified.' The coupling is significant; wisdom and eloquence are two parts of one ideal. Wisdom cannot express itself properly without eloquence; eloquence is so much empty verbiage without wisdom. It should be stressed again that the emphasis on style in Renaissance literary theory is not formalism. The intimate connection between style and thought is often reiterated; in the *Apophthegms*, Erasmus recounts an anecdote about Socrates, who said to a youth who had been sent by his father to be seen by the philosopher, 'Speak that I may see you,'

> signifying that the mind of man is manifested less in his face than in his speech (*oratio*), because this is the surest and least lying mirror of the soul.

Diseases of the mind issue in diseased speech; the idea is expressed in *Discoveries* and exemplified by the characters in Jonson's plays, in the bombast of Sir Epicure Mammon, for example.

Wisdom and eloquence are the properties of the true orator. Humanists revived the classical ideal of the orator, whose aim was not just to know the good but, through eloquence, to move others to the good; passages from Cicero and Quintilian expressed this ideal eloquently. *Humanists had what may seem an excessive faith in the power of word and the persuasive force of language*.

> How much eloquence can accomplish in the shaping of human life is known both from reading in many authors and from the experience of everyday life. How great is the number of those we recognise in our own day, to whom even examples were of no help, who have been aroused and turned suddenly from a most wicked manner of life to a perfectly ordered one simply by the sound of others' voices,

wrote Petrarch. 'Nothing among humans is more powerful at stirring all motions of the soul than speech (*oratio*),' said Erasmus. Such faith pervades Daniel's *Musophilus*. It is important to note that ideas about oratory were transferred to poetry; the argument of Sidney's *Defence of poesy* centres on the moving power of literature:

> Truly, I have known men, that even with reading *Amadis de Gaule* (which God knoweth wanteth much of a perfect poesy) have found their hearts moved to the exercise of courtesy, liberality, and especially courage. Who readeth Aeneas carrying old Anchises

on his back, that wisheth not it were his fortune to
perform so excellent an act?

and Ben Jonson adapts Quintilian's definition of the orator to the poet in *Discoveries*. English poets made high claims for their art as a moral and cultural force: Spenser declared that the aim of *The fairy queen* was 'to fashion a gentleman or noble person in virtuous and gentle discipline,' and Milton thought Spenser 'a better teacher than Scotus or Aquinas.'

To define what the humanists meant by wisdom is a delicate matter. If I may simplify a complex issue, they turned away from the Metaphysical ideal of the Middle Ages, when theology was queen of the sciences and its study was guided by logic, towards an ethical ideal, often with a bias towards the active life (the Neo-Platonism of Ficino and Pico della Mirandola in its advocacy of contemplation looks back to scholasticism; but many humanists did still feel the attraction of the life of contemplation). Such an ideal was in harmony with Cicero's ideas of wisdom. In hundreds of passages of Renaissance literature, we find pictures of wisdom as self-knowledge, self-rule, moderation, superiority to circumstance, constancy, rationality, which are thoroughly classical in spirit. Plutarch and Ben Jonson share a similar belief in reason. The humanist idea of wisdom tended to emphasise the part played by natural reason, with the caveat that such reason is implanted in us by God. 'I call nature an aptness to be taught and a readiness that is grafted within us to honesty,' wrote Erasmus, whose belief in the co-operation of nature and grace (here, he was in harmony with Aquinas) and in the natural tendency of men to the good ('Now doth every man's mind incline unto that which is wholesome and expedient for his nature') was one of the issues in which he clashed with Luther, who viewed the will as corrupt and who accused Erasmus of paganism. Erasmus thought that the virtuous pagans might have been saved because of their behaviour (here, he was in harmony with Dante); Luther thought they were damned because they had no faith in Christ. Luther was, like St. Augustine, ambivalent in his attitude to pagan wisdom; both felt that it was in opposition to Christian wisdom and that it might be used but not enjoyed. Erasmus believed rather that it was in a continuum with the Christian revelation and that it must be used. As far as English literature is concerned, it was Erasmus' view which was on the whole victorious (though there were sometimes tensions, as in the famous passage in *Paradise lost*, where Milton turns the pagan gods into devils, and there were attacks on pagan literature by both Catholics and Puritans throughout the Renaissance).

Humanists have sometimes been accused of anti-intellectualism, because of their attacks on the scholastic metaphysicians. There is certainly a trace of this in Petrarch's essay *On his own ignorance and that of many others*, with its attack on Aristotle and the atheism of some of his modern followers, and the famous declaration that it is better to will the good than know the truth. However, in rejecting abstract philosophical speculation and also sometimes scientific enquiry, humanists did not come down on the side of simple innocence. Philosophy was replaced by scholarship and erudition. Elsewhere, Petrarch writes, 'Ignorance, however devout, is by no means to be put on a plane with the enlightened devoutness of one familiar with literature.' Erasmus speaks of 'good letters, without which what is human life?' and his *Antibarbarians* is a defence

of learning against those who felt that it had no part in the Christian life; in it, he defines wisdom as 'virtus cum eruditione liberali,' virtue joined to liberal learning. Many passages from Erasmus praising cultivation of mind and making the Socratic connection between knowledge and virtue could be collected. *'What is most pernicious to man? Stupidity'*, he writes in *On giving children and early and a liberal education*, and in *The education of a Christian prince* he stresses the need of the ruler for knowledge:

> How can anyone who does not know what is best direct it? Or even worse, if he considers the wickedest things the most desirable, being utterly misled by his ignorance or personal feelings? . . . There is only one means of deliberating on a question, and that is wisdom. If the prince lacks that, he can no more be of material assistance to the state than an eye can see when sight is destroyed.

Similar ideas are expressed by English writers. 'Oh no, he cannot be good that knows not why he is good,' says the wise councillor, Philanax, in the *Arcadia*, whose heroine, Pamela, is described as 'she in whose mind virtue governed with the sceptre of knowledge.' In an aside in *The defence of poesy*, Sidney writes, 'it is manifest that all government of action is to be gotten by knowledge, and knowledge best by gathering many knowledges, which is reading.' In Spenser's poem, *The tears of the Muses*, Urania praises knowledge:

> What difference twixt man and beast is left,
> When th'heavenly light of knowledge is put out,
> And th'ornaments of wisdom are bereft?

'Men have been great, but never good by chance,' wrote Jonson, whose poems are full of praises of action joined to knowledge, the man 'that does both act and know' (Marvell's phrase from the *Horatian ode*), and attacks on the ignorant barbarians who oppose him (see the three odes to himself).

The humanist rejection of abstract reasoning may have influenced some writers in their presentation of ideas. Erasmus thought that truth could not be arrived at step by step, by the logical process; rather he preferred to suggest it obliquely. Hence his fondness for the dialogue form and for the ironies of Lucian; the reader has to make a synthesis which embraces all the complexities which the author has suggested. *The praise of folly* and *Utopia* notoriously elusive and complex works, and such qualities may be found in other Renaissance writers. *Debate and alternative points of view play an important part in* Shakespeare's history plays, and Ben Jonson knew the value of ambiguity, irony and indirection in presenting moral issues, witness *Volpone*.

Source: Joanna Martindale, "Introduction," in *English Humanism: Wyatt to Cowley*, edited by Joanna Martindale, Croom Helm Ltd., 1985, pp. 17-51.

Critical Essay #5

In the following essay excerpt, Martines examines the origins of Italian Humanism and describes its five interrelated disciplines.

The velocity and extent of change in the cities of late medieval Italy had a profound effect on consciousness. Especially susceptible were the dominant political and social groups who made the fundamental decisions. In the course of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, a new awareness gradually dawned upon them, an awareness or redirection most effectively articulated by their literary and educational spokesmen. In one of its manifestations this awareness was humanism. We may therefore look upon humanism as a phase in the history of consciousness□the consciousness of the men who fashioned the destinies of the Italian cities. Seen in this light, the true burden of the historian of humanism is to identify the link between humanism and the values, moral and ideological, of the dominant social groups within the cities. The point of the succeeding pages will be to do this.

Changes of consciousness gave rise to changes in the methods and scope of education. Between about 1250 and 1400, church schools lost their exclusive control over education for the laity. Florence and other cities saw the establishment of private schools run by and for laymen. The schoolmasters were often professional notaries, and their schools were designed to teach the elements of Latin and commercial arithmetic to the sons of tradesmen, urbanized noblemen, and merchants who trafficked on an international scale. Strictly utilitarian in its aims□for Latin was the language of contracts and formal diplomatic dispatches□this development was the first phase in a gradual but basic change in the aims of education.

At the level of university instruction, the late fourteenth century witnessed the beginning of a new current, with the lecturing in Florence of men like Giovanni Malpaghini (1346-1417), who taught rhetoric, poetry, and moral philosophy, and Manuel Chrysoloras (d. 1415), who taught Greek to an audience of adult enthusiasts. In the fifteenth century, the vanguard in course offerings at the universities was held by the humanistic subjects□ rhetoric, poetry, history, and moral philosophy. But the next phase of far-reaching educational change at a more basic level really began around 1400, with the founding of small but select schools run by humanists: that of Roberto de' Rossi (1355?-1417) at Florence, of Gasparino Barzizza (1359?-1431) at Padua, of Guarino Guarini (1374-1460) at Venice, Verona, and Ferrara, and of Vittorino da Feltre (1373-1446) at Mantua. In these schools Christianity was taken so much for granted□indeed, Vittorino had his pupils attend daily Mass□that the major classical writers could occupy the heart of study. Hencefort the *studia humanitatis*□"the humanities" □provided the substance for the most innovative and vigorous wave in primary and secondary education.

Human, humane, the humanities: these words are no more than a remote echo of what the nouns *humanista* and *studia humanitatis* meant in fifteenth- century Italy. We must not confuse vague twentieth-century notions with their more precise Renaissance forebears.

Italian humanism put man where it was both most flattering and most dangerous to be: at the center of active inquiry. The first modern treatise on painting (*Della pittura*, 1435), composed by the humanist Leon Battista Alberti (1404-1472), directs painters to determine the sizes of objects in the picture space by the scale of the human figures there represented. Alberti's statement of this "law" conveyed an attitude of discovery. "Man is the measure." Protagoras had long since asserted the same thing, but after the achievements of Alberti and his circle neither painting nor sculpture was to recover from that perception.

In its most general and genuine sense Italian humanism was education for practical and worthy living; but it was education based on the study of the classical Roman and Greek writers. Florentine, Venetian, and other Italian humanists believed that classical literature held the rich and communicable remains of a momentous civilization, that it expressed a viewpoint centered on the value of man's activities in the world. This recognition was combined, as we shall see, with a keen appreciation of the secularity of time, the historical nature of time. There was no necessary conflict between these attitudes and Christianity, but the fact that the classical world was mainly pre-Christian was not entirely beside the point.

It is astonishing to note how many humanists were either members of the legal profession or career officials in government chancelleries, and just as many were born into professional or intensely political families. Three of the most celebrated Petrarch (1304-1374), Lorenzo Valla (1407-1457), and Angelo Poliziano (1454-1494)were sons of, respectively, a notary, a canon lawyer, and a civil lawyer. Four others of great preeminenceColuccio Salutati (1336-1406), Poggio Bracciolini (1380-1459), Pier Candido Decembrio (1392- 1477), and Giovanni Pontano (1426?-1503)were leading municipal, papal, and royal secretaries. In Venice nearly all of the most able humanists were drawn from the political partriciate.

These facts are mentioned in order to show that the humanist enterprise proceeded under the direction of, and in keeping with the values of, men brought up for practical activity in the urban community, whether in politics, the rough-and-tumble world of municipal administration, the law courts, the business of drawing up contracts (then the stock-in-trade of the notary), or the counting house. Immersed in practical affairs and oriented toward the accomplishment of everyday ends, such men had an urgent sense of time, a recognition of man's inescapable place in the world, and a sense of his achievements and possibilities. Thus the great appeal for themor at least for the learned among themof Aristotle's emphasis on action in his *Ethics*; and the even greater appeal of Cicero, with his emphasis not only on action and knowledge ("the true praise of virtue is in action") but also on eloquence, felicity, and force of verbal expression. Evidently, in the context of the evolved city-state, the orator easily came to represent the ideal fusion of action with wisdom, of will with contemplation.

Appropriately, in the history of modern Europe, the first great private libraries of classical works were built up by men of the sort described above: e.g., Niccolò Niccoli (1364-1437) and Antonio Corbinelli (1377?-1425), the sons of wealthy Florentine wool merchants; Giovanni Corvini (d. 1438?), political secretary to the last Visconti Duke of

Milan; or rich citizens who stood at the forefront of public life, like the Florentines Palla Strozzi (1372-1462) and Cosimo de' Medici (1389-1464). No less than the most celebrated humanists, these men applauded the ardent search for the neglected manuscripts of ancient works, a pursuit first strikingly taken up in the first quarter of the fifteenth century.

Why did the break with medieval habits of thought not come sooner, in the thirteenth century, when Italian cities were at the peak of their economic and political vitality? The answer seems to be that the break was retarded by the very condition of urban experience: in this case the raw atmosphere of new cities populated by rustics, large numbers of illiterate noblemen, and tradesmen struggling to survive or to amass enormous fortunes. Since the traditional forms of orientation and feeling must often have seemed inappropriate, it must be that the experience of the urban populace or whatever was novel in that experience could not easily generate its own finished forms of expression over a short period of time, except perhaps in song. Particularly resistant in this regard was the fund of experience belonging to the new class of merchants and urban administrators, who eventually gave rise to humanism and provided the audience for it. In some respects their experience *had* to conflict with the prevailing modes of apprehension and cognition, which better suited a feudal society and an ecclesiastical intelligentsia. The intellectual tradition, after all, condemned all interest as usury. Temporal lordship was assigned heavenly essences. Government was often seen as punishment for sin. "Getting and spending" were regarded as inferior a priori to the gallant professions of arms, prayer, and contemplation.

Ideas of unity, hierarchy, and order; an overriding emphasis on authority, essences, and metaphysical reality these provided the framework and foci for twelfth-and thirteenth-century thought. In a sense the entire fourteenth century, at all events in the world of the city-state, marks a decisive drift away from the more static and hierarchical assumptions of the late Middle Ages. But even Marsilius of Padua (c. 1275-1342), the most inquiring political thinker of the fourteenth century, was unread by his Italian contemporaries: his basic presuppositions were too much in conflict with established opinion concerning the temporal authority of the church. In the early fifteenth century, one of the most sophisticated conceptions of the unity of Christian society, that elaborated by the French thinker Jean Gerson (1363-1429), was still governed by a strict notion of the interlocking relationship between heavenly and earthly hierarchies. And within this scheme man had a fixed place.

Italian humanism worked a radical break with this tradition of thought. It put man at the center of intellectual and artistic inquiry but gave him no fixed nature, no metaphysical trappings or underpinnings. It focused on his humanity and his potential, and offered temporal glory rather than salvation. It therefore emphasized the study of history, recognizing that man lives in a changing temporal continuum; and it laid great emphasis on the study of moral philosophy (hence, on the dilemma of choice), having stripped man of his fixed nature. Humanism assigned vast importance to rhetoric the art of persuasion and eloquence for the practice of this art (i.e., effective and graceful verbal expression) combined action and wisdom, taught a certain control over the emotions (of others and so of one's own), and underlined man's reliance upon the immediate social

and civil community. Finally, humanism turned philology□the rigorous historical and grammatical study of language and literature□into its primary intellectual tool, thus opening the way to a better understanding of the literature of antiquity.

In short, it was by means of philology that the humanists approached the classical world, maintaining critical detachment from it, and at the same time sharpening their sense of identity and of their own creative role in the hammering out of a new age. Paradoxically, therefore, the intensive study of classical literature was a process of self-realization. The humanists looked to antiquity to affirm the vitality, value, and experience of the present. In this way the old modes of thought were revolutionized: the impact of accumulated experience was finally able to determine the direction of intellectual and artistic development.

The syllabus of humanism had five interrelated disciplines: grammar, rhetoric, poetry, history, and moral philosophy. By cultivating these subjects, the fifteenth-century humanists altered the course of intellectual history.

1. *Grammar* meant, first, the study of Latin and then, ambitiously, Greek. It was a commonplace of Renaissance educational theory that all serious preparation for civil life began with the study of Latin grammar. In its highest form, grammar was indistinguishable from philology, for it entailed not only a mastery of the elements of grammar, of syntax, diction, usage, and orthography, but also a true understanding of their development: that is, a grasp of their precise place in the history of the language. This obviously meant a thorough-going familiarity with the history of literature. In this sense grammar was both a tool and a way of life; it opened all the doors of the intellect, but its mastery was the fruit of an austere schooling.

Lorenzo Valla was the outstanding philologist and in some ways the most brilliant humanist of the fifteenth century. Born in Rome in 1407, the son of a North Italian papal lawyer, Valla published his first work, *A Comparison of Cicero and Quintilian* (now lost), at twenty. He taught rhetoric at the University of Pavia in the early 1430s, thereafter drifting to Milan, Florence, and Genoa. In 1435 he settled in Naples, where he became secretary to King Alfonso of Aragon and Naples. In the 1430s and 1440s he brought out a variety of remarkably provocative works□philological, philosophical, and historical. Intellectually he was intensely combative: swift, arrogant, and courageous. Transferring himself to Rome in 1448, he served in a secretarial capacity under Popes Nicholas V and Calixtus III, and died there in 1457. His major philological work, *On the Graces of the Latin Language* (1435-1444) is a combined critical and historical grammar, as well as a handbook of rhetoric and style. It is marked by an astonishingly able grasp of the history of the Latin language. With Valla the possibilities of historical criticism receive a virtuoso demonstration, and in his perspicacity we have one of the first unmistakable examples of the modern historical sense. Nor did he hesitate to address his philology to Holy Scripture and church documents, as in his *Notes on the New Testament* (1449) and his learned harangue on *The Falsity of the Alleged Donation of Constantine* (1440).

2. *Rhetoric* or eloquence□the art of graceful but forceful persuasion□could obviously not be learned until the rules of grammar had been mastered. Cicero and Quintilian, the

classical Roman rhetoricians, were taken to be the models in this realm, the princes of oratory. The choice of the word *oratory* is deliberate: it emphasizes that aspect of rhetoric pertaining to action, to a job of doing. For in their writings the humanists turned and returned to the practical and useful nature of eloquence, most especially in connection with its utility for civil or community service. In his humanistic treatise *Concerning Excellent Traits* (ca. 1402), addressed to a son of the lord of Padua, Pier Paolo Vergerio (1370-1444) observes that "speaking and writing elegantly affords no little advantage in negotiation, be it in public or private affairs . . . but especially in the administration of the State." And in a short essay on literary education, *De studiis te litteris liber*, (ca. 1425), one of the most distinguished of all humanists, Leonardo Bruni (1372?-1444), holds□almost casually□that knowledge should have an application: "The high standard of education referred to earlier can only be achieved by one who has seen much and read much . . . but to make effective use of what we know we must add the power of expression to our knowledge."

These were views which found a ready audience in the intense social world of the city-state, particularly among the more alert and ambitious members of the governing classes.

3. *Poetry* helped to complete the individual; it enlarged his vision and added to his humanity. From it he could draw a fund of examples and enhance the force and variety of his own speech. The preferred poets were Virgil and Homer, then Seneca, Ovid, and Horace; but the vernacular poets, Dante and Petrarch, were by no means neglected. Carlo Marsuppini (1398-1453), first secretary of the Florentine republic from 1444 to 1453, translated the first book of the *Iliad* into Latin verse. He was followed in this effort by a major poet who was also the leading philologist of the second half of the century, Angelo Poliziano (1454-1494). At sixteen, Poliziano had translated books II-V of the *Iliad* into Latin verse, an accomplishment which brought him into Lorenzo de' Medici's entourage.

The most talented of all humanist poets, Francesco Petrarch (1304-1374), is sometimes called "the father of humanism" (as if such a designation made any historical sense). The son of a Florentine notary who suffered political disgrace and exile, Petrarch spent his life abroad, studied law for a time but soon rejected it for a life of writing and reflection. After taking minor religious vows, which gave him financial independence, he traveled widely and found patronage at Avignon, Rome, Milan, Padua, Venice, and elsewhere. Of particular interest for the fortunes of humanism□ apart from his *De viris illustribus* (lives of famous Romans) and his stinging self-analysis in the *Secretum* □are Petrarch's Latin letters, known as the *Familiares*, which exhibit his boundless admiration for the world of antiquity, a longing to read Greek, a love of Cicero, familiarity with the history of ancient Rome, and an abandoned attachment to the elegance of classical Latin literature.

4. *History* was in some respects the unifying discipline of humanism. An affirmative view of the ancient world was, primarily, what the humanists had in common. When they united this view of the past with their study of the literature antiquity, they invented philology and brought historical scholarship into being. Yet we must not think that their

attitude toward history presupposed an abstract approach. They looked at the past in terms of specific men and events, and their impulse to study history had a limited ground: here

Source: Lauro Martines, "The Italian Renaissance," in *The Meaning of Renaissance and Reformation*, edited by Richard L. DeMolen, Houghton Mifflin, 1974, pp. 27-70.

Topics for Further Study

In many ways, the economic and social setting of fourteenth-century Florence, Italy, made it the perfect place for the birth of Humanism. Florence was a center of trade, and powerful families trained their sons to become ethical, successful merchants. What is the relationship between the society in Florence and the development of a new way of thinking about humanity and its role in the world?

The early humanists were devout Christians, yet the humanist movement has evolved to one that is frankly opposed to religious ideology, and many of today's humanists are active atheists. Research the ideas of the Renaissance humanists as compared to those of modern Humanism. How do you account for this substantial change in philosophy?

All religions play a role in reinforcing moral behavior and attempt to explain the purpose of human life. The major religions□Christianity, Judaism, Buddhism, Hinduism, and Islam□ share these goals. Study one or more of the major religions and compare the methods of approaching these goals with the methods proposed by humanists. What underlying principles are shared by all of these belief systems?

The rise of Humanism accompanied exciting changes in art, such as the invention of perspective and the development of portraiture. In addition, artists studied human physiognomy in order to portray human figures more realistically. Did these artists subscribe to humanist thinking? How did humanist ideas find expression in art? What role did patronage play in the development of the new artistic style of the Renaissance or the new humanist way of thinking?

Compare and Contrast

1100-1400: The most devout Christians, the monks and nuns, lead lives of quiet piety, cloistered away from the cares of the world.

1450-1600: Pious men begin to realize that piety can be practiced here on earth, so many humanist scholars, who are at the same time highly religious, invest themselves in making society a better place to be.

Today: Religious men and women devote themselves to the betterment of the underprivileged here on earth as do the humanists.

1100-1400: In the west, Christianity is a common aspect of life. People of other religions are sometimes treated as strangers, infidels, or unbelievers and are persecuted.

1450-1600: As Christianity splits into Catholicism and Protestantism, religious persecution continues, now between the two branches. Persecution of Jews, Muslims, and people who practice neither Catholicism nor Protestantism is also rampant.

Today: Religious tolerance is a hallmark of a liberal society. There are still places in the world that persecute people of religions other than their own, and their intolerance has become one of the key challenges of the twenty-first century.

1100-1400: Both scholars and clergy accept Christian teachings as presented by the Catholic Church.

1450-1600: Humanist scholars and clergy begin to feel skepticism about some Catholic teachings and therefore develop the ideology that people can seek revelation on their own. Their ideas are considered heretical. **Today:** Secular humanist scholars flatly deny any credence to religious belief. Secular Humanism itself serves as a kind of religious belief in human dignity.

What Do I Read Next?

Renaissance art shows the ideals of the period. One important painting by Raphael (Raffaello Sanzio, 1483-1520), "The School of Athens" painted in 1510-1511, captures the spirit of Humanism, with its portrayal of humans learning from other humans. Aristotle, Socrates, Plato, and other classical scholars also appear in the painting.

The idea of artistic perspective was growing during the time of the Renaissance humanists, too. Essentially a product of mathematical calculations to portray the illusion of depth on a flat, painted surface, perspective allowed painters and sculptors to integrate their subjects into the context or background of the painting more realistically. Painters of the Renaissance were almost obsessed with perspective. Notable pieces that show perspective are "The Holy Trinity" by Masaccio (Tommaso di Giovanni di Simone Guidi, 1401-1428) and "Dead Christ" by Andrea Mantegna (1431-1506). Portraits were another "invention" of the Renaissance, stemming from the humanist belief in the essential dignity of man.

Of the many classical writers who laid the groundwork for Humanism, several are still pertinent today and also highly readable. Plato's *Republic*, which describes the ideal state, inspired many humanist thinkers. The *Republic* explores the facets of the ideal state through a dialogue conducted by Socrates.

Besides researching classical writers and writing to them in fictional letters, Petrarch wrote lovely sonnets, consisting of fourteen lines, the first eight of which state a problem that the final six lines resolve. The Italian, or Petrarchan, sonnet rhymes a-b-b-a, a-b-b-a in the first portion. Most of his sonnets are written to "Laura," a real or fictional woman who did not return Petrarch's love.

Robert Bolt's play *A Man for All Seasons* is thoroughly researched and captures the essence of early humanist Sir Thomas More as he struggles with his own conscience in opposing the king's subjection of the Catholic Church in England.

For twentieth-century portrayals of humanist ideology, any episode of humanist Gene Roddenberry's television series *Star Trek* will provide two lessons based on humanist values: one personal and one societal.

African American Humanism: An Anthology (1991), edited by Norm R. Allen, presents evidence that African-American writers such as Richard Wright and Zora Neale Hurston carry on the tradition of humanist ideals in their work. As an alternative, read Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (1937) about a young girl's longing for independence, or Wright's *Native Son* (1940), or *Black Boy* (1945). Richard A. Wright proposes in his work *African Philosophy* (1979) that African Humanism stems from Greek sources.

Further Study

Ackroyd, Peter, *The Life of Thomas More*, Random House, 1999.

Ackroyd provides a balanced biography of Sir Thomas More that successfully places the man in his historical context and reveals the source of his moral courage as well as his basic humanity.

Davies, Tony, *Humanism*, Routledge, 1997.

This work is an overview of the historical context of Humanism from the Renaissance to modern times.

Hale, John, *The Civilization of Europe in the Renaissance*, Simon & Schuster, 1993.

Hale offers an historical account of the transformation of Europe that occurred between 1450 and 1620 in art, literature, politics, and culture.

Knight, Margaret, *Humanist Anthology from Confucius to Attenborough*, Prometheus Books, 1995.

Knight's text is a compilation of short pieces, sometimes excerpted from larger works, by well-known humanists.

Kraye, Jill, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Renaissance Humanism*, Cambridge University Press, 1996.

Kraye's book is a compilation of scholarly articles on aspects of Humanism, from rhetoric and philology to the humanist's relationship to art and science.

Lamont, Corliss, *The Philosophy of Humanism*, 7th ed., Continuum Publishing Company, 1990.

This work is a defense of modern Humanism as a philosophy with an account of its historical traditions and its ethical beliefs.

Margolin, Jean-Claude, *Humanism in Europe at the Time of the Renaissance*, translated by John L. Farthing, Labyrinth Press, 1981.

Margolin compiles a survey of humanist literature, its proponents, and its connection to educational systems in Europe.

Nauert, Charles, *Humanism and the Culture of Renaissance Europe*, Cambridge University Press, 1995.

This offering is a contextual history of Humanism
from its beginnings through the end of the Renaissance.

Ross, James Bruce, and Mary Martin McLaughlin, *The Portable Renaissance Reader*, The Viking Portable Library, 1977.

This comprehensive anthology contains literature
from the Renaissance, including samples from most
of the key humanist thinkers.

Tracy, James D., *Erasmus of the Low Countries*, University of California Press, 1996.

Tracy's biography of Erasmus interprets his writings
in light of his education, travels, and allies.

Trinkaus, Charles, *The Poet as Philosopher: Petrarch and the Formation of Renaissance Consciousness*, Yale University Press, 1979.

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Introduction

Purpose of the Book

The purpose of Literary Movements for Students (LMfS) is to provide readers with a guide to understanding, enjoying, and studying novels by giving them easy access to information about the work. Part of Gale's□For Students□ Literature line, LMfS is specifically designed to meet the curricular needs of high school and undergraduate college students and their teachers, as well as the interests of general readers and researchers considering specific novels. While each volume contains entries on

□classic□ novels frequently studied in classrooms, there are also entries containing hard-to-find information on contemporary novels, including works by multicultural, international, and women novelists.

The information covered in each entry includes an introduction to the novel and the novel's author; a plot summary, to help readers unravel and understand the events in a novel; descriptions of important characters, including explanation of a given character's role in the novel as well as discussion about that character's relationship to other characters in the novel; analysis of important themes in the novel; and an explanation of important literary techniques and movements as they are demonstrated in the novel.

In addition to this material, which helps the readers analyze the novel itself, students are also provided with important information on the literary and historical background informing each work. This includes a historical context essay, a box comparing the time or place the novel was written to modern Western culture, a critical overview essay, and excerpts from critical essays on the novel. A unique feature of LMfS is a specially commissioned critical essay on each novel, targeted toward the student reader.

To further aid the student in studying and enjoying each novel, information on media adaptations is provided, as well as reading suggestions for works of fiction and nonfiction on similar themes and topics. Classroom aids include ideas for research papers and lists of critical sources that provide additional material on the novel.

Selection Criteria

The titles for each volume of LMfS were selected by surveying numerous sources on teaching literature and analyzing course curricula for various school districts. Some of the sources surveyed included: literature anthologies; Reading Lists for College-Bound Students: The Books Most Recommended by America's Top Colleges; textbooks on teaching the novel; a College Board survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; a National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; the NCTE's Teaching Literature in High School: The Novel;and the Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA) list of best books for young adults of the past twenty-five years. Input was also solicited from our advisory board, as well as educators from various areas. From these discussions, it was determined that each volume should have a mix of □classic□ novels (those works commonly taught in literature classes) and contemporary novels for which information is often hard to find. Because of the interest in expanding the canon of literature, an emphasis was also placed on including works by international, multicultural, and women authors. Our advisory board members□educational professionals□ helped pare down the list for each volume. If a work was not selected for the present volume, it was often noted as a possibility for a future volume. As always, the editor welcomes suggestions for titles to be included in future volumes.

How Each Entry Is Organized

Each entry, or chapter, in LMfS focuses on one novel. Each entry heading lists the full name of the novel, the author's name, and the date of the novel's publication. The following elements are contained in each entry:

- Introduction: a brief overview of the novel which provides information about its first appearance, its literary standing, any controversies surrounding the work, and major conflicts or themes within the work.
- Author Biography: this section includes basic facts about the author's life, and focuses on events and times in the author's life that inspired the novel in question.
- Plot Summary: a factual description of the major events in the novel. Lengthy summaries are broken down with subheads.
- Characters: an alphabetical listing of major characters in the novel. Each character name is followed by a brief to an extensive description of the character's role in the novel, as well as discussion of the character's actions, relationships, and possible motivation. Characters are listed alphabetically by last name. If a character is unnamed□for instance, the narrator in Invisible Man-the character is listed as □The Narrator□ and alphabetized as □Narrator.□ If a character's first name is the only one given, the name will appear alphabetically by that name. □ Variant names are also included for each character. Thus, the full name □Jean Louise Finch□ would head the listing for the narrator of To Kill a Mockingbird, but listed in a separate cross-reference would be the nickname □Scout Finch.□
- Themes: a thorough overview of how the major topics, themes, and issues are addressed within the novel. Each theme discussed appears in a separate subhead, and is easily accessed through the boldface entries in the Subject/Theme Index.
- Style: this section addresses important style elements of the novel, such as setting, point of view, and narration; important literary devices used, such as imagery, foreshadowing, symbolism; and, if applicable, genres to which the work might have belonged, such as Gothicism or Romanticism. Literary terms are explained within the entry, but can also be found in the Glossary.
- Historical Context: This section outlines the social, political, and cultural climate in which the author lived and the novel was created. This section may include descriptions of related historical events, pertinent aspects of daily life in the culture, and the artistic and literary sensibilities of the time in which the work was written. If the novel is a historical work, information regarding the time in which the novel is set is also included. Each section is broken down with helpful subheads.
- Critical Overview: this section provides background on the critical reputation of the novel, including bannings or any other public controversies surrounding the work. For older works, this section includes a history of how the novel was first received and how perceptions of it may have changed over the years; for more recent novels, direct quotes from early reviews may also be included.
- Criticism: an essay commissioned by LMfS which specifically deals with the novel and is written specifically for the student audience, as well as excerpts from previously published criticism on the work (if available).

- Sources: an alphabetical list of critical material quoted in the entry, with full bibliographical information.
- Further Reading: an alphabetical list of other critical sources which may prove useful for the student. Includes full bibliographical information and a brief annotation.

In addition, each entry contains the following highlighted sections, set apart from the main text as sidebars:

- Media Adaptations: a list of important film and television adaptations of the novel, including source information. The list also includes stage adaptations, audio recordings, musical adaptations, etc.
- Topics for Further Study: a list of potential study questions or research topics dealing with the novel. This section includes questions related to other disciplines the student may be studying, such as American history, world history, science, math, government, business, geography, economics, psychology, etc.
- Compare and Contrast Box: an □at-a-glance□ comparison of the cultural and historical differences between the author's time and culture and late twentieth century/early twenty-first century Western culture. This box includes pertinent parallels between the major scientific, political, and cultural movements of the time or place the novel was written, the time or place the novel was set (if a historical work), and modern Western culture. Works written after 1990 may not have this box.
- What Do I Read Next?: a list of works that might complement the featured novel or serve as a contrast to it. This includes works by the same author and others, works of fiction and nonfiction, and works from various genres, cultures, and eras.

Other Features

LMfS includes □The Informed Dialogue: Interacting with Literature,□ a foreword by Anne Devereaux Jordan, Senior Editor for Teaching and Learning Literature (TALL), and a founder of the Children's Literature Association. This essay provides an enlightening look at how readers interact with literature and how Literary Movements for Students can help teachers show students how to enrich their own reading experiences.

A Cumulative Author/Title Index lists the authors and titles covered in each volume of the LMfS series.

A Cumulative Nationality/Ethnicity Index breaks down the authors and titles covered in each volume of the LMfS series by nationality and ethnicity.

A Subject/Theme Index, specific to each volume, provides easy reference for users who may be studying a particular subject or theme rather than a single work. Significant subjects from events to broad themes are included, and the entries pointing to the specific theme discussions in each entry are indicated in boldface.

Each entry has several illustrations, including photos of the author, stills from film adaptations (if available), maps, and/or photos of key historical events.

Citing Literary Movements for Students

When writing papers, students who quote directly from any volume of Literary Movements for Students may use the following general forms. These examples are based on MLA style; teachers may request that students adhere to a different style, so the following examples may be adapted as needed. When citing text from LMfS that is not attributed to a particular author (i.e., the Themes, Style, Historical Context sections, etc.), the following format should be used in the bibliography section:

□Night.□ Literary Movements for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 234-35.

When quoting the specially commissioned essay from LMfS (usually the first piece under the □Criticism□ subhead), the following format should be used:

Miller, Tyrus. Critical Essay on □Winesburg, Ohio.□ Literary Movements for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 335-39.

When quoting a journal or newspaper essay that is reprinted in a volume of LMfS, the following form may be used:

Malak, Amin. □Margaret Atwood's □The Handmaid's Tale and the Dystopian Tradition,□ Canadian Literature No. 112 (Spring, 1987), 9-16; excerpted and reprinted in Literary Movements for Students, Vol. 4, ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski (Detroit: Gale, 1998), pp. 133-36.

When quoting material reprinted from a book that appears in a volume of LMfS, the following form may be used:

Adams, Timothy Dow. □Richard Wright: □Wearing the Mask,□ in Telling Lies in Modern American Autobiography (University of North Carolina Press, 1990), 69-83; excerpted and reprinted in Novels for Students, Vol. 1, ed. Diane Telgen (Detroit: Gale, 1997), pp. 59-61.

We Welcome Your Suggestions

The editor of Literary Movements for Students welcomes your comments and ideas. Readers who wish to suggest novels to appear in future volumes, or who have other suggestions, are cordially invited to contact the editor. You may contact the editor via email at: ForStudentsEditors@gale.com. Or write to the editor at:

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