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HUMANISM AND THE EARLY ITALIAN RENAISSANCE

(A second essay on humanism deals with Renaissance humanist history and historical consciousness.)

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Introduction

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In its narrowest sense, humanism was a Renaissance intellectual movement devoted to the study, revival, translation, and after 1460, the printing of classical literature. To make classical literature an essential element in modern culture, early humanism focused much of its energies on changing the curriculum and creating new public schools to educate the sons of well-to-do families. Since humanism redefined what it meant to be an educated person, it ended up with a very broad impact, transforming all European high culture after 1400 including politics, literature, art, music, philosophy, religion, and science. Humanism is thus fundamental to any understanding of fifteenth-century Italian art and all sixteenth and seventeenth-century European art. Despite its orientation toward the classical past, humanism was a forward-looking movement geared not toward scholarship for its own sake but rather the education necessary for citizen-elites to handle the challenges of new urban conditions, experiences, and problems within a larger political framework of centralizing states and international exploration.

With its strong commitment to civic and political engagement, humanism moved beyond traditional medieval oppositions between celestial and terrestrial, mind and body, contemplative and active, sacred and profane. Despite the important exception of court culture, most medieval writing tended to extol the superiority of an inner life, piously retreating from the sinful, outer world. In sharp contrast, humanism located "true" piety and virtue in social and political engagement and tied all inner virtues firmly to outward actions and civic accomplishments. Chief among these were work, family, and politics.¹

¹ If an understanding of humanism is inseparable from the cultural revolution of the Renaissance, it is even more critical to an understanding of Italian Renaissance art. Without an understanding of humanism, one cannot comprehend how church and secular officials used classical mythology and ancient history to represent modern values, how pagan myths of rape and adultery signalled sixteenth-century religious and political virtues, and how the Bacchic revels of drunken satyrs and nymphs represented Christian mysteries in works like Bellini's *Christ the Redeemer*.

Seen in a social-economic context, humanism was the new culture produced by urban elites to cope with modern circumstances, problems, and possibilities keenly experienced in the city. It arose because late medieval monasticism and scholasticism (the theological culture of late medieval universities) was incapable of coping with the new challenges, opportunities, and goals of fifteenth- and sixteenth-century life. The rise, after 1400, of a proto-capitalist market economy featuring long-distance trade, credit finance, larger markets, and international banking, was one such development. Another was the discovery of a world of unexplored territories by Columbus (1492) and his successors and the violent struggle between the major European courts to colonize this new land and monopolize its natural resources. The sixteenth-century struggle to project power globally helped create new imperial states and ongoing wars between the three greatest empires: Spain, France, and after 1590, England. The rise of the imperial nation state also depended on revolutionary changes in military technology and architecture as well as shipbuilding and navigation. Without such advances in technology, the nation state could never have consolidated power internally or projected it successfully abroad.

Late medieval values and debates were increasingly outmoded in this rapidly changing world. It was humanist willingness to face the challenge of living virtuously in the thick of worldly struggles which emerged as the new culture of Renaissance elites, whether courtly, burgher, or ecclesiastical. In the end, humanism was less a fixed set of rules or guidelines than a new commitment to making sense of the changing social and political environment in which modern elites found themselves and to forge new habits, practical knowledge, and technological mastery. As such, humanism was inherently flexible and adaptable. It improvised and evolved to meet new challenges and assumed distinct forms in different groups and regions.

The Three "Worlds" of Humanism: Politics, Nature, Morality

In its broadest dimension, humanism encompassed all forms of knowledge geared toward the terrestrial challenges of modern life. With respect to the public sphere, seen as the loftiest, noblest arena of human achievement, humanism explored the law and justice, political philosophy, war, economics, and history (above all, political history). With its practical, "earthly" focus, humanism also produced an impressive scientific culture in areas such as astronomy, geology, geography, botany, and medicine. Much of this science was tied to

practical political and economic benefits. Astronomy benefited navigation and cartography, botany fueled work in pharmacology and agriculture, geology fed into mining, and metallurgy produced new weapons technology. By invigorating scientific research and publication, Renaissance humanism also contributed to technological advances in engineering, hydrology, shipbuilding, and military technology.

Humanism also produced comprehensive new discussions of the private sphere and moral issues - of marriage, family, and sexuality - and the relation of private life to the public sphere and the well-governed state. In general, humanism saw the family as the cradle of all political and religious virtues and as the earliest "school" for educating and training political elites and all virtuous citizens.

Modern observers easily miss the unity of humanism's three preoccupations: politics, natural science, and morality. Yet all three realms - the state, nature, and human nature - remained interwoven in humanist culture through traditional notions of macrocosm and microcosm, larger and smaller worlds united in a single, harmonious cosmos. In this traditional thinking inherited from classical antiquity and basic to medieval thought, the largest world or cosmos contained within itself a variety of smaller worlds or microcosms. These included the earth, the state, and the human being. All four worlds, cosmos, earth, state and human nature were seen as orderly governments where divine reason ruled over base matter, mind over body, intellect over the "passions" (emotions and desires), educated persons over the uneducated "common man," human beings over animals.

More importantly, humanists reinterpreted all four worlds in accord with humanist values. Thus humanists projected modern urban values and experiences into basic notions of human nature, into biology, into natural science, and into cosmology. In this way, the whole universe confirmed and legitimized what were actually new urban, humanist values. By projecting its values into every sphere, humanism naturalized and universalized itself just as medieval feudalism universalized aristocratic values by projecting them into all important spheres.

The fact that classical writers already interwove scientific discussions of nature, political discussions of the ideal city, and moral discussions of the virtuous, "well-governed" human being made it easier for Renaissance humanists to do the same. While Renaissance humanism

drew on Platonic, Aristotelian, and Epicurean thinking, it singled out Stoicism as the most important school of ancient philosophy. This was especially true for early Italian humanism, from 1350-1470, and for sixteenth and seventeenth-century burgher humanism in Northern Europe.

The Greek and Roman Stoics appealed to Renaissance humanists because they believed in a rational, moderate, tempered, orderly, virtuous, hardworking, profitable "nature" and in its microcosmic equivalent in human nature. If all schools of classical thought believed in a human nature uniquely endowed with a "divine" mind, the Stoics argued mankind was born to contemplate the divine order of the cosmos and to recreate this cosmic order in earthly government and in the well-governed self. The most influential of the Stoics was not the severe Seneca, who counseled an inner virtue detached from social, economic, and political passions, but rather the more moderate, politically engaged Stoicism of Cicero. Cicero's Stoic humanism offered a more appealing model for Renaissance humanists eager to fuse political and moral virtue and to defend the moderate enjoyment of earthly pleasures.

Medieval Contemptus Mundi vs. the Renaissance Humanist Idea of the Dignity of Man

It would be a grotesque simplification to reduce medieval thinking to the monastic virtue of *contemptus mundi* (contempt for the world). Rooted in the early Christian reaction against the worldliness of pagan values, early Christian thinking created the monastic system where organized groups of men and women took oaths of chastity, poverty, and obedience, withdrew from an everyday world deemed sinful and false, and entered an intensely communal life dedicated to prayer and spiritual pursuits. To foster removal from the sinful world, most monasteries were built in remote, largely uninhabited places. Because medieval monasteries grew immensely wealthy through the bequests of rulers, nobles, and merchants, they became the dominant force in medieval Christianity and the most important centers of learning. This intellectual power helped give monastic values its larger influence in medieval thinking as a whole. (Ironically, medieval monasteries preserved most of the classical literature which survives, giving Renaissance humanists all the texts they needed to create a new humanist outlook.)

Although medieval monastic thinking dominated Christian values through the late Middle Ages (12-14th centuries), it was by no means static or monolithic. The rise of the city after 1100 allowed new institutions to emerge such as universities and urban preaching orders (Franciscans and Dominicans) offering a more worldly Christianity geared to ordinary Christians, not monks

and nuns. Late medieval culture also saw an explosion in secular court literature with chivalric romances and the poetry of courtly love. Some writers like Dante (active 1290-1320) created hybrid literatures mingling monastic values with courtly love. In his vernacular epic, *The Divine Comedy*, Dante recounts his spiritual-amorous quest from Hell to Purgatory to Paradise to join his beloved, Beatrice. The traditional monastic idea of the soul's journey away from the sinful world was fused with a more secular tradition of courtly love, albeit of a chaste sort, and presented in beautiful Italian lyrics which ordinary people could understand.

The rise of urban preaching orders and the explosion of courtly romance and love poetry in the later Middle Ages reminds us that there was always more to the Middle Ages than monastic *contemptus mundi*. Nonetheless, Renaissance humanists found it expedient to use monastic thinking and monastic treatises on the misery of human existence as a foil against which new humanist values were sharply defined. Here they took advantage of a monastic literature describing in great length the emptiness, corruption, and misery of all human existence from birth to death, the false sinfulness of all things earthly, and the need to focus on the next world. The most famous of these texts was a book entitled, *On the Misery of Mankind* by a theologian who later became pope.

Starting in the early fifteenth century, Florentine humanists began writing books with titles like *On the Excellency and Dignity of Mankind*. Dismissing monastic *contemptus mundi*, the new humanist literature revived the pagan sense of the divine proportion, rational order, clear purpose, and physical beauty of the whole cosmos from the heavens and the earth to the microcosm, the human being and even the body. While many classical texts were important, the key text was Cicero's *On the Nature of The Gods*. In book two, Cicero developed an exhaustive, sixty-page long description of the sacred order and beauty of the cosmos and of all natural things and beings within it. It begins as follows.

Let us look first at the panorama of our own world which is set in the middle of the universe, a solid globe ... and clothed with flowers and herbs and trees and fruits, whose number is beyond belief and whose variety is without end. Look next at the cool perennial streams, the clear waters of the rivers, their banks all robed in living greens, the depths of the hollow caves, the rugged cliffs, the heights of the overhanging mountains, the vastness of the open plains. ... Think of all the various kinds of animals, both tame and wild! Think of the flight and song of birds! Think of the grazing flocks and herds and the woodlands full of life!

Then think of the human race, who have been appointed, as it were, to be the gardeners of the earth, who will not permit it to become a savage haunt of monstrous beasts or a wilderness of thorny scrub. Under their hands, the lands, the islands and the shores shine out, decked with their buildings and their cities.

If we could see all this panorama in a single glance with our eyes, as we can in thought, I believe that nobody, seeing thus the whole wide world, could doubt the handiwork of God."

Such ancient texts were collected and copied in fifteenth century Italy and inspired Florentine humanists in particular to develop a new, physical interpretation of the old Christian idea from Genesis 1:26 of mankind "made in God's image". Until late medieval court writing, this idea was almost always understood metaphorically. God's image was present in the human soul or in mind, not in any bodily or visible form. ⁱ By the fifteenth century, humanists moved beyond monastic hostility to the body by redefining the natural and bodily world as a visible theater of God's mind. Thus the Florentine civic or burgher humanist, Lorenzo Valla, wrote,

"what nature has made and formed cannot be anything but holy and laudable ... Nothing can be found which is not ... completed, ordered, embellished with the greatest rationality, or beauty, or utility. The structure alone of our own body can be evidence of these qualities". ⁱⁱ

Such ideas also circulated in court humanism, most notably Manetti's treatise, *On the Dignity of Man* (1452). Like ancient writers, Manetti grounded the beauty and utility of the human body in a larger natural sphere, comparing it to grasses, trees and their fruits such as flowers, leaves, fruit, oil, wine and balsam. Reversing medieval monastic attacks on the sinful bodily realm, Manetti even ennobled the lowest "fruits" of the human body - saliva, urine, and excrement - as medically useful and wondrous.

So too, Manetti's reversed the conventional Biblical-medieval idea that life's brevity showed the emptiness of all worldly accomplishments and pleasures. For Manetti, the shortness of life had developed historically over the centuries. God made human life long in the days of the Bible to allow humanity to invent and develop the complicated arts and sciences of high civilization. As human existence grew more and more civilized, God gradually shortened the average life since one could now rise much more quickly to the highest levels of virtue and knowledge.

Manetti even reinterpreted bodily labor in line with a humanist work ethic. Rather than a divine punishment for sin, work became a productive activity inseparable from notable accomplishments and from an Aristotelian idea of pleasure as something fundamental to human existence. In this way, the medieval burden of work - imposed as divine punishment on Adam and Eve - became a humanist virtue infused with a measure of bodily delight.

The Dignity of Man and the New Inner Nobility of Mind

If the new humanist idea of the "dignity of man" spotlights the beginning of a sharp turn away from medieval monastic thinking, it also redefined medieval ideas of nobility from matters of birth to questions of education, inner character, and outer action. Nobility was now said to be an inner quality of mind or soul available to all those who were educated, and whose noble (or divine) reason freed them from the "slavery" of bestial passions and appetites. True nobility was also connected to outward action tied to everyday life. Needless to say, the burgher class

of wealthy, educated, non-noble city-dwellers (bankers, merchants, lawyers, doctors, teachers, etc.) strongly encouraged such humanist thinking because it allowed them to claim a new nobility. Indeed, they often claimed what burgher humanists called a true or natural nobility in contrast to the “false” or “artificial” nobility of blood. At the same time, the educated nobility also jumped on the new humanist bandwagon of “human dignity” and “inner nobility” as just one more way to distinguish themselves from the great mass of uneducated people below them on the social ladder.

The Humanist Celebration of the Active Life

If the new practical curriculum of humanism gave new value to empirical experiences and metaphors, it was inseparable from a new sense of virtue as the active life tied to concrete deeds, public service, and political ambitions. It was also inseparable from a strong work ethic and from the praise of a wide range of "profitable" or productive activities. Defined in various ways, this new, active life with its virtuous "work" included political engagement such as princely government, courtly service, exploration and colonization, institutional service, local politics, and burgher citizenship. It also encompassed private life such as conjugal and parenting obligations, child-raising and education, and household management. And it overlapped public and private life, making distinctions between the two while fusing them into a larger system. Uniting all of this was a search for virtue understood as an inner state tied to concrete outer actions, deeds, ambitions, and virtues.

Humanist and the New Ethical Piety or "Living Godliness"

Given humanism's interest in the virtuous life of action, some traditional monastic and ecclesiastical thinkers perceived humanism as a "secular" movement. To counter such criticism, many Renaissance humanists claimed to offer a more authentic Christianity grounded not in

medieval monastic asceticism or in the sacramental spectacle of late medieval church ritual but rather in the "living godliness" of a life well lived within city or court.

Thus humanists redefined spirituality in new ethical terms of the virtuous, active life. For humanists, a "true," inward piety expressed itself not in monastic withdrawal from the "sinful" world or in the devotion to church rituals and to ecclesiastical, sacramental, or mystical notions of community. For most humanists, true piety appeared in an outward, everyday, godly life of civic virtue, family commitments, diligent and profitable work, and civic or courtly community.

Many humanists even attacked traditional medieval notions of piety. Monastic asceticism (poverty, chastity, obedience) was rejected as a "false" godliness and even a hypocritical facade concealing an underling greed, lust, and ambition. And ecclesiastical or church piety was criticized as an overly formalistic or superstitious theater of rituals and esoteric, "useless" dogmas. Small wonder many humanists attracted fierce attacks from traditional monastic institutions and writers whose way of life, cultural and political power, and dominance within universities was severely threatened.

While these attacks made life difficult for many humanists, the hiring of so many humanists as mid-level church officials - writers, lawyers, diplomats, and personal secretaries - by popes, bishops, and cardinals, and the election of three Renaissance popes who were themselves well-known humanists, changed the balance of power for humanists within church culture. While skirmishes continued throughout the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, humanism was fairly well established within Catholic church culture by the early sixteenth century as seen in the Vatican art of Raphael, Michelangelo and others.

Humanism and the New Value of History as Active Life

Out of the new praise for the "active life" came a new humanist concern with history and historical writing. Through history and the patronage of enduring literary and artistic

monuments, humanist culture defined a new, secular immortality of "fame" which reversed medieval notions of "empty" human accomplishments withering in the face of an all triumphant death. Henceforth, European elites, writers and even artists lived, in part, for the future, struggling to leave an enduring mark on human memory through their own accomplishments and patronage. By the late fifteenth century, artists began displaying a new historical consciousness, pride, and ambition, as seen in the growing tendency to sign and date works of art. For a fuller discussion of this critical aspect of humanism, see the separate folder, "Humanist History".

The Humanist Life of the Mind and the Rule of Rhetoric

Despite its focus on the active life and on practical concerns, humanism also extolled the life of the mind. It was, after all, an intellectual movement which spread primarily through intellectual institutions and media. What distinguished the new humanist life of the mind from its earlier medieval counterpart was its practical or terrestrial orientation. Humanist intellectual endeavor was firmly tied to the active life and focused on political and moral philosophy, natural science, medicine, geography and travel, educational reform, and rhetoric. The new humanist education prepared upper class men to take their place among ruling elites in local government - republican, monarchical, or mixed (oligarchic).

The new interest given to rhetoric in Renaissance education emerged from the larger humanist goal of educating citizens, or rather citizen-leaders, capable of participating intelligently and persuasively in public discourse and decision-making. Of course, this humanist rhetorical education was largely limited to men since women were generally excluded from public discourse and governance except within female institutions such as convents or in courts where women ruled.

By looking briefly at the new centrality of rhetoric (public speaking) to humanist education, we can sharpen our understanding of humanism's new commitment to the active life and the way

it overcame a medieval tendency to oppose action and contemplation, body and mind, outer and inner, and elevate the latter. Rhetoric was important for Renaissance humanists for two reasons. First, classical writers on rhetoric like Aristotle, Cicero and Quintilian already defined eloquent speech as the most important tool for participating in government. Speech was the outer expression of divine mind and the crucial agency of all higher urban existence. All three classical writers also saw education as universal knowledge aimed at political engagement. Rhetorical education was thus another label for the new practical, civic-minded education of Renaissance humanism.

If a "rhetorical education" would create ruling elites with the wide knowledge and a powerful eloquence necessary to participate in public life, it also hoped to create rulers capable of governing through persuasion and reason rather than brute force. Thus, the new rhetorical education envisioned political consensus and harmony achieved through the mind. The power of speech would allow the "divine" minds educated elites and rulers to govern the body politic peacefully, wisely, and virtuously.

Printing and the Spread of Humanism

The new technology of the printed book and the printed image also transformed humanist values and "high culture" into a more widely marketed, mass-produced "commodity" available to broader audiences and consumers of luxury goods (though still within the limited social strata of urban elites). Here, humanism spread primarily through a new, more popular, vernacular mode with classical texts and their modern humanist equivalent translated or published in Italian, French, and the other vernaculars. Vernacular humanism tended to be still more "practical" in its concerns and reached a much larger audience than the more intellectually demanding humanism published in Latin and Greek. By the mid-seventeenth century, vernacular humanism had largely triumphed in Europe and most important writers eschewed classical languages for the vernacular.

Humanism as a New Patriarchy

Renaissance humanist writings on women worked carefully to prevent women from participating in the new world of the active life at its most heroic and powerful, the public sphere of government and the professional occupations (law, medicine, teaching, etc.). By defining the public sphere as an exclusively male domain and by confining virtuous women of all ages (daughters, wives, mothers, and widows) to the private sphere, Renaissance humanism confined upper class women to a new patriarchal family loosely grounded on the "traditional family values" of ancient republican Rome. Although rudimentary education was available to most upper-class women at home, higher education was institutionally off-limits to women. Nonetheless, some noblewomen and the daughters of enlightened humanists such as Thomas More were educated to a much higher level, as were some women in convents.

Despite obstacles to higher education, thousands of upper-class women participated in the world of high culture as patrons, artists, viewers, and writers. The invention of printing and the growing flood of vernacular literature after 1500 allowed women (and ordinary men) new opportunities to publish their own works. In general, printing loosened what had been an institutionalized, patriarchal grip on education, writing, and high culture. On the other hand, women writers (and artists) faced an uphill battle against hostile male colleagues, traditional theology, mainstream social thinking, and patriarchy entrenched in all manner of institutions. Every woman writer struggled in a male-dominated intellectual world intensely hostile to high-level female intellect and professional ambition. The exclusion of women from higher education lasted in the West until the late 1940s and continued in the world of the professions (law, medicine, science, business) until the later 1970s.

The patriarchy redefined by Renaissance humanists is particularly clear in the way some humanists gendered the new idea of the dignity of man, made in God's image. The pioneering humanist, Boccaccio,

Your studies at least should have shown you . . . that you are a man made in the image and semblance of God, a perfect creature, born to govern and not to be governed. He who had created man a little beforehand showed this clearly in our first father [Adam]

by placing all the other creatures before him and having him name them, and subjecting them to his dominion and by doing the same thing later with the one and only woman in the world, whose gluttony, disobedience, and persuasions were the cause and origin of all our miseries. Antiquity excellently preserved this order; and the present world still preserves it in the papacies, empires, kingdoms, principalities, provinces, peoples, and generally in all magistratures and priesthoods and other high positions, divine as well as human, by preferring and entrusting the government of all men and women to men only, and not to women. Anyone with judgment can see quite easily how valid and cogent an argument this is to show how greatly the nobility of man exceeds that of woman and of all other creatures. ⁱⁱⁱ

Before blaming Renaissance humanism for creating a new golden cage for women, one should remember that patriarchal structures had been deeply entrenched in European social, political, and cultural life for thousands of years. It was inconceivable that a Renaissance cultural revolution like humanism would have significantly altered the status for women, especially when humanism was largely defined by men.

It is also true that Renaissance humanism made some improvements in the lives of women, even if one kind of prison was exchanged for another, more gilded cage. The humanist celebration of conjugal sexuality over the medieval monastic virtue of chastity, helped move European religious morality away from a contempt for the body and especially the female body. The attack on monastic chastity was institutionalized in the Protestant Reformation (1517-) with the dissolution of monasteries and convents and the new acceptance of priestly marriage. Protestant Europe also relaxed laws against divorce. So too, the new humanist focus on education gave women a new educational role in the home and new reasons to pursue their own education. The spread of print technology and vernacular writing also made it easier for all upper class women (and men) to educate themselves privately and stay abreast of new knowledge.

The Three Major Forms of Humanism in Early Modern Europe

Rather than a single, static, bounded system of values and beliefs, humanism was a relatively unbounded, evolving, shifting phenomenon. Its character depended on the particularities of time, place and social group. Indeed, a multitude of different humanisms existed in Renaissance Europe which can be roughly divided into three major forms. Though these groups overlapped and exchanged elements with each other, they originated in different social groups and can be seen as distinct group cultures. The first two forms of humanism - court and burgher humanism - were dominant in the fifteenth century in Italy and spread North after 1490. The third form of humanism - church humanism - emerged only in the 1480s in Italy and spread out from the international Catholic church culture of papal Rome.

Burgher or civic humanism peaked in the republican city-states of fifteenth-century Italy before losing out to the court culture, court humanism, and absolutist politics which swept Italy after 1500. In the sixteenth century, burgher humanism was important in the commercial centers of Germany, France, and the Southern Netherlands. It reached its most striking expression in the Northern Netherlands which emerged after 1609 as a wealthy, independent, mercantile republic. Church humanism expanded in Catholic Italy after 1480 but never spread into many parts of Northern Europe with the rise of the Reformation after 1517. And court humanism was strong where courtly elites dominated.

Try to see humanism as a selective revival and transformation of classical antiquity to serve a variety of different elite group values and cultures emerging in fifteenth, sixteenth, and seventeenth century Europe. Each of the three principal elites - burghers, nobles, and church officials - ended up fashioning its own forms of humanism to define distinct group values, traditions, goals, and social identities.² At the same time, there was also considerable overlap between these group values as well as a continuous, ongoing process of group interaction, cultural exchange and mutual transformation. Thus humanism's three major forms were dynamic and shifted over time and space in response to a variety of other changes.

234567891011 *Horace, Centennial Hymn*

I. Court Humanism / Imperial Humanism

Court humanism was produced for rulers, high nobles, and, after 1500, church officials, especially in Rome. Not surprisingly, court humanism looked back to an imperial classical antiquity where aristocratic hierarchies were most pronounced. Most important of all was the Roman imperial period which began with Augustus (d. 14 A.D.) and eventually turned Christian with the late Roman emperor, Constantine (d. 337 A.D.). Court humanism also looked back to the earlier Greek imperial culture seen under the world-conqueror, Alexander the Great (d. 323 BC), and to the aristocratic warrior-hero ethos of the earliest Greeks described in Homer's epics (ca. 8th century. B.C.).

Heroes, Empires, and World Histories in Court Humanism

Equally appealing to Renaissance court humanists was the way these classical heroes were always attached to great families, cities, and empires ruled by god-like monarchs. Here court humanism found ample material to manufacture aristocratic "world histories" and heroic genealogies in which time unfolded as a divine or cosmic scheme, a grand sequence of world heroes, rulers, and mighty kingdoms stretching from the classical gods (especially Jupiter, Mars, Hercules, Apollo, Minerva, Venus, and Bacchus) and running through classical heroes such as Aeneas and the Trojans or Jason and the Argonauts.

This heroic mythological history continued in later classical rulers such as Alexander the Great and the most exemplary Roman emperors such as Augustus, Trajan, Hadrian, and Constantine, all of them extolled as gods in their own lifetimes. Renaissance court humanists continued this heroic genealogy into medieval Christian rulers such as Charlemagne before ending their histories in the "unsurpassed" figure of their modern patron. Every important ruler in fifteenth, sixteenth, and seventeenth century Europe was flattered with such grand historical narratives. In his chivalrous romance, *Orlando Furioso* (1517), The early sixteenth-century court poet, Ariosto, traced the d'Este family, rulers of Ferrara, back to his fictitious medieval hero, Ruggiero and through him to the Trojan prince, Hector, and still earlier to Alexander the Great and Zeus (who fathered Alexander by rape). By the mid sixteenth century, most European rulers commissioned a wide array of pictorial representations in sculpture, frescoes, oil

painting, tapestry, stained glass, and historically resonant architecture, to proclaim their illustrious ancestry and divinely ordained power. With the invention of printing and printed books in the 1460s, court culture could even project such glorious historical representations to the four corners of the earth.

Golden Age and Court Humanism

A reoccurring leitmotif in this cosmic or world history was modern ruler's glorious restoration of a lost Golden Age found in antiquity or early human history, a time of perfect government, order, justice, and harmony. Since most humanists were eager to find lucrative court patronage, they usually imagined the Golden Age as a time when kings were philosophers and as such extensive patrons of an exemplary, "world famous" high culture in letters, music, arts, and architecture.

By defining the Golden Age in humanist terms as a cultural golden age, Renaissance court humanists hoped to transform their local rulers into generous patrons of humanist culture. Put another way, the nostalgic humanist invention of cultural golden ages set in classical antiquity and credited to philosophically enlightened rulers allowed Renaissance humanists to project their own yearnings, wishes, and fantasies into an historical past where such dreams could appear real if forever lost.

Thus Renaissance humanism invented two historical myths which are still with us today: that of classical antiquity as Golden Age of philosophy, culture, arts, and government, and that of the intervening centuries as a "middle" or medieval period, a "dark" ages between the two ages of light. While many civic and burgher humanists bought into this historical myth of a once perfect, Golden Age of truth, beauty and wisdom in Greco-Roman antiquity, courts and court humanists were especially attracted to the myth of the Golden Age.

As a device within cosmic history, Golden Age rhetoric worked to relate five different ages or epochs. In one version, the Golden Age was located in the earliest cosmic history, before the advent of human beings, when the gods lived blissfully in nature. A second version moved the Golden Age up to the earliest human history and developed two strikingly different worlds. In one, nature was a lush, Paradisiacal, garden-like nature marked by plenty, ease, leisure, and pleasure. As seen in Ovid, Tibullus, and Claudian, this Golden Age was idyllic, courtly, and "feminine," and closely tied to pastoral or garden culture.³ In the other, found in Hesiod and Seneca, the Golden Age of early human history appeared as a "Stoic" rugged wilderness demanding hard work and promoting "manly" virtues of austerity, fortitude, and courage.⁴

In either case, the Golden Age of early human history was a time of original perfection when heroes and gods ruled the earth and everyone knew their natural place in the overlapping cosmic, political, and social hierarchies. Slaves and peasants obeyed their masters. Women obeyed their fathers or husbands. Commoners left government in the hands of aristocrats and emperors. And the whole world rejoiced as Hellenistic or Roman emperors conquered the "barbarian" peoples of the world and replaced bestial savagery with Greco-Roman civilization.

In a third temporal location, the Golden Age was frequently placed in the early history of a particular civilization or city, as in pastoral histories of Rome.⁵

A fourth historical location was the present. Here, Golden Age discourse usually flattered contemporary princes whose god-like virtues restored a lost, Golden Age of cosmic justice, peace, good government, piety, natural abundance, and commercial prosperity. In imperial Golden Age discourse, nature's fertility demonstrated the divine power of the new ruler whose triumphal advent allowed time itself to begin anew. Ironically, the imperial Golden Age restored universal peace through universal conquest. Thus the use of Golden Age discourse by Roman court poets to celebrate imperial expansion and global victory. As an imperial discourse, Golden

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567891011 Horace, *Centennial Hymn*

Age representation usually deployed the natural rhetoric of solar rule whereby contemporary rulers repeated and restored Apollo's original cosmic order in their own "global" victories.⁶

From the time of Virgil's Augustan flattery, the Golden Age restored by the modern prince also included a revival of poetry, philosophy, and the arts. The Golden Age as rebirth of letters worked in at least three ways. First, it allowed poets to insert their own works into the highest civilization while hailing their patron as the divine, solar mind presiding over all cultural revival. Second, it allowed writers to soften power with wisdom, to remake empire into philosophical dominion, and to represent princely violence as justice, triumph, or the restoration of cosmic peace.⁷ Third, it located modern culture at the center of the natural order by defining a cosmic rebirth encompassing nature and human civilization. By naturalizing new values, the Golden Age converted the problematic into the timeless and forged new communities of belief.

Finally, the Golden Age was also located in the future, as a Messianic period whose perfection symmetrically matched nature's original condition. At times, this was the immediate future promised by the advent of a new ruler but not yet fulfilled. At other times, classical writers moved the Golden Age to the end of time by projecting it into the Elysian Fields.⁸ Later, Renaissance writers simply updated this by projecting the Golden Age into the Christian afterlife. Paradise became the latest Golden Age awaiting rulers, church officials, saints, and all those saved in Christ.⁹

Regardless of its location in a particular text, the Golden Age remained a mobile discourse comparing or connecting separate periods. As a common metaphor in cosmologies and world histories, it always implied narratives of cosmic progress or decline or cosmic decline suddenly reversed or a triumphal apotheosis at the end of time. In most texts, the Golden Age appeared

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in at least two places simultaneously: as an ideal past and a present which restored that past or which was contrasted to it.

With all these options readily available in the texts they most admired, Renaissance writers were free to locate the Golden Age in any period. And since they had a thousand years of additional history to use, their versions of the Golden Age could take on a greater historical variety. For French writers, the Golden Age could appear in the time of Charlemagne. For papal writers, it could appear in a triumphal yet pure, early Christianity headed by Constantine or in the age of modern Rome. And for humanists in general, all of classical antiquity could now appear as a Golden Age, along with the modern age which restored it.¹⁰

From 1550 to the French Revolution (1789), Golden Age imagery was used to celebrate the coronations, papal elections, secular and religious holidays, birthdays, weddings, births, and funerals of every important ruler in Renaissance Europe. And because the Golden Age had strong Roman republican traditions, it outlived the fall of ancien regime court culture and continued into modern democratic rhetoric. It was especially appropriate for democratic world powers whose rulers had intellectual pretensions. In 1962, Robert Frost hailed the inauguration of John F. Kennedy in Roman terms.

*"makes the prophet in us all presage
the glory of a next Augustan age
A golden age of poetry and power"*

Gods, Heroes, and Cosmic Space: Courtly Geography as Empire

¹⁰¹¹ Horace, *Centennial Hymn*

If European court culture saw time as a grandiose world history, it fashioned an equally grand sense of space through cosmic celestial and geographic rhetoric. Since classical culture already imagined gods and goddesses ruling over the heavens and the earth with its lands, seas, and rivers, ancient writers used mythology to elaborate an imperial geography marked by cosmic space, territorial or global power, and universal order. Here, Apollo served well as a mythological image of cosmic space, as well as time. Thus the Roman poet, Horace, used Apollo to celebrate the new Rome ruled by the first emperor, Augustus.

Kind Sun, who in your shining chariot reveal
And then conceal the day, reborn another and yet
The same, may you view nothing greater than
The City of Rome.¹¹

Similar texts appeared in Virgil's *Aeneid* and *Georgics*, in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, and in later Roman imperial discourse. One particularly elaborate example came in the *Panegyric on the Third Consulship of the Emperor Honorius* written in the late fourth century by the Roman court poet Claudian. Here he also praised the emperor's brother, Arcadius, who ruled over the eastern half of the Roman emperor.

... O glory of heaven [Apollo] as once thou wert of earth, the ocean that laves the shores of the land of thy birth receives thee wearied with thy nightly course, Spain bathes thee in thy natal waves. Happy father, when first thou risest above the horizon thou lookest upon Arcadius, when thou dippest to thy setting the sight of Honorius delays thy westerling fires. Through whichever hemisphere thou takest thy wandering journey, thou passest over the domains of sons who with tranquil mind and ripe control rule over allied peoples, who once again fashion the ages from a nobler ore. ...

Brothers twain, with the heart of one, brothers to whose rule fate has entrusted sea and land, if there is aught that has escaped your grandsire's conquering hand, aught

¹¹ Horace, *Centennial Hymn*

*your father has left unsubdued, even now Vulcan prepares the arms for their subjection and Cyclops labours on the Sicilian anvil. ... 'Tis for you that Neptune pastures in the seaweed meadows of the Ionian main green sea-horses who can fly o'er the surface of the blue waters with so light a step that their hoofs are unflecked with foam, and course o'er fields of corn so delicately that the ears do not bend beneath their weight. E'en now I see the sack of Babylon and the Parthian driven to flight that is not feigned, Bactria subjected to the Law, the fearful pallor of the Ganges' servile banks, the humbled Persian throwing off his gem-encrusted robes. Mount to Tania's source, explore the frozen North, traverse sun-scorched Libya, o'ercome the fires of Titan and surprise Nile's hidden spring; pass the Pillars of Hercules, the bourne, too, whence Bacchus returned; whatever heaven enfolds shall own your dominion. To you the Red Sea shall give precious shells, India her ivory, Panchaia perfumes, and China silk.*¹²

Claudian's text exemplifies the imperial geographic catalogue of numerous conquered nations and peoples and of the treasures they surrender as tribute to an all-triumphant Rome.

Once Constantine made Christianity the official religion of the Roman empire in the early fourth century, this imperial geography was fused with early Christian papal culture in ways which proved irresistible to the humanist church elites of Renaissance Europe. Here, for example, is a fourth-century tribute to the emperor Constantine.

Even the resplendent sun in its long journey through the great expanse of the ages acknowledges him alone as Lord, and obedient to his command, never dares to step outside its bounds. And the moon which retires before the light of the sun, periodically waxes and wanes in obedience to the divine laws. And the stars, the beauties of the heavens, proclaim him the Giver of All Light by glittering in their choral dances and moving in order and harmony and measuring their circles on high. Together all the heavenly luminaries at his command and word join in one melody and complete their long course by revolving through many eons and competing in ethereal races. The alternating movements of night and day, the changes of hours and seasons, and the

¹² Loeb. ed., I, pp. 283-285. The text dates from the late 4th century A.D.

rhythms and arrangements of all things honor the highly complex wisdom of his infinitely great power.

To him the unseen powers who soar around the free fields of air send up their obligatory and fitting tribute of divine praise. The whole cosmos singing together praises him as the Great Ruler. The heavens above and the higher choruses of the heavenly vaults honor him. Hosts of angels sing ineffable hymns in his praise. Spirits sprung from intellectual light glorify their divine Father. Ages that were timeless before this firmament and this cosmos, and besides these other endless ages that existed before the creation of all visible things, recognize him alone as the Great Lord and Absolute Ruler.

He who is above all, before all, after all, his pre-existing and only begotten Logos, yes the great God's great High Priest who is older than all time and all eons and is dedicated first and foremost to the honor of his Father, intercedes with him for the salvation of everyone. Glorified is he for being the first ruler in the universe, though he is second in command in his Father's kingdom. For he was that very Light beyond the universe which dances around the Father and mediates between created existence and the eternal and uncreated Form and also divides the one from the other, that Light which gushes forth from on high from the endless and beginningless divinity and proceeds out over the supercelestial realm, shining on everything within the heavens with rays of wisdom brighter than the sun.

...

In the same manner is the reign of our victorious ruler, which resembles that of the Ruler of the Universe, honored by the Giver of All Blessings. Now it begins a new era of good fortune, presently bringing to completion this thirty-years festival but afterwards reaching forward to far greater intervals of time and endeavoring to realize the expectation of future blessings in the heavenly kingdom. There not one sun but hosts of innumerable lights dance in chorus around the Ruler of All. There every light surpasses the brightness of the sun, glowing and shining with the splendor of the everlasting wellspring of light.

This text, and many others like it, were well known in Renaissance Europe at a time when Renaissance popes commissioned large depictions of a victorious Constantine in fresco (Romano) and sculpture (Bernini) to celebrate their own imperial Christian ambitions in the face of a Turkish empire expanding westward toward Europe and the newly discovered lands awaiting Christian conquest in the New World. With the gradual consolidation of political power in Europe after 1400 and the rise of the absolutist nation state¹³ in the sixteenth and seventeenth-centuries - above all, Spain, France, and England - court and church culture both used a humanist rhetoric of cosmic or global space hand in hand with a courtly rhetoric of cosmic time and "great ages".

The Example of Virgil's Epic in Court Humanism

While Homer's epic poetry remained important for early modern European court humanism, the later Roman epic poet, Virgil, was even more influential for a number of reasons. Written to glorify the new Roman empire of the first Roman emperor, Augustus, Virgil's *Aeneid* (and his *Georgics*) created a cosmic narrative folding all Greek history and earlier Homeric epic into a larger Roman world history whose divinely ordained destiny was fulfilled in a new Roman Empire headed by Augustus. Though Homer's heroes are primarily kings, queens, and high nobles, Homer's epics did not focus on imperial themes of world-exploration, conquest, and government. In contrast, Virgil's *Aeneid* appropriated the earlier Homeric epic tradition and interwove it into a very different, explicitly imperial Roman discourse to glorify the imperial values of his patron, Augustus. Needless to say, Virgil's distinctly Roman imperial epic poetry was the perfect literary and artistic model for a new Renaissance humanist court culture looking back to classical literature and art to justify its new imperial ambitions in an age of

¹³ For students unfamiliar with the term "absolutist," I mean great nations with centralized political, economic, judicial, and cultural institutions where monarchs claimed a special "divine right" to complete authority, vs. earlier medieval traditions where political and administrative power was not centralized and where kings shared power with the great nobles who were supreme authorities in their own, large fiefs.

regional political consolidation, foreign exploration and colonization, and perpetual war between rival nation-states.

A closer look at the pre-humanist culture of the later middles shows that the Trojan cycle and Virgil's *Aeneid* had been popular in court culture for three or four centuries. What changed in the new humanism of the Renaissance was both the form and content of this Roman-Virgilian court culture. Late medieval representations of Virgil's *Aeneid* and of Trojan history look medieval with their knightly accoutrements. They also remain tied to medieval chivalric ideals such as crusading and late medieval versions of courtly love.

In contrast, the Virgil and Homer invented in Renaissance and Baroque court culture looked and read much more like classical Roman culture while serving a new sixteenth and seventeenth-century imperial culture. For early modern European rulers, Virgil offered the perfect model for a relentlessly politicized, imperial humanism, a court humanism serving the international interests of the emerging nation state and of its supreme ruler. Thus Virgil's *Aeneid* remained a touchstone for a new, early modern European imperial court culture. This was especially true for the three most powerful, nation states battling for world domination, Spain, England, and France. And it was also true for a new, self-consciously "Roman" Catholic church culture after 1510 and especially after the 1560s with the onset of the Counter-Reformation. (See the section below on "church humanism".)

Epic Poetry as Heroic Verse: A Model for the Visual Arts

One of the most revealing classical expressions of this court mentality came in an important ancient political treatise frequently reprinted by humanists in Europe after 1500. This was Dio Chrysostom's *First Discourse on Kingship* which cited an imaginary conversation between Philip of Macedon and his son, Alexander the Great. Philip asked Alexander why he was "so infatuated with Homer". Answering him in part by quoting Homer's *Iliad*, Alexander replied in a way which would have resonated with many a European ruler between 1500 and 1700.

"... What is there in them [the other poets] by which a man could profit, who, like you or me,

'aspires to be

The master, over all to domineer' [Iliad 1.288]

The poetry of Homer, however, I look upon as alone truly noble and lofty and suited to a king, worthy of the attention of a real man, particularly if he expects to rule over all the peoples of the earth - at any rate over most of them, and those the most prominent - if he is to be, in the strict sense of the term, what Homer calls a 'shepherd of the people' [Iliad 4.296] On my word, father, I not only cannot endure to hear any other poet recited but Homer, but even object to any other meter than Homer's heroic hexameter.' Then Philip admired his son greatly for his noble spirit, since it was plain that he harbored no unworthy or ignoble ideas but made the heroes and demigods his examples."

Dio's Philip then asked why Alexander didn't admire the other important early Greek epic poet, Hesiod. After noting Hesiod was a great poet for shepherds, farmers, and carpenters since he discussed them in his epic poem, *Works and Days*, Alexander dismissed all such lowly groups as base and "effeminate" lovers of pleasure completely unsuited for the lofty mind of a king. In a different and much more influential text, Aristotle's *Poetics* defined tragedy as a literary genre concerned with kings, heroes, and high nobles who were "universally" known and whose high position allowed for a terrible yet cathartic fall. The sufferings of an ordinary person could never be tragic or invested with great significance in this aristocratic world.

Dio's comments about epic illuminate the links between literary form and subject matter and the political, social, and sexual values of ancient Greek court culture at a certain moment. If we substitute the visual language of art for the verbal language of poetry, Dio's remarks also help us see why so much Greek and Roman art employed an exalted or heroic naturalism concerned

not with ordinary, mundane, vulgar realities but rather with an ideal level at once godlike, aristocratic, intellectually and morally lofty, and "masculine" (as defined by aristocratic men).

Of course, not all ancient literature or art dealt with heroic subjects. Hesiod and Virgil both made epic poems about farmers, as did Renaissance poets and artists in their wake. Nonetheless, Dio's snobbish exaltation of epic poetry allows us to comprehend one aspect of the appeal of classical subjects and style in Renaissance art. At a time when medieval forms were increasingly tied to outmoded ideals, practices, habits, and social circumstances, the new, heroic naturalism conspicuously drawn from Greco-Roman art and used in depictions of classical mythology, epic, and history gave Renaissance courtly audiences a flattering image of their own lofty existence. Offered up as grand public and private images of a new spiritual ancestry, classical mythology and epic proclaimed a series of new heroic identities deeply imbedded in a new humanist court culture and the new social and political world of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries.

To see classical culture this way opens up a complex politics of Renaissance humanism and humanistic art. The so-called Renaissance "revival" of antiquity was not some disinterested, neutral, dry, bookish process. On the contrary, it was loaded with a continually shifting cultural politics which needs to be carefully scrutinized and interpreted within the changing historical particularities and circumstances of each art work.

Court Humanism and Church Piety

Despite its innovations, court humanism with its hierarchical, imperial, absolutist (pseudo-feudal) politics had many things in common with traditional church piety with its ecclesiastical hierarchies stretching down from above (God-Virgin-saints-pope-bishop-monk/priest-believer). Thus court humanism found it expedient to incorporate and preserve many aspects of traditional ecclesiastical piety, both monastic and sacramental, to reinforce the new political thinking of the emerging nation state. For example, the creation of the Spanish Inquisition by the Spanish king and his attempts to export this new inquisition to other regions outside Spain

to further his absolutist, political ends is one example of the willingness of court culture to preserve and deploy church culture for its own ends. This relative coziness between court humanism and traditional church culture is one of the striking differences between court humanism and civic humanism.

Court Humanism, Wealth, and Luxury

Despite its strong agreement with traditional ecclesiastical notions of hierarchy and with the hierarchies of church humanism, court humanism had its own take on wealth, luxury, leisure, and pleasure. Since all these were traditional elements of courtly life at the highest levels in the middle ages, as in classical antiquity, it is no surprise to find Renaissance humanists working for nobles defending what many church writers and burgher civic humanists saw as sloth, idleness, lasciviousness, and corruption. The debate over nobility by the humanist Poggio, assigned for the paper on Piero, is an unresolved debate between courtly humanism, voiced by Lorenzo de' Medici, and civic, Stoic humanism voiced by Niccolo Niccoli. If you read that dialogue after reading this handout, you will better understand the differences between courtly and civic humanism and the ambiguous position of art as a luxury good within civic humanism.

Court Humanism and Medieval Chivalry

Renaissance court humanism also drew extensively on medieval chivalry as seen in two of the many chivalric epics of the sixteenth century, Ariosto's *Orlando Furioso* (1532) and the later Counter-Reformation epic, Tasso's *Jerusalem Conquered* (1575). Both were modern humanist epics yet they were set in an imaginary medieval past of crusading, jousting, and damsels in distress. While this continuation of old-fashioned "medieval" heroics may seem out of place in a Renaissance humanist court culture looking back to ancient Rome, medieval chivalry flourished in early modern court society for many reasons.

In part, medieval chivalry continued in the same way that medieval culture as a whole continued as an element right through the Renaissance, often in new hybrid forms combined with humanist classical themes and values. Classical mythology had always appealed to later medieval court culture as seen in the many late medieval romances based on the Trojan War, the voyages of Aeneas, Jason and the Argonauts, and the life of Alexander the Great. In late medieval courtly romance, the pagan heroes were all transformed into exemplary knights as chivalry traced its origins back to classical antiquity. Perseus freeing Andromeda became another amorous knight rescuing a damsel in distress. Jason's search for the Golden Fleece became another knightly quest. Classical wars reappeared as crusades. The festival of Neptune, held by the Romans with the Sabines, became a medieval tournament, described here in one French court writer around 1410.

The jousts were held outside the city on a plain next to a mountain, and the ladies were all seated according to rank on the mountainside. There the knights competed against one another in performing deeds of valor and prowess, and the sight of the beautiful ladies gave them more strength and daring to perform knightly deeds.^{iv}

And so on. In the visual arts, this feudalized antiquity was particularly prominent through 1500 in Northern tapestries (popular all over Europe including Renaissance Italy) and in Italian wedding chests (*cassone*).

It was, in part, the comprehensive feudalizing of classical antiquity between 1200 and 1450 which allowed chivalric imagery and medieval courtly values to continue operating in Renaissance court culture right through the 17th century.

Medieval "chivalric," "feudal," and crusading imagery also appealed by offering European courts a compelling language to express new military conflicts with the new, powerful Turkish threat invading from the East in the late 14th century (a military threat continuing into the 18th century). Although the Muslim Ottoman Turks were not medieval Saracens, European rulers, writers, and artists continued to frame the new conflict with a reassuring, medieval imagery of crusading.

Feudal ceremony and imagery also helped Renaissance rulers manage disgruntled nobles in a new, post-feudal age of political centralization, republican city states, powerful burgher financial elites, and politically dispossessed nobles. This was the period when nobles were gradually weakened and made increasingly dependent on all-powerful central courts. In the fourteenth and fifteenth century, kings and emperors founded a number of new chivalric orders such as the Order of the Garter founded by the King of England and dedicated to St. George, the Order of St. Michael (founded by the King of France) and above all, the Order of the Golden Fleece (based on Jason and the Argonauts), founded by the Duke of Burgundy. Restricted to the highest nobles, these orders helped rulers centralize their authority by excluding the lesser nobility and subordinating grand nobles to a single, sanctified authority.

Chivalric culture also helped the aristocracy cope with the new social, economic, and cultural world of Renaissance urban life as European nobles gradually moved into the city, first in Italy by the 13th and 14th centuries and in Northern Europe by the 16th century. To cite one example, the medieval castle and manor house gave way after 1500 to the new humanist villa tied to the modern city. Faced with such all-encompassing changes, the European aristocracy embraced traditional chivalric imagery as a reassuring fantasy theater of traditional identity where nobles were still all-powerful and where glorious, timeless traditions and histories lived on. In this sense, the appeal of medieval chivalry in Renaissance culture was profoundly nostalgic and drew on the new historical self-consciousness of Renaissance elites who knew that the age of chivalry was largely over and that a different age had begun. As courtly nostalgia, chivalrous romances and Christian chivalric images like St. George defeating the Dragon offered the aristocracy a pleasing and consoling image of past glory and provided a therapy to cope with the new realities of urban life far from medieval castles.

Despite the continuing appeal of medieval chivalric culture, Renaissance court culture looked back primarily to the heroic ethos of classical antiquity. As described in classical epic poetry and mythology, blue-blooded, princely heroes and heroines interacted with gods and goddesses to fulfill their great, divinely ordained destinies guided by divine providence. Many epic heroes were themselves directly or indirectly descended from the union of gods or goddesses with princely mortals. Such heroes included Jason, Achilles, Castor and Pollux, and Aeneas, the son of Venus and Anchises and the protagonist of Virgil's enormously influential *Aeneid*.

II. Civic Humanism / Burgher Humanism / Stoic Humanism

This brand of humanism was grounded in burgher elites and highly urbanized nobles and flourished especially in republican city-states such as early fourteenth-century Siena, fifteenth-century Florence and Venice, sixteenth-century German, Dutch, and English cities. With its focus on ethical life and its austere morality of hard work and simple living, civic humanism was the most hostile to traditional religious values inscribed in church and monastic cultures. In the seventeenth century, civic humanism flourished primarily in Northern Protestant Europe, especially the republican Netherlands where neither church nor state had a single ruler.

Though the humanism of burgher elites was often drawn to the same kinds of social pretensions and self-glorifying mythological rhetoric, especially at the very highest social and political levels of burgher society (like the Medici), burgher humanism in general was more oriented toward the less monarchical-feudal model of an earlier, republican Rome. Here Rome was not the exemplary empire or monarchy ruled by a single, all powerful, godlike figure but rather a civic republic governed more broadly by a wise body of aristocratic Senator-citizens. If monarchy emphasized hierarchy and a single head governing the body politic, republican thinking emphasized shared governance where citizens banded together horizontally, like brothers, to govern themselves. Fraternal metaphors remained central to republican and burgher political thinking right into the twentieth century, most famously in the republican slogan of "*Liberté, Egalité, Fraternité*" adopted by the French Revolution in 1789.

Civic humanism appealed to Italian republics and free city-states and, after 1480, to Northern urban commercial centers. With its strong civic orientation and piety, civic humanism was particularly hostile to certain aspects of medieval piety: its dualistic monastic values and retreat from a "natural" of body, human society, and mundane concerns deemed corrupt, its excessive inwardness and solitude, its esoteric or mystical theology, its late medieval glorification of

religious poverty and begging (rather than productive work), and its official, church-oriented piety of dogma and sacramental ritual.

In contrast to such traditional views now deemed old fashioned and "medieval," civic humanists, and to a certain extent, court humanists, emphasized the free will, ethical responsibility, and individual dignity of a mankind called to a new, civic Christianity of active virtue or heroic imperial destiny. This civic piety was not fulfilled in monastic retreat or in ecclesiastical ritual but rather in the public and private realms of good citizenship, hard daily work benefiting the commonwealth, philanthropic and cultural spending (whereby personal wealth was now legitimized), and familial duties (where proper civic values could be instilled). Typical was the comment of one Florentine humanist who noted the study of classical antiquity was essential to the well-being of the "civic community and to the moral life of the individual"¹⁴ No wonder Renaissance humanists and artists described ideal urban city-states whose streets and squares displayed a new geometrical order, symmetry, and classical architectural logic not found in the medieval city.

Since classical Greek and Roman literature was pervaded by such ethical/political concerns and piety, it offered the perfect model for the new, practical, court or urban Christianity of Renaissance humanism. (In court humanism, Christian values were fulfilled in the glorious political action of pious ducal, royal, imperial, or papal rule.)

In its larger sense, civic humanism reinterpreted the overlapping medieval orders of monarchical/princely politics, feudal society, ecclesiastical piety, and hierarchical science (Nature as a fixed cosmos). Suspicious of traditional institutions and ceremonies, and to some extent, suspicious of all ceremony, humanism moved identity away from larger institutions and formalized communities to an series of internalized orders generated within and maintained by more free-floating, educated individuals with larger ties primarily to the one political and social sphere where burgher elites had some real power and relative autonomy, the city.

Thus civic or burgher humanism redefined government as a "republican" self-government. Feudal nobility became a false outer virtue contrasted to a true, inner nobility based on reason and education (not birth) and realized in citizenship and civic participation, hard work whose products benefited both household and community, and family obligations (modeling the ideal household and its gender relations on the patriarchal city-state). Church community became a false ceremony replaced by a true, "living" Christianity, an inner godliness realized outwardly in virtuous civic participation and charity, hard work, and marital fidelity. Even scientific ideas of the cosmos transformed Nature from a fixed hierarchy of higher elements and bodies ruling over lower elements to a somewhat more dynamic, free, moral arena of individual ascent and descent with greater tolerance for social mobility in some regions.

The key to burgher humanism was its tendency to reinterpret all subjects in terms of burgher morality and civic virtue. Even classical mythology was susceptible to this kind of moral allegorization especially since this was long a feature of medieval readings of mythology. If Renaissance courtly audiences read classical mythology and epic as flattering images of its own divine ancestry, imperial power (H. 25-11), and aristocratic superiority, Renaissance burgher audiences imagined a "spiritual" ancestry or kinship with the same classical subjects now read as allegories of burgher morality, humility, self-control, and moderation.

Burgher Humanism: the Decentering of Authority and Common Culture

While humanism worked to create new civic institutions and communities to replace traditional "medieval" values, practices, social structures, economic realities, and political changes (esp. the slow rise of the nation state), it also laid the grounds for greater social plurality, "multiculturalism", and perceived fragmentation. By redefining order as a series of interior structures and by giving new legitimacy to self-made virtue, reason, and authority, humanism ended up undermining common cultures and social orders to some extent.

This was greatly magnified (and to a large extent, made possible) by the rise of printing and the resulting proliferation of a thousand, conflicting, authoritative, individual voices. By the

sixteenth century, Renaissance literature and art was suffused with anxieties about the "new man", about a new, modern individual cut off from traditional obligations and restraints, without a stable, larger identity, and caught up in the socially destructive pursuit of private desires and agendas. By the late sixteenth century, the lofty fifteenth-century Italian humanist dream of a noble, free human being rising from a common background through the liberal arts toward a god-like, celestial mind, nobility, and virtue had become a nightmare of the predatory monopolist, merchant, banker, or social climber, the individual urban burgher or artisan freed to create her or his own identity in an age of rapid religious and political change, economic transformation (new credit finance, long-distance trade, economies of scale), greater international migration and travel, and new social opportunities and mobility.

III. Church Humanism: Papal-Scholastic-Ecclesiastical Humanism

After 1480, many church officials began taking up court humanism on a grand scale, especially in Rome where the papacy was developing an increasingly magnificent and ostentatious court. Cardinals, in turn, vied with each other in Rome to fashion their own humanist courts after 1510. A similar competition to take on and display the new humanist culture proceeded down the ecclesiastical hierarchy to bishops and even some monastic administrators (despite the strong tensions between civic humanism and monastic culture). Thus one can also speak of church humanism as a third major form of humanism in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

The humanist transformation of high church culture in Rome by 1515 shows the irresistible force of the humanist movement within the new conditions and needs of Renaissance Europe. The development of church humanism also stemmed from the fact that the highest church offices were increasingly reserved for wealthy and powerful nobles who brought their court humanism into church patronage and culture. As high nobles monopolized an increasing share of important church offices during the sixteenth century and completely dominated high clerical office after 1600, high church culture grew increasingly humanistic and courtly.

In many ways, church humanism was a variation of court humanism with imperial values modified to accommodate and strengthen church hierarchies, official Christian values (defined at the top), and new Counter-Reformation notions of a single, universal Roman Catholic "empire" spreading out through missionary orders like the Jesuits and Franciscans, supported by Catholic monarchs, to colonize, convert, and save the newly "discovered" world.

In so far as two of the three great world powers competing for control of the newly discovered Americas and East Indies were Catholic - Spain and France - an explicitly imperial, Roman Catholic church humanism became a core element within Spanish and French court humanism. The Spanish and French absolutist monarchs battled each other, fought Protestant England and the Netherlands, and colonized foreign lands in the name of an all-powerful, Roman church bringing universal salvation, peace, harmony, order, and virtue. Since the Roman Catholic church was well established in Spain, France, the Southern Netherlands, Italy, and parts of southern Germany, church humanism operated there within court culture.

Conversely, an imperial court culture also appealed enormously to church humanism and overlapped with it at a time when the Counter-Reformation has defined a new, global, absolutist, hierarchical church culture looking back to the Christian Roman emperor, Constantine. In short, court and church humanism overlapped in many ways, just as the two spheres were dominated by the same, intermarrying high nobility.

The center of church humanism lay in Roman Catholic culture at the highest levels, especially the activities of Catholic popes, cardinals, bishops, and the heads of wealthy monastic orders charged with missionary activities, pastoral care, and enforcing religious orthodoxy such as the Franciscans, Dominicans, and Jesuits. Church culture also encompassed the building and lavish decorating of Catholic churches and shrines, the imbedding of Catholic values into neighborhood life by reorganizing parish structures and activities and by working with confraternities (Catholic lay civic groups), by staging dozens of annual Catholic religious festivals and processions through city streets, by publishing Roman Catholic devotional literature in the vernacular, and by encouraging popular Roman Catholic devotions with tens of thousands of inexpensive woodcuts and engravings.

Within Italy itself, and especially central Italy where popes had some real political power, church humanism got caught up in the political ambition of each papal court and in the changing ambition of the various families who sequentially controlled the papacy. In papal church culture, church humanism often addressed local Italian power struggles and shifts between the great noble families. One perpetual area of conflict was that between older, more established and entrenched Roman nobles and newer arrivals to high church office (esp. the papal office) from other parts of Italy. New (and old) families arriving in the papal office used patronage to enrich, entrench, and glorify themselves. Of course, architectural and artistic patronage was crucial for all such self-glorification.

MODES OF HUMANISM WITHIN THE THREE BASIC CATEGORIES

To make matters more complicated, one should also recognize an important strain of relative alienation and retreat in Renaissance humanism. Since this could operate in court and burgher humanism as an critical element within a larger political engagement and, in its more extreme forms, as an ideology lying outside court and civic humanism which rejected political participation in favor of metaphysical retreat, I have listed it below under a separate heading. Rather than a fourth category of humanism, it makes more sense to see it as a version or element within the my three primary forms of humanism: court humanism, civic humanism, and church humanism.

Metaphysical Humanism and the Philosophy of Retreat

Unlike the modes of imperial or civic humanism which balanced the active and contemplative lives, metaphysical humanism is my phrase for various streams of humanism which gave strong priority to the contemplative life and to notions of higher metaphysical realities (eternal ideas, not mutable worldly phenomenon) while devaluing the active life. With its culture of virtuous disengagement, metaphysical humanism lay on the margins of Renaissance humanism. To connect it better to mainstream humanism, we might see it as an inevitable humanist alienation from humanist political commitment. It was thus a periodic byproduct of mainstream humanism, frequently voiced by older, frustrated humanists and by civic humanists living under repressive regimes where political engagement was difficult or impossible.

To some extent, the rise of a more metaphysical humanism was a natural element in professional growth and expansion of Renaissance humanism as an intellectual and an institutional movement eager to secure patronage at the major universities, courts, religious institutions, libraries, and urban centers. By turning in on itself in some quarters, by endlessly elaborating its own texts, by piling interpretations on top of interpretations, by growing increasingly erudite and creating a

kind of autonomous life of the mind which defined its own value in part through its high autonomy and difficulty, some humanists (burgher intellectuals) tried to secure a stable intellectual and social position for themselves. Their more difficult and metaphysical humanism worked as a kind of fortress of high mind and virtue, impregnable to most outsiders and scornful of the more civic-minded humanism which worked increasingly in the vernacular to reach larger audiences with its more practical concerns.

To a large extent, the search for a kind of professional stability and security applies to all streams of metaphysical humanism. Within this generalization, certain major variants of metaphysical humanism can be noted.

Neoplatonic Humanism.

This strand of metaphysical humanism went back to the late classical, philosophical school of Neoplatonism. Rather than directly describing itself as alienated from political life, Renaissance Neoplatonic humanism sought out loved notions of secret, mysterious truths and mystical doctrines reserved for the rarified understanding of a privileged few. This self-consciously esoteric humanism flourished in Florence in the later fifteenth century when republican culture had been undermined by the increasingly authoritarian political control of the powerful Medici family. Late fifteenth-century humanists working for the Medici like Ficino dwelled deliberately on esoteric texts, secret mystical doctrines, syncretist doctrines fusing Jewish, Christian, and classical philosophers, and late antique "mystery religions". It was Ficino who praised newly discovered writings attributed to Mercury as a secret key to the highest wisdom uniting all of the world's different religious and cultures into a single, Neo-Platonic system of secret wisdom and truth. (See the discussion of Botticelli's Primavera, below.) One could also call this "mystical humanism" for its love of secret mystery religions and doctrines.

Even if this esoteric or mystical humanism avoided commenting on contemporary social and political developments, it was still be related historically to them in interesting ways. In Ficino's case, it accompanied the late-fifteenth-century erosion of civic, republican values in Florence under the rule of the Medici. Thus, regardless of what Ficino was willing to acknowledge explicitly, the modern observer looking back can read his brand of Neoplatonic humanism as either alienated from political and civic engagement or prudently steering away from concerns which were then decidedly unwelcome among Florence's most powerful patrons and politicians.

Consolation Humanism and the Example of Stoic and Cynic Philosophy

The fifteenth, sixteenth, and seventeenth centuries was a time when European cities were wracked by war, political upheaval, forced emigration, and economic disruption. With the rise in the 15-16th centuries of credit finance and long-distance trade, economic life became considerably more risky, uncertain, impersonal, and unpredictable. Ironically, it was the socially engaged civic and court humanists who were the more vulnerable to political, social, and

economic disruptions and disasters. So too court humanists were vulnerable to sudden shifts in court politics, to banishment, exile, or death, as Thomas More discovered when Henry VIII had him beheaded. Not surprisingly, these conditions fueled the rise of a certain strain within all forms of Renaissance humanism which could be called "consolation humanism" (my phrase).

For some Renaissance humanists (and for all of them to some extent), the solution to the failures, disappointments, corruptions, and misfortunes of political life was to withdraw into a serene interior world of philosophical order and serenity. In this way, one would console and heal the battered civic self by developing a humanist inner life of detachment and intellectual retreat. This inner sanctity of "pure reason" would help the individual gain psychic and philosophical distance on all worldly commitments, desires, and goals (whether political, social, or economic). If this inner retreat was described as necessary to maintain civic and political engagement, then one is dealing with a "consolation humanism" operating within mainstream court or civic humanism. And to a large extent, this was how "consolation humanism" worked. With its warnings against excessive engagement, "consolation humanism" operated throughout civic and court as a kind of safety value. It both preserved a healthy distance from an unreliable and dangerous world and offered a therapeutic, "consoling" escape or retreat from life's inevitable misfortunes.

If, on the other hand, a Renaissance writer denounces all civic and political engagement as corrupt, evil, foolish, and destructive, then one has a form of "consolation humanism" operating outside court or civic humanism. Do not confuse this language with the medieval monastic values it superficially resembles and which it sometimes superficially borrowed. These are alienated, modern, urban intellectuals, not monks writing from monastic seclusion. And their main sources were not monastic but rather classical philosophical writers who suffered similar forms of urban alienation such as the Cynic philosopher, Diogenes. In any case, the most extreme forms of "consolation humanism" should be placed as an element operating within what I have called "metaphysical humanism". For it ends up extolling the autonomous life of the mind as the only dependable, stable, "true" reality worth cultivating.

Interestingly, the tension between political engagement and alienated retreat and the search for inner order and consolation was widespread in classical culture. At one end of the spectrum, even the philosophers of civic engagement such as Cicero recognized the need for periodic retreat to recharge batteries and relocate basic values. Temporary disengagement was formalized in classical villa culture where the villa served as a place for periodic retreat and renewal before returning to the city. And in old age, Cicero and others allowed a legitimate, permanent retreat after a life of political engagement. Here the exemplary statesman or citizen would retire to the villa and philosophically contemplate nature's eternal orders while preparing to die without fear, grief, or other internal passions and disturbances. ("Consolation humanism" frequently appeared in philosophical discussions of death as the one ultimate and inevitable misfortune.)

On the other end of the spectrum from the Roman civic engagement of Cicero's philosophy was the Cynic school of philosophy led by Diogenes. Though he lived centuries before Cicero in fourth-century B.C. Greece as the contemporary of Plato and Aristotle, Diogenes's example was well known in ancient Roman and Renaissance culture. He spent his life in the city attacking the

corruption of all ambitious urban groups including rulers, philosophers, nobles, and merchants. Spurning social conventions, choosing poverty and begging for the freedom it gave him, defecating and masturbating in public, and ridiculing all those around him including Alexander the Great, Diogenes was the ultimate outsider in many ways.

Yet even here, important ambiguities remained. Though Diogenes was profoundly alienated and disengaged politically, he nonetheless devoted his life to his own peculiar philosophical crusade within the city attacking folly and corruption. On one level then, he remained profoundly engaged and quite unlike the medieval monk fleeing into an isolated monastery. And it was this unresolved ambiguity which made Diogenes so appealing to the most alienated Renaissance humanists. He was the perfect classical source for Renaissance humanist notions of inner withdrawal without completely giving up on a more Ciceronian civic engagement.

The Liberal Arts as Consolation and the Complexity of Humanist Engagement

As noted earlier, mainstream Renaissance notions of the liberal arts invented a more socially-embedded, practical educational-intellectual idea in which education and philosophy would culminate in virtuous civic participation. One studied the liberal arts to take an active, even leading place in society. The other side of this humanist coin, however, was the widespread tendency to see the liberal arts as a therapeutic retreat, as the consolation of a higher philosophical distance and disengagement. Rather than an alternative tradition to the new humanist liberal arts, "consolation humanism" worked as a necessary and inevitable component within the new culture of civic and social engagement. It was the latter's darker side when it experienced disillusionment and the need for temporary disengagement and retreat.

To see this "consolation humanism" as a basic element operating to some degree or another in all Renaissance humanism is particularly helpful because it opens our eyes to the terrible difficulties and problems Renaissance humanists encountered in trying to construct orderly civic, political, and social environments in a violent and chaotic world. It makes it easier for us to see how Renaissance humanism culture, for all its civic engagement and optimism, invariably harbored deep streams of pessimism and alienation, fear and uncertainty. And because these tensions and ambiguities were already endlessly discussed by classical authors, Renaissance humanists often press the same classical authors into service to justify their own philosophies of disengagement ranging from temporary and relative notions of retreat found in Cicero to more extreme forms of Diogenes-like alienation and misanthropy.

Within what I am calling "consolation humanism," Renaissance humanists defined the new liberal arts as the only true sanctuary from worldly ups and downs, from disaster, catastrophe, death, and misfortune. Whereas medieval monastic culture sought to create physical and communal sanctuaries from worldly confusion by retreating into psychically secluded monasteries with their anchoring vows of chastity, poverty, and obedience, Renaissance humanists committed to political and social engagement tried to turn humanist education and

intellect itself into a kind of portable retreat which one could preserve in any setting, even within the worst disappointments of the city itself.

And because Renaissance art in Italy was so thoroughly inscribed with new humanist culture and liberal arts (as was Northern Renaissance art after 1500), all of this is important for a larger understanding of Renaissance art. Indeed, because so much Renaissance art was for the household and existed as part of a larger, domestic, material culture encompassing paintings, books, maps, prints, sculptures, tapestries, musical instruments, decorated furniture, ceramics, stained glass, architecture, and landscape architecture (gardens), one should always be on the lookout for ambiguities and tensions within Renaissance art and interior decoration. Here I refer to the tension between civic and court humanism with its confident affirmation of public, communal values and a rather different sense of the private, domestic interior as a philosophical sanctuary where the wealthy patron can retreat, villa-like, from the disorders of the larger world into an orderly, philosophical world of mind made visible in refined, highly intellectual objects.

THE IMPACT OF HUMANISM ON THE ARTS

Since humanism encompasses most of the core shifts in Renaissance culture, any attempt to sum up its impact on art will be necessarily incomplete. Every aspect of humanist thought found expression in the visual arts. The more one understands about humanism, the more one understands its artistic impact. With this said, a number of important areas deserve further comment.

1. Individual Vision, Creativity, Progress

Given this strong sense of an individual vantage point in time, it is interesting to note the simultaneous emergence in Renaissance Italy individualism in the arts on a variety of levels. Both humanism and Italian Renaissance art celebrated the individual with a rebirth of portraiture, (previously confined to royalty and other elites).

Along with this came a new sense of the artist as an individual philosopher, poet, scientist (anatomy, botany, geology), and God-like creator. Originality, fecundity of pictorial invention, and artistic virtuosity became prized qualities in artists and their art. This fueled a humanist avant-garde mentality of "artistic progress" where "new" was better. Artists were increasingly under pressure to "improve" on themselves to keep up with other competitors and maintain the most lucrative and prestigious patronage. This was especially true in the major urban and court centers such as Siena, Venice, Padua, Mantua, Naples, Rome, and above all, Florence. As a large and wealthy republic, Florence was the most productive center for the new, "progressive" art of the Early Renaissance. In part this was because of its great size, wealth and prosperous burgher class. This group was eager to invest privately in the luxury objects of high culture to decorate homes, palaces, and villas, and publicly in civic and religious building and decoration. And Florence's unusually strong republican political traditions, all but unique in a larger sea of Italian

cities ruled by strong, feudal lords, allowed far more of its citizens to have a stake in civic art patronage. With its numerous citizen committees tied to various institutions involved in building and decorating the city's public spaces, Florence fostered a more informed, critical, and art-oriented public capable of demanding more from its artists and of responding favorably to the latest, most challenging art. No doubt such progressive attitudes also fed off Florence's keenly competitive mercantile economy, the hub of European banking and commerce. As the sixteenth-century Florentine writer and painter, Vasari, later put it in a highly tendentious history of modern (Renaissance) art stressing the preeminence of Florence, Florence owed its artistic liveliness to three factors.

"The spirit of criticism ... leading [people] to value works for their beauty and other good qualities rather than for their authors. The second .. whoever wishes to live there must be industrious, quick and ready, constantly employing his intellect and judgment, and then he must know how to make money... The third ... is a thirst of glory and honor which the air generates strongly in the men of every profession, so that no man of ability will allow others to equal him" ^v

Humanism also contributed indirectly to the development and rapid spread of one point perspective, a system for creating pictorial space mimicking individual perception yet based on mathematical principles, not empirical intuition. (This system is discussed below, under Masaccio.) Here was yet another expression of individualism in the arts. In this way, the artist and the single viewer were both visible in the work, through style, thematic interpretation (increasingly demanded of the learned spectator as well), in virtuoso techniques, and in the perspectival manner the paintings related to the beholder's gaze.

2. History Painting and the Rise of New Genres from Below

The new artistic individualism fostered by humanism also fueled the rise of "history painting", that is, lofty and original artistic interpretations of the grand narratives of religion, myth, ancient history, as well as the more explicitly intellectual sphere of allegory. Yet humanism also helped undermine the privileged artistic position of history painting by encouraging artists to tackle common and even lowly subjects such as peasants, landscape, and everyday urban or domestic situations by cleverly investing them with elevated philosophical, ethical, and religious values. In this intellectualized, "high" or serious form, the emergence of these lowly categories of painting in the sixteenth century and their rise to a certain prominence in the seventeenth, eventually offered a real challenge to the preeminence of history painting. In short, humanism's effects on the arts were complex and even in some ways contradictory.

3. An Economy Based Increasingly on the Consumption of Luxury Goods

Underlying the humanistic praise of human freedom to ascend through virtue was a social rebellion of burgher intellectuals against medieval feudal social hierarchies based on birth. It was

economic and social self-interest which drove Renaissance humanists, lawyers, poets, painters, and other professionals to celebrate an alternative, inner "nobility" of mind and virtue rather than blood. In so far as these qualities were available theoretically to anyone, learning and other displays of virtue became the new arena for social advancement. As art became increasingly intellectualized and respectable, increasingly distant from medieval ideals of craftsmanship (the latter dismissed as lowly manual labor), it also offered burgher patrons like the Medici or Strozzi an arena in which they too could display not just their piety or wealth, as was true of later medieval patronage, but also their "noble" inner qualities such as their supposed love of truth, virtue, and learning. Thus new humanist notions of art allowed both non-aristocratic artists and patrons to raise themselves socially and in the case of wealthy burghers, to relieve anxieties about "ignoble" money-grubbing.

4. The Redefinition and Continuation of Class and Gender Hierarchies

As this rhetoric suggests, class differences in society and culture were by no means banished by humanism's new "natural" virtue and nobility. Despite the urban bourgeois critique of feudal social hierarchy, the new humanist ideas on education were saturated with metaphors of class, with "free" and "enslaved", "high" and "low", "noble" and "base", "mind" and "body". In this sense, aristocratic values were in many ways internalized and adopted even as they were criticized and transformed. Seen thus, the new humanist education makes sense in part as the curricular expression of a new and increasingly powerful social class of urban burghers developing and asserting their own culture in the face of traditional church and court cultures. A humanist education - the basis of the modern humanities - was in part a requirement to all those with ambitions to gain respectable work in one profession or another and advance socially. It was increasingly necessary for lawyers, doctors, and civil servants. So too, artists after 1400 increasingly flaunted knowledge of classical literature and art to rise above the lowly status of uneducated artisans and manual laborers, those in the "mechanical arts".

To the extent that humanism was concerned with the art of good government and citizenship, it was far more than an intellectual movement (though it has often been defined in such neutral terms). Indeed, all forms of humanism addressed themselves to political issues and concerns; education reforms were designed to produce good citizens (among the male urban elites for whom education was available). As such humanism was profoundly political. So too, the humanist imagery of classical culture was cultivated to legitimize the power and values of ruling elites in city and in court. At its worst, both civic and imperial humanism offered noble guises for the violence which one Renaissance humanist, Francesco Guicciardini, saw as the basis of all political power. "*States cannot be established or maintained by conforming to the moral law. For if you look to their beginnings, all will be seen to have their origin in violence*".^{vi} Only since the Victorian nineteenth-century (Matthew Arnold, and later, T. S. Eliot) when high culture emerged as a quasi-religion and a defense against social disorder has the humanities been sanitized, depoliticized, and removed from its historical origins into a pursuit of timeless "cultural excellence".

5. *The Reinterpretation of Nature and the Body: Naturalism as Humanism*

If the Early Renaissance in Italy glorified modern life and the individual, it showed a more positive view of nature as a whole. The natural world (humans, landscapes, animals) was presented aesthetically with a new grandeur and beauty just when Italian humanists were developing a new literary topic, orations on the "dignity of man". An emphatically bourgeois concept, the "dignity of man" was the most striking expression of the larger anti-aristocratic discourse of "natural", "inner" or "true" virtue mentioned above.

If the civic and ethical concerns of humanism appealed to the new urban mercantile class eager to assert its economic, political and moral power, so did the more "practical", earthly naturalism of Italian Renaissance art. If humanists replaced the "pointless," overly-abstract speculation of Gothic scholasticism and theology with a useful, ethical piety, Italian Renaissance artists replaced Gothic material splendor, once seen as immaterial and transcendent but now discredited as materialistic and craft oriented, with a new aesthetic, intellectual yet visually familiar and even sensuous, its spaces and bodies mathematically ordered yet natural, a visual language whose ideality made visible its spiritual qualities and whose naturalism translated those qualities into a piety more integrated with daily life. In this way, Renaissance artists (and humanists) offered merchant and courtly patrons more reassuring representations of both a more accessible, familiar, sacred world and a mankind raised toward God through its ethical and civic achievements.

One Point Perspective and the "Natural" Aesthetics of Renaissance Art

One point perspective was a pictorial system for making three-dimensional spaces on two-dimensional surfaces in ways which were both true to mathematics and to what seemed like plausible, "natural," visual experiences of the world. As such, perspective raised both the natural world and the traditionally flawed area of human sense perception to a new level of dignity and value. Because the new Renaissance perspective aesthetics is fundamental to any understanding of Renaissance art and the impact of humanism, it is written up as a separate file in the folder on fifteenth-century Italy.

ⁱ In an excellent discussion of how Donatello drew on a classical and humanist tradition of writings on the dignity of man, Patricia Leach suggested that the metaphoric tradition was the only one in the middle ages. She quoted the mid-fourteenth century, the first Italian humanist, Petrarch, on physical beauty as a "burden for the spirit ... a useless decoration". Petrarch, of course, was also known for his many lyric poems extolling outward beauty. In any case, Leach's generalization should be modified in light of William Diebold's unpublished comments about a physical *Imago dei* in Byzantine and Carolingian iconoclastic controversies, and my own reading of late medieval courtly love poems, especially Gottfried's *Tristan and Isolde* where an aesthetic of physical beauty is frequently grounded in God's workmanship.

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ⁱⁱⁱ Boccaccio, *The Corbaccio*, trans. Anthony Cassell, Binghamton, 1975, p. 35.

^{iv} Christine de Pizan, *The Book of the City of Ladies*, Book II.22, Persea Books, p. 147

^v Erasmus, *Colloquies*, University of Chicago Press, p. 94

^{vi} Francesco Guicciardini, *Elsewhere*, Guicciardini made an exception for republics free from imperial ambitions. See his *Ricord*, Series B, no 95, *Maxims and Reflections of a Renaissance Statesman*, trans. Nicolai Rubenstein, Harper and Row, 1965, p. 119.