Christopher S. Celenza

Humanism and the Classical Tradition

Two approaches can be employed and synthesized to understand the problem of humanism and its complex origins in the ancient western world. The first approach is source-based: through etymology and history one can come to an understanding of what western thinkers have believed about terms like “humanity,” “human,” and so on. The second approach is more explicit about the commitments of the present-day interpreter but necessarily less precise when it comes to sources. If one believes in the existence of something we can locate as “human” (beyond biological differentiation); that this human factor is a motivating force for action in the world; and that this conception of what is “human” is something worth defending, then it makes sense to look retrospectively and find earlier adumbrations, even implicit ones, of what one currently takes to be characteristic and defensible about humanity.

Until recently, one would not have needed to state the seemingly self-evident proposition that something called “human” exists. Now, however, one is presented with a world in which the use of psychotropic drugs to manipulate serotonin levels in the brain is a widely accepted practice, and the increasingly frequent de facto genetic selection occurring among certain segments of the population is carried out through artificial fertilization. In short, the existence of a stable human “self” has been called into question by an ethically neutral, evolving natural science, to such a point that some current thinkers are speaking of “our post-human future” (Fukuyama) and others can find no clear dividing line between human beings and animals (Singer). It may be the case that reaching back into the classical past can help us discover some of the roots of a

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1 I would like to thank Anna H. Celenza, Paul Richard Blum, Massimo Lollini, and the Editor of this journal for their useful input.

2 Giustiniani and Ramminger, for example, each focus on the etymological aspects of the question; whereas Buck collects sources from antiquity through modern times that reflect a wide range of thought on what it has meant to be “human” and thus of what “humanism” might consist. See also Blum, 21-43, and Toussaint for two recent important perspectives on humanism.

3 Fukuyama examines the intersections among law and human rights questions in the context of evolving science; whereas Singer prefers to stress the similarities between humans and certain orders of animals (they share the capacity to suffer and seek to avoid suffering) rather than differences (such as discursive verbal reasoning, which Singer sees as a matter of degree rather than of ontological difference).

much later tradition that proclaims, unashamedly, the existence of and respect for the human.

The word “humanism” was first used in a fully theorized way in 1808 when the German educator Friedrich Immanuel Niethammer (1766-1848) employed it to argue for the importance of a secondary educational system based on the Greek and Roman classics. A contemporary and colleague of Johann Gottlieb Fichte at Jena, Niethammer was later appointed minister for education for the protestant confession in Bavaria. The demands of this role led him to write a short, polemical book that pitted what was termed Philanthropinismus versus Humanismus. “Philanthropinism” was a style of education developed in the middle of the eighteenth century in the German-speaking world that emphasized freedom in children’s education, with a focus on sports and seemingly practical subjects. “Humanism,” for Niethammer, stood in contrast to this notion. It reflected a love for classical languages, especially Greek, and a belief that the ancient, classical world was the most useful reference point for bringing the minds of young learners to their fullest human potential. Niethammer’s use of the term “humanism” has a complicated history, rooted as it is in the educational politics of the fast-changing world of Napoleonic Europe. Still, his adoption of the term and his defense of the ideals he believed implicit in it invite us to return to its ancient roots, and to two Latin words, “humanitas” (humanity) and “humanus” (human).

Writing once an age of classicism had been completed in the late second century CE, Aulus Gellius discussed the term “humanitas” in his miscellanistic work, the Attic Nights:

Qui verba Latina fecerunt quique his probe usi sunt, ‘humanitatem’ non id esse voluerunt, quod volgus existimat quodque a Graecis philantropia dicitur et significat dexteritatem quandam benevolentiamque erga omnis homines promiscam, sed ‘humanitatem’ appellaverunt id propemodum, quod Graeci paideian vocant, nos eruditionem institutionemque in bonas artis dicimus. Quas qui sinceriter cupiunt adpetuntque, hi sunt vel maxime humanissimi. Huius enim scientiae cura et disciplina ex universis animantibus uni homini data est idcircoque ‘humanitas’ appellata est. Sic igitur eo verbo veteres esse usus et cumbirimis M. Varronem Marcumque Tullium omnes ferme libri

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4 See Niethammer; Campano; Kristeller. The first occurrence of the word “Humanismus” seems to have been in 1798; it was then that Johann Friedrich Abegg (1765-1840, from 1819 professor of theology at the University of Heidelberg) used the term in a travel diary, as he recounted a conversation with a friend, Johann Georg Scheffner (1736-1820). Scheffner is reported as having asked Abegg “about the University of Heidelberg and whether humanism is also read [i.e., taught] there.” (“Er [i.e., Scheffner] erkundigte sich auch nach der Heidelberger Universität, und ob auch da über Humanismus geseheit würde.”) Abegg responded to his friend: “No, they do not love fine wines and their spirits.” (“Nein, sie lieben die feinen Weine u. ihren Spiritus nicht.”) Abegg 235-36.

5 See Schauer for the remainder of this paragraph.
declarant. Quamobrem satis habui unum interim exemplum promere. Itaque verba posui Varronis e libro rerum humanarum primo, cuius principium hoc est: 'Praxiteles, qui propter artificium egregium nemini est paulum modo humaniori ignotus. 'Humaniori' inquit non ita, ut vulgo dicitur, facili et tractabili et benivolvo, tametsi rudis litterarum sit - hoc enim cum sententia nequaquam convenit -, sed eruditori doctiorique, qui Praxitelem, quid fuerit, et ex libris et ex historia cognoverit. 6

There he wrote that those who use Latin correctly (as opposed to the crowd) distinguish the word "humanitas" from the Greek philanthropia, which means a benevolent love toward all men. The truer meaning of the Latin word, he suggests, is closer to Greek paideia, which "we," he continues, "call learning and education in the liberal arts.... In fact, the devotion to this kind of knowledge and the method that results from it has been given to man alone, out of all living creatures." He then offers an example from Varro (116-26 BCE), who had written that the famous Greek sculptor "Praxiteles is unknown to no one who is in the least bit humane." Gellius then concludes that "humane" here means someone who is well instructed and learned, who knows who Praxiteles was through books and through history.

It is clear from this citation that one principal meaning of the term "humanitas" in antiquity was bound up primarily with learning, a sphere admittedly proper to human beings but not one, equally clearly, in which all human beings partook. To be "humane" (humanus) meant only not to be a human being but also to have exercised one's capacity as a human being to the fullest through learning. "Humanism," then, with reference to the classical tradition, can be thought of as a respect for the authoritative and exemplary status of the classical, Greco-Roman world. It is in these senses, the

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6 See Gellius 13.17: "Those who created the Latin language and who have used it correctly did not mean what the crowd means by the term 'humanity' and what in Greek is called 'philanthropia', meaning a certain benevolent indulgence toward all men without distinction. Rather, by 'humanity' they meant something like what the Greeks term 'paideia' and what we mean when we speak of education and initiation into the liberal arts. Those who singlemindedly long for and strive after the liberal arts, these especially are 'humanissimi' [most humane]. Indeed, cultivation and learning in this type of knowledge has been given to man alone from among all animate beings and is therefore called 'humanity'. This is the way, then, that the ancients, and especially Varro and Cicero, employed this word, as almost all books clearly state. For this reason it suffices for the moment for me to offer one example. So, I have taken the following words from the beginning of Varro's Antiquities, which begins like this: 'Praxiteles, who, because of his exceptional artistic talent, is unknown to no one who is in the least bit 'human' [humanior]. 'Humane' here does not mean, as commonly said, 'accommodating', 'amenable', and 'benevolent' but at the same time ignorant of literature — for this would not agree in any way with Varro's meaning. Instead, it means 'well educated' and 'rather learned': someone who would know, through books and history, who Praxiteles was."
authoritative and the exemplary, that the classical world is conceived of as worthy of imitation, exegesis, and, most importantly, constant re-interpretation. In any case, Gellius’s historical position, toward the end of the classical period, suggests that one needs to return to certain key ancient authors who formed his background to flesh out these diverse themes related to the human.

“Man is the measure of all things, of the things that are, that they are, and of things that are not, that they are not.” Protagoras (c. 490–420 BCE), a traveling and highly respected teacher of rhetoric (or “sophist”), is reported by Plato to have made this statement. On the face of things Protagoras seems to remove the possibility of objective knowledge by reducing knowledge to individual perception. It was in his key dialogue on epistemology, the *Theaetetus*, that Plato had the interlocutor Socrates attribute this statement to Protagoras (*Theaetetus* 152a, in *Platonis Opera* 1). Protagoras’s sentiment and Plato’s report together tell us much about the emerging trajectory of thought on the human in the ancient world. For in the fifth century BCE, in the world of the *polis*, it became apparent that, in these small, face-to-face societies, the power to persuade one’s fellow citizens represented a key to worldly success and glory; and indeed, rhetoric, the art of persuasion, became a cornerstone of ancient education, which remained predominantly rhetorical until late antiquity. Sophists like Protagoras purported to be able to teach their students not only how to persuade people, but also to speak on any possible topic, “to make,” as Protagoras is also reported to have said, “the weaker argument the stronger” (Diels and Kranz 80b6). This connection between the sphere of language and what was considered proper to humanity remained a strong one from classical times onward. However, since it is possible to persuade people of things that are not only not salutary but even, at times, seemingly immoral, the sophists naturally provoked reactions, even if those reactions did not, at the time, decisively change the oratorical character of ancient society.

The most influential reaction to these relativistic ideas was that of Plato. Plato wrote in the inherently ambiguous genre of dialogue, and he did not set forth what to a later age might seem a “systematic” philosophy. He did, however, maintain throughout his dialogues a powerfully influential notion: that a doctrine or set of practices that assumed that the purely human represented a guideline for morally productive truth could never be satisfactory. Since opinions, perceptions, and judgments varied from person to person, if no standard beyond what we individually perceive could be found, then human beings were doomed to perpetual strife, guided as they must be by the ungrounded opinions of a capricious crowd. In his *Republic*, Plato presented, in his celebrated myth of the cave, a description of humanity radically opposed to the one seemingly implicit in Protagoras’s view (Plato, *Republica*, 514a-520a,

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7 On the birth of the notion of “systematic” philosophy in the eighteenth century and the way this notion has retrospectively colored the historiography of philosophy, see Catana.
Platonis Opera 4). Plato asks his readers, again through Socrates, to imagine people in a cave. Its inhabitants sit with their backs to the entryway facing the interior wall opposite the cave's opening. They see in front of them only shadows of the real beings who are acting and moving around outside the cave. They "believe reality to be nothing other than the shadows of the artificial objects," since the shadows projected on the wall in front of them imitate only imperfectly the realities dwelling outside (Plato, Respublica 515c, Platonis Opera 4).

Plato’s confrontation with the sophists reminds us of an important point about "humanism," especially as it is grounded in the classical tradition. No ancient figure held as axiomatic the notion that human beings and the human world alone provide a sufficient grounding for the determination of absolute (as opposed to practical or plausible) truth. The sophists were concerned with technique and with what "worked;" whether the gods existed or not was not typically a question they asked (Romilly). Persuasion and the vagaries of everyday human life could indeed be successfully based on the contingencies of human language. It was not, however, until recently that this rhetorically based model of truth acquisition in ethical matters — that is, focusing on the human shorn of any exterior referent — became associated with a style of thought that we can term "humanism." In short, members of what can be termed, with appropriate caution, the classical tradition hold almost universally that a reality greater than ours exists and that, in some measure, the measurement of truth for us must, however diversely, correspond to that greater reality.

Plato’s most important student, Aristotle (384-322 BCE), presented one of the most lasting guides to human behavior and conduct in his Nicomachean Ethics. There he established that human excellence (arête in Greek, what would become “virtue” in Latin and either “virtue” or “excellence” in English) consisted, in one fundamental respect, in action. One of Aristotle’s key notions was that of the hexis (“habitus” in Latin, “habit,” “disposition,” or even “capacity” in English). For Aristotle a hexis is a trained and trainable capacity brought from potentiality to actuality by action. Human “virtue” (arête) is a hexis: thus, for instance, we are not born naturally brave, but we become brave by the repeated performance of brave acts, even as we all possess the hexis for bravery. Similarly with justice: “It is in the course of our common interchange with our fellow-men that we become just or unjust [...]” (Aristotle, Ethica Nicomachea 2.1, 1103b14-16).

Aristotle’s doctrine of the virtues entails activity on the part of a human being, and it is important to note that this activity can be as much intra-mental as externalized. Aristotle essentially concludes the Nicomachean Ethics by arguing that, of all the possible lives one can pursue, the happiest will be the life of contemplation: action, but action of the mind. It is this life that makes one wise, and the wise man (provided he lives a complete life, that is, into old age) is the happiest man. He alone is self-sufficient, he alone can continue to practice his
own proper activity (contemplation) long after the possibility for physical action has worn itself thin, and he alone, finally, possesses the ability to engage in an activity that is practiced for its own sake (Aristotle, *Ethica Nicomachea* 10.7-8, 1177a12-1179a32).

Concerning certain fundamental questions, then, the two fountainheads of ancient philosophy agreed: the realm of the divine and the realm of the human are different, and one of the best tasks for the human being was “to become like a god” as Plato would have it or, with Aristotle, “to put on immortality.”8 The realm of the divine exists, and human beings can partake of it to a greater or lesser degree depending on their conduct. It was impossible to imagine a cosmos without the divine. Plato, disillusioned with the phenomenological world, wrote literary works in many of which he seems to devalue certain worldly pursuits or to suggest that the practitioners of those pursuits, living unreflectively, did not understand the subsistent truths with which they engaged as they practiced their activities. Aristotle, by contrast, was not so dour about the day-to-day world. He sketched in his *Nicomachean Ethics* a vision of the ethical life in which, though he deemed the contemplative way of life best, it was clear that worldly pursuits could and should be carried out well, that is, with a concern for the other human beings with whom the individual interacted both in private and in public.

After Plato and Aristotle, Stoics, Epicureans, and Skeptics all contributed in their own way to defining the realm of the human with respect to the divine. The Stoics grounded their ethics in the practice of virtues, which were thought of as interlinked, so that one could not really possess one virtue without possessing them all. The Stoics conceived of an exemplary figure, the “sage” (*spoudaios* or *sophos*) who practiced perfect virtue and whose soul was free of disturbance. This “sage,” as such, could not be found in the daily world, so the “philosopher” was conceived as one who attempted to live “coherently” (*homologoumenos*), balancing a concern for the virtues with philosophical inquisitiveness.9 Epicureans conceived of pleasure as the highest human good and object of striving, but pleasure was regarded in a particular way, as having one’s desires satisfied. The fewer desires one had, the more easily one could satisfy them, and the more one could experience true pleasure, or more accurately for Epicurus, *ataraxia*: calmness, impassiveness, or the freedom from disturbance.10 Self-discipline allowed one to reduce desire. Skeptics believed that the central problem of human life lay in the difficulty of finding an adequate criterion of

8 See Plato, *Theaetetus* 176b1-2, in *Platonis Opera* 1; and Aristotle, *Ethica Nicomachea*, 10.7 (1177b33). On the commonalities between the two philosophers (and the way these were understood as such in late antiquity), see Gerson, “What is Platonism?” and *Aristotle and other Platonists*.

9 See Hadot 73-77; and Sellars 15-54. In general, on the Hellenistic schools, see Long; for texts, Long and Sedley.

10 See Epicurus, *Epistulae* 1, in Usener 30.
truth: the human senses are deceptive, satisfactory answers to life’s most difficult questions are hard to find, and opinions vary endlessly. Given these factors, they strongly affirmed that one could and should doubt almost everything on the level of absolute truth and be contented, instead, with the realm of the plausible.

These three Hellenistic schools of philosophy contributed to defining what is proper to human activity, and they had as a major focus of their ethical doctrines a conception of human life that functioned independently of the divine. Yet again, members of all three schools did not deny that there existed truths higher than human truths. For the Stoics, the cosmos was ruled by an ineluctable fate. For the Epicureans, the divine existed, though as one of the school’s most famous exponents, Lucretius (c. 99-5 BCE), put it, “without any pain or danger, strong with its own resources and needing nothing of ours, that very divine nature is enticed by no prize and untouched by anger” (Lucretius, 2.646-51). For the Skeptics, an absolute truth was assumed to exist; it was simply not our province to know it.

This multifaceted Greek philosophical inheritance found its way into classical Latin sources, especially through Cicero (106-43 BCE), who synthesized and culturally translated Greek ideas for his Roman audience. Through different philosophical works, usually dialogues held among a number of interlocutors and set dramatically over more than one day, basic doctrines associated with Platonism, Aristotelianism, Stoicism, Epicureanism, and Skepticism became available to the Roman world. Cicero also brought to the fore the rhetorical concern that had been a part of the Greek inheritance, explicitly in the case of the sophists and implicitly in Plato’s carefully dialogical strategies for guiding his readers’ and listeners’ appropriation of his messages. Cicero saw language and the ability to persuade one’s fellow citizens as the distinguishing mark of humanity. As he wrote in On the Orator, “It is in this one respect that we stand out most especially from beasts: we converse among ourselves, and we can explain what we have felt by means of speech.”11 Here and elsewhere Cicero echoes a commonplace found in Greek authors, such as Isocrates and Aristotle, that although other animate beings may supersede humans in strength, swiftness, and so on, it is the power of language that distinguishes humanity.12

Still, although these sentiments were relative commonplaces, Cicero’s appropriation of them is notable for two reasons. First, Cicero’s function as a cultural mediator between the Greek and Latin worlds meant that he consolidated the notion, inherited from the Greeks, that there was a realm of activity separate from the divine that was proper to humans, even as human

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11 Cicero, De oratore 1.8.32: “Hoc enim uno praestamus vel maxime feris, quod colloquimur inter nos et quod exprimere dicendo sensa possimus.”
12 See Aristotle, Politica 1253a9; and Isocrates, Nicocles 5-6, in idem, Cyprian Orations.
beings needed to recognize their obligations to the divine. Second, owing to the Latin language’s subsequent domination in western history as a language of culture, it was through Cicero that much of ancient philosophy was known to the west until the fifteenth century. In Cicero, too, we see the use of the word “humanus” (“humane”) to signify learning and culture, as we can see in the following example in his De divinatione, where “humanam” is paired synonymously with “doctam:” “Gentem quidem nullam video neque tam humanam atque doctam neque tam immanem tamque barbaram, quae non significari futura et a quibusdam intellegi praedicique posse censeat.” 13 We are reminded again of the ancient determination that the propensity to focus on intellectual cultivation is what makes one most fully human.

A balance can be perceived in the pre-Christian ancient world between regard for a properly human sphere and respect toward the divine; to the divine, human beings owed allegiance but not constant devotion. This balance shifted in the early Christian era, as the legatees of the classical tradition took what they had inherited from the ancients (a concern for ethical human action combined with the notion of a supreme being who stood above all divinity) and combined these elements with the teachings of an important figure, the Jewish sage Jesus of Nazareth. Believed by his followers to be divine, Jesus represented the wonder-working sage well known to classical antiquity but with a difference: in his teachings he emphasized the merits of the downtrodden, creating an ethics of humility rarely glimpsed in the ancient world. He preached a supreme being who was at once an omnipotent arbiter of justice as well as a personal god, interested in individuals who, even the humblest among them, would be rewarded in the afterlife according to their conduct on earth.

Though Jesus himself did not consciously weave into his thought elements from the classical tradition, one of his followers in the Jesus movement, Paul of Tarsus, did. The Platonic notion of our world being only a reflection of a greater, truer one that transcends earthly reality was given famous expression in Paul’s first Letter to the Corinthians. There, as Paul wrote of the gifts of the Holy Spirit, he suggested that human beings in their earthly lives would only experience one of those divine gifts, “love” (agape), as if it were reflected “in a mirror, darkly,” but that someday, released from the body’s prison, one would experience divine love “face to face” (1 Cor. 13). To experience this love and divine beatitude, however, one needed also to have divine grace, itself another gift from God. One could never be certain one had received this gift.

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13 Cicero, De divinatione 1.1.2: “Indeed I do not discern a people who are so humane and learned or so rude and barbarous that they do not think that future events can be made known and, by some, understood and predicted.” A similar parallel usage of “doctus” and “humanus” occurs in Cicero’s In Verrem 2.4.98: “Haec Scipio ille non intellegebat, homo doctissimus atque humanissimus: tu sine ulla bona arte, sine humanitate, sine ingenio, sine litteris, intellegis et iudicas!”
Various writings of one of the foremost exponents of the Pauline position in the early Christian world, Augustine (354-430 CE), set the tone for how western thinkers might approach the issue of grace in the centuries to come. If, that is, one posited God as absolutely omnipotent, omniscient, and infinite, it was difficult to see how human beings, finite as they were, could earn the gift of grace. A shift had occurred: the worlds of transcendence that had been part of the classical heritage (whether adumbrated through myth by Plato or extrapolated on the plane of logic and deductive reasoning by Aristotle) were now theorized extensively and anchored in the notion of a supremely powerful being who was in charge of the world He had created. From the unarticulated but powerfully functional assumption that human beings were basically in control of what happened to them in the world of their day-to-day existence, a new notion arose: not by any means that one should be irresponsible, that wickedness could be excused, or even that human beings lacked free will. Rather, this shift implied that, while the human world mattered, there was a larger world that mattered more; from the earliest Christian writings on and definitively with Augustine, one could view one’s life as a pilgrimage toward eternity rather than as an end in itself. In the west, importantly, this shift also became institutionalized, as Christianity became the religion of the Roman Empire, definitively by the end of the fourth century and the reign of Theodosius (347-95, r. 379-95).

The vestiges of what we can call humanism were thenceforth preserved in texts, even as classically influenced conceptions of what it meant to be a human being (within and in relation to a framework shaped and articulated by the divine) became part of western social memory. Monasteries did the vital work of copying and transmitting these texts, with major centers emerging in the era of Charlemagne (742/7-814).14 During the early middle ages, much of Greek literature and philosophy was lost, and the number of thinkers who were skilled in both classical languages declined dramatically.15 In the eleventh through thirteenth centuries, many of Aristotle’s works were translated, sometimes from the Greek, sometimes from Arabic intermediaries.16 The rise of medieval cathedral schools and eventually universities, along with the communities of intellectuals that naturally gathered around those institutions, meant that in Western Europe there ensued a rediscovery of the “auctores,” or “authors,” through which the canon of Latin classical texts was increased.17

Certain intellectuals of this period, most notably John of Salisbury (1115-

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14 For an overview, see Bischoff.
15 For an overview, see Berschin.
16 See the texts in the Aristoteles Latinus project, in Minio-Paluello, ed.
17 Standard treatments evolved from late antiquity onward to approach the auctores, to such a point that by the era of the high middle ages these “approaches” or “accessus” were formulaic (Quain).
demonstrated a lively interest in classical texts (Nederman; and Liebeschutz). In addition, one feature of humanism emerged that would become particularly important in fifteenth-century Italy: the tendency to question established canons of texts and to add to them in the service of a better human life. When John of Salisbury satirized contemporary logicians in his Metalogicon, he was not criticizing the discipline of logic as such, which he deemed a “happy and fruitful branch of knowledge.” Instead he was advocating a return to the (for him) broader principles, techniques, and overall mindset of one of the other three members of the trivium, grammar, which he conceived as the “origin of all the liberal disciplines,” the “cradle of all philosophy” and the “first wet-nurse of all literate pursuit.” His targets had made the mistake, not of studying logic, but of making it the field in which “they consumed their entire life.” Restricting their pursuit of human wisdom too extensively, they had cut themselves off from branches of learning that could make them wiser individuals, allowing their pursuits to be conditioned by institutional imperatives rather than by a dispassionate pursuit of human wisdom. Certain thinkers, and John of Salisbury is one, show that the ability grew in this period to theorize aspects particular to humanity as benefits in themselves.

Evolving humanism lacked a key element, however, until intellectuals began to be stylistically self-conscious of the language they used for their major works, Latin. The late thirteenth century saw a group of thinkers centered in northern Italy, especially the city of Padua, who consciously attempted to imitate classical Latin. Spurred on by the enthusiasm for classical texts present in the world of the French schools and universities, they derived contacts to that world both through travel to the University of Paris and by contact with traveling poets. These early humanists were the direct ancestors of those more commonly considered Renaissance humanists. Comparatively little known today, thinkers such as Lovato dei Lovati (1240/41-1309) and Albertino Mussato (1261-1329) wrote poetic works in Latin in which they consciously attempted to reproduce ancient Latin style. Beyond stylistics they focused their enthusiasms largely on secular matters. For example, Lovato “discovered” the

18 Salisbury 2.7.1-2: “Non tamen ut in logicam invehar haec propono, scientia enim iucunda est et fructuosa […]; also 1.13. My attention was drawn to John of Salisbury by an excellent forthcoming study of Francesco Caruso.
19 Salisbury 1.13.5-8: “[…] est enim grammatica scientia recte loquendi scribendique, et origo omnium liberalium disciplinarum. Eadem quoque est totius philosophiae cunabulum, et ut ita dixerim, totius litteratorii studii altrix prima.”
20 Salisbury,2.7.1-5: “[…] et in ea quam solam profitentur non decennium aut vicennium sed totam consumperunt aetatem.”
21 This point has been made forcefully by Ronald G. Witt, who argues for a definition of humanism focused on the imitation of classical Latin.
location of the tomb of the ancient Trojan hero Antenor in Padua (in the city’s cathedral), mining classical sources and conferring legitimacy on the city-state as he did so (Witt 56). These thinkers and their direct heirs provided the essential background for the person who made humanism a European phenomenon in the fourteenth century, Francesco Petrarca.

Petrarch (1304-74) possessed Florentine family origins, though after only a few years in Tuscany he was raised in southern France in the environment of the papal court, which by the year 1308 was located in Avignon.22 His father, a notary, had gone there after having been exiled in the same series of political purges that drove Dante Alighieri from Florence. From his youth Petrarch possessed a conflicted sense of exile: not literal of course, but, perhaps because of his deracinated upbringing, for the first time we see a figure who, as Michel de Montaigne would do two centuries later, unabashedly took his own life as his subject matter. Petrarch united two passions without which no contemporary intellectual movement could hope to thrive, given prevailing social norms; and he added a third, which became a hallmark of the best Renaissance humanists. First, he engaged without reservation the contemporary, growing fascination with classical antiquity. Petrarch became an excellent Latinist, and in doing so, he saw distinctly that the Latin then in use, in the Church and in universities, did not seem to match in style the Latin he found in classical Roman sources. As he did pioneering philological work (on the text of Livy, for example), he also allowed this passion for antiquity to fuel a new historical sense.23 His letters to long-departed ancient figures, such as those to Cicero, represent his affective connection with the past coupled with a historical sense that the past in question is long gone. There is a reason that Petrarch habitually signed off those letters by designating himself “apud superos” — “in the land of the living.”24 Petrarch realized the great distance between himself and the ancients, sometimes lamented it, but never allowed that distance to go unrecognized.

The second factor that fueled Petrarch’s humanism was his preoccupation with religion. Thinkers of the two intellectual generations before Petrarch had been fascinated with the classical world; they had embraced a precise and classicizing Latinity, and they had shared in the evolving historical sense that grew along with this love of classical sources. Petrarch, however, took these engagements and redirected them. He drew inspiration from classical sources (both pagan and Christian) in his constant, self-directed quest to become a better person, which for him meant becoming a better Christian. He derided contemporary scholastic philosophers (with the rhetorical exaggeration characteristic of his age) not only for their un-classical Latin style, but also because, in focusing, he claimed, too exclusively on non-Christian sources of

22 For overviews on Petrarch’s life, see Dotti; Wilkins.
23 For Petrarch and Livy, see Billanovich.
24 His letters to Cicero can be found in Petrarch, Le familiari, ed. Rossi, 24.3 and 24.4.
philosophy, they actually veered dangerously close to rejecting true Christianity.25

Petrarch’s religiosity was related directly and inevitably to his historical sense, and it teaches an important lesson to anyone who might ahistorically equate humanism with anti-religiosity. If there is anything permanent and enduring about humanism, it is this: its leading figures, in whatever epoch, have always had the ability to situate themselves convincingly, effectively, and unflinchingly in the present. In Petrarch’s day, an integral part of this “present” was, in the west, Christianity. This is not to say that Petrarch necessarily supported institutional Christianity or its various epiphenomena, such as the papal court (which Petrarch lambasted in his letter-collection entitled Sine nomine, “Without a Name” as having abandoned its true mission) or certain segments of contemporary universities leading to the teaching of theology, the “Queen of the sciences.”26

This anti- or extra-institutional bent represents the third formative aspect of Petrarch’s humanism and the one that lasted most durably throughout humanism’s history. Petrarch’s life was marked by itinerancy. He tended to travel where patronage was available, working at different times for a cardinal, the Visconti despots of Milan, the Carrara of Padua, and the republic of Venice. Clearly, he had various institutional affiliations, and yet he still managed to express his own viewpoints in his writings. He expressed his identity as an intellectual from a deliberately extra-institutional vantage point. Petrarch served as the first humanist in Renaissance Europe to point out the dangerous sterility of intellectual orthodoxies, as he emphasized (in different forums and in diverse genres) the way that intellectuals, gathered in groups and institutionally enfranchised, allowed themselves to reproduce in a social sense, stifling creativity. The writings of Renaissance humanists after Petrarch did not, by and large, cause great changes in institutional structures (such as the methods of elementary and secondary education, those of university learning, or the papal court), but they did allow humanists to serve as a voice advocating critique of fixed ideas.

Humanists made an important inroad in their reform of Latin, the language of education, a reform whose consequences for the life of humanism thereafter were momentous. In the five intellectual generations after Petrarch in Italy, humanists succeeded in fundamentally changing the way Latin was employed.27 First, from Petrarch’s day through to the early fifteenth century and the generation of Coluccio Salutati (1331-1406), in recognizing that the Latin

25 His On his Own Ignorance presents the most vivid example of this latter tendency. See Petrarch, De sui ipsius et multorum ignorantia in Petrarch, Opere latine 2. 1025-151.
26 See Petrarch, Liber sine nomine (Piur).
27 For surveys of different aspects of this five-generation process, see Celenza (b) and Celenza (d).
currently in use did not match ancient Latin, humanists developed some of the tools we associate with historical thinking. Then, by the middle of the fifteenth century, humanists successfully imitated ancient Ciceronian Latin to such an extent that it became the gold standard of elite educations. In their dialogues, histories, orations, and letters, humanists such as Leonardo Bruni (1370-1444) and Poggio Bracciolini (1380-1459) turned humanism’s sharp critical eye on contemporary society and made Latin an acceptable vehicle for a new kind of literature.28

Italian humanism took a turn toward the philological in the mid to late fifteenth century, as its two most brilliant exponents, Lorenzo Valla (1405/7-57) and Angelo Poliziano (1454-94) went beyond the now achieved objective of successful imitation of classical Latin.29 Both wrote outstanding pieces of creative philosophical literature in Latin, with Valla concentrating much of his energy on what he perceived to be a Christianity gone astray. His penetrating dialogues, like his On Free Will (De libero arbitrio) or his On the Profession of the Religious (De professione religiosorum) ask of early modern Christianity’s most penetrating questions: How can it be that a supremely good being, God, seems to allow people, his creations, freely to choose to perform evil acts, when with His omnipotence He could easily prevent them from doing so? (Valla, De libero arbitrio). What is the nature of the status of those who have taken religious vows? Does their vow count as a meritorious work and therefore bring them closer ipso facto to heaven, or are Christians who have not taken a vow equally rewarded if they have lived a just life? (Valla, De professione religiosorum). Since these works are dialogues and thus at points strategically ambiguous, Valla’s messages, his powerful and controversial questioning, come through in a fashion that is more subterraneous than direct; the reader becomes another interlocutor and many opinions can be legitimately inferred (Celenza [a]: 85-100). Poliziano, an accomplished Tuscan poet, taught at the University of Florence, and he enjoyed at the same time Medici patronage. As he taught he wrote some of his most scintillating Latin works to accompany or to aid his teaching: sometimes these took the form of poetic introductions to the texts he was to teach in his courses, other times small but virtuosic solutions to textual problems in classical works which he then collected into his masterpiece of scholarship, the Miscellaniest, still other times lengthier introductions, or praelectiones to the texts of his course, written in precise, elegant, and highly individualistic Latin.

Finally, by the late fifteenth century the ability to write acceptably classical

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28 For recent literature on Bruni, see Hankins 1: 5-271; the classic biography of Poggio is still Walser, to which Fubini and Canfora should be added.
29 For recent literature on Valla, see the forum in the Journal of the History of Ideas 477-556, with essays by Bullard, Celenza (=Celenza [c]), Copenhaver, Regoliosi, and Struwever; Nauta, forthcoming; for literature on Poliziano, see Celenza (e).
Latin became routine among educated elites. Thereafter, the historical sense, the irony, the propensity to take the (sometimes imagined) position of the outsider in relation to existing intellectual institutions, all of these made their way outside of Italy, even as, within Italy, many of those inherently humanistic traits were transferred to the vernacular.

Part of the success of Italian Renaissance humanists had also to do with a factor that was, loosely speaking, curricular. In 1440, in a suggested library acquisitions list prepared for Cosimo de’ Medici, for the first time we see mentioned together a group of five, verbally-oriented academic subjects. These subjects (grammar, rhetoric, history, poetry, and moral philosophy, known together as the *studia humanitatis* or “the humanities”) had been at the unarticulated center of the humanist movement since Petrarch. They were at the center in the sense that these subjects were what humanists cared about most, the ones in which and through which they discovered, learned, and employed their new Latin style. They were the subjects to which humanists referred obliquely when they talked about “these studies of ours” (*haec nostra studia*), as did so many in correspondence with one another. Humanists, especially in the early phases of the movement, were not always able to implement this new curricular and stylistic ideal in their practical, day-to-day work as educators, secretaries to princes or cardinals, or governmental bureaucrats. Still, these verbal arts represented an important thread that remained woven deep within humanism’s genetic texture from this point onward.

Humanism as a movement for stylistic reform of Latin succeeded completely on the level of education. From the era of Pietro Bembo (1470-1547), who wrote the definitive work on the Italian vernacular in 1525 (*Prose della volgar lingua*), Latin and the vernacular came to have clearly defined places, both within Italy and without (Bembo). The vernacular, evaluated on classicizing lines, became a language suitable for serious intellectual work, in a way that only Latin previously had been. And the Tuscan vernacular (which became the basis for the Italian vernacular) was itself Latinized; as the fifteenth-century thinker Cristoforo Landino famously put it in the late 1460s, “whoever wants to be a good Tuscan must be a good Latin first.”

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30 Kristeller centered his definition of Renaissance humanism famously around these five subjects. Kohl traces the first time they are all used together in Parentucelli’s list.

At the same time, the basic language of western education remained Latin, and the Latin in use from the early sixteenth century onward in education was basically Ciceronian. It is an easy, relatively uncontroversial thing to trace the progress of certain subjects, such as the verbally oriented studia humanitatis. It is more difficult, but no less useful, to attempt to delineate how this classicizing verbal turn among certain intellectuals adumbrated what would turn out to be humanism’s greatest triumph: the definition and celebration of the individual human person, as a being in whom certain rights inhere precisely by virtue of being human. The full realization of this complex group of factors did not come to fruition until the eighteenth century.

In the meantime, Italian humanism’s main thrusts — a scholarly predilection for a purified Latinity, a delight in the recovery of ancient classical texts, a concern for source criticism, a dialogical, sometimes ambiguous irony fueled by history, and an occasional propensity to take the ironic posture of the iconoclastic outsider — took hold throughout early modern Europe in different ways. The most famous humanist of the early sixteenth century, Erasmus (1466-1536), gained lasting fame by his numerous works of scholarship, not least his editing of the New Testament in Greek and his providing, quite controversially, a new Latin translation, a corrective to the Vulgate then in use, on which his Italian forbear Lorenzo Valla had earlier worked with acuity.\textsuperscript{32} In his own Latin writings he provided beautifully written short works, his Colloquies, designed to help schoolboys learn their Latin.\textsuperscript{33} Erasmus combined creativity and scholarship in one of his bestselling works, the Adages — a collection, which grew with every new edition, of proverbs that Erasmus annotated and explained with scholarly virtuosity.\textsuperscript{34} His fame was diffused throughout the learned world by constant letter-writing; today, his letters illuminate invaluable the intellectual world of Renaissance humanism (Erasmus, Opus Epistolarum). His most lasting work, the Praise of Folly, served as a summing up of earlier Renaissance humanism. In it, Erasmus recapitulated Italian humanism’s penchant for a deliberately dialogical type of philosophizing, whereby the reader is made into a silent but powerful interlocutor: the narrator, “Folly,” is as such inherently unreliable, but she skewers mercilessly and humorously institutionalized learning and religion in a way that would have been familiar to Erasmus’s fifteenth-century Italian forebears. The work looks forward as well, in the sense that its boldness highlights a freedom of thought and expression soon to be

\textit{esser\`e latino chi vuole essere buono toscano [my emph.].}” For the dating, see Cardini 334-41.

\textsuperscript{32} For Erasmus’s work on the New Testament, see Bentley; Rummel; Erasmus, eds. Reeve and Screech; and Chomarat 1: 541-86,

\textsuperscript{33} See Erasmus, Colloquies in Erasmus, \textit{CWE} 39-40; and Chomarat 2: 849-930.

\textsuperscript{34} See Erasmus, \textit{Adages} in Erasmus, \textit{CWE} 31-36; Erasmus, \textit{Adagia}, in Erasmus, \textit{Op.Om.}, 2nd “ordo,” 8 volumes projected; Phillips; and Chomarat 2:761-82.
extinguished by the forces of religious zealotry. All of Erasmus’s works were placed on the original 1559 Index of Prohibited Books; even though that judgment was soon modified and only some of his works condemned, Erasmus’s presence on the Index is still a phenomenon that signals that the broader intellectual underpinnings of Italian humanism would be transformed decisively.\textsuperscript{35}

Early modern vernacular literature took some of the tendencies of Italian humanism and made them more broadly available. Michel de Montaigne (1533-92), who “never saw a greater monster or miracle” than himself, wrote his \textit{Essays} to express his innermost feelings and predilections even as he was well aware of the impressions these would foster in the world of possible elite readers, accustomed as many were to norms of social restraint which had taken hold of elite Europe in the growing age of sovereign states.\textsuperscript{36} Montaigne’s self-scrutiny represented one result of the occasional focus on the individual that reached back to the days of Petrarch. Another result of humanism’s growth was the continued interest in the kind of philological scholarship at which Poliziano had been adept. Figures like Isaac Casaubon (1559-1614) and Joseph Scaliger (1540-1609) brought their immense erudition to bear on a variety of Greek and Latin texts and produced definitive, lasting critical editions.\textsuperscript{37} In doing so, they and others like them laid the groundwork for the encyclopedic scholarship characteristic of the Enlightenment.

In turn, Enlightenment thinkers of various stripes, informed by ancient

\textsuperscript{35} The early index divided its entries into three categories: (1) authors who should be entirely prohibited, (2) authors only some of whose works should be prohibited, and (3) anonymous books, dangerous to the faithful, that should be prohibited. The first 1559 Index placed Erasmus in the first category; see Index, 1559, A9v: “Desiderius Erasmus Roterodamus cum uniuersis Commentarisi, Annotationibus, Scholios, Dialogis, Epistolis, Censuris, Versionibus, Libris, et scriptis suis, etiam si nil penitus contra Religionem, vel de Religione contineant.” Erasmus was soon transferred in mitigated versions to the second category; still, the \textit{Praise of Folly} remained. Here, for example, is the 1564 version published by Paolo Manuzio at Rome (Index, 1564: 33-4 [misnumbered as 37-38]: “Desiderii Erasmi Roterodami \textit{Colloquiorum} liber, \textit{Moria, Lingua, Christiani matrimonii institutio, De interdicto esu carnium}, eiusdem \textit{Paraphrasis in Matthaeum} quae a Bernardino Tomitano in Italicam linguam conversa est, cetera vero opera ipsius, in quibus de religione tractat, tamen prohibita sint, quamdui a facultate Theologica Parisiensi vel Lovaniensi expurgata non fuerint. \textit{Adagia} vero ex ea editione quam molitum Paulus Manutius, permittentur. Interim vero quae iam edita sunt, expunctis locis suspectis iudicio alicuius facultatis Theologicae universitatis Catholicae vel Inquisitionis alicuius generalis, permittantur.”

\textsuperscript{36} For the quotation, Montaigne, \textit{Essais} 3.11, \textit{Oeuvres} 1.1002-13, at 1006: “Je n’ai veu monstre et miracle au monde plus exprès que moy-mesmes.”

\textsuperscript{37} For context, see Wilamowitz-Moellendorff 46-55; Reynolds and Wilson 176-77; on Scaliger, see Grafton.
sources and having fully assimilated what was then available, went on to provide the foundations of modern humanism by coming to certain conclusions about the nature of the human person. The late eighteenth century saw the theory of the individual take shape effectively, for it was only then that the concept of the individual was buttressed in practice by its eventual inclusion in law. It is one thing to talk about “the good” or “the good for human life” in the style of Plato or Aristotle. It is quite another to consider an individual human person, precisely by virtue of being a person, to be endowed with certain human rights, rights that the person has outside of any historically specific political arrangement.

Such was the argument for the “law of nature” that John Locke (1632-1704) made in his Second Treatise on Government: in a state of nature all beings of the same species are equal on a basic level. So too with people, “sharing all in one Community of Nature, there cannot be supposed any such Subordination among us [...]. Every one as he is bound to preserve himself, and not to quit his Station wilfully; so by the like reason when his own Preservation comes not in competition, ought he, as much as he can, to preserve the rest of Mankind, and may not unless it be to do Justice on an Offender, take away, or impair the life, or what tends to the Preservation of the Life, the Liberty, Health, Limb or Goods of another.” The argument Locke is making here in defense of a conception of inalienable rights of life, liberty, and property, stands both as a synthetic recapitulation of past traditions and as the point of departure for modern theories of human rights.

The notion that, since there could be no universally agreed-upon set of pre-existing natural laws (and hence that all human beings are in principle free), coupled with the idea that there is no universal standard for determining relative value among individuals (and hence that all human beings are equal) led, by the late eighteenth century, to an historically unique theory of the human. This theory, which has never, as yet, been fully adhered to in practice, formed the basis for the development in the west of theories of human (eventually civil) rights which were then instantiated into legal systems. This entire process can be said to have its own internalist history, with elements being either adumbrated or present in ancient Greek democracy, Roman republicanism, early, high, and late medieval legal theory, Italian humanism, and Huguenot thought. Still, it was not until the late eighteenth century that the full complex of these theories was both realized and made into a program for political action, itself supported by both laws and (as Lynn Hunt has recently argued) by affective consent, which is harder to document but no less important.38

One can add, parenthetically, that thinkers such as John Locke, Voltaire (1694-1778), and Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712-78), obviously differed in many

38 See Hunt; for earlier antecedents, Skinner, The Foundations and idem, Liberty before Liberalism; Pocock; Tierney; and Tuck.
respects, but in one they were united: they agreed that many of the social structures that evolve as people gather into groups can become stale, intellectually sterile, and even patently immoral in their effects. Since there were limits to human understanding, it was important to come to an understanding of what those limits were and then base one’s theories and actions on the limits of that sphere.

These notions (focusing on the individual, aiming a critical eye on the behavior of people when gathered into groups, decrying empty ritual for the sake of ritual) tended naturally to a lack of respect for traditional religion and a corresponding fear that the place of the transcendent would be erased from human life. In response to the seemingly anti-religious tendencies of British empiricism (especially in the case of Hume) and French Enlightenment anti-religiosity, German thinkers such as Johann Joachim Winckelmann (1717-68), Gotthold Ephraim Lessing (1729-81), Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (1749-1832), Friedrich Schiller (1759-1805), and others, all in their own way stressed the human, but they did so in a larger context.39 Themselves not lovers of traditional religion (in most cases Lutheranism), these thinkers drew inspiration from the ancient Greek world, finding there a love of harmony and beauty that they idealized. Early nineteenth-century thinkers such as Wilhelm von Humboldt (1767-1835) and Johann Gottlieb Fichte (1762-1814) helped to translate these predispositions into a pedagogical program, and it was out of this environment that the word “humanism,” Humanismus, has its origin.40 The centrality of the classical Hellenic world meant largely an idealization of Plato and the creation of Plato as predominantly a metaphysical rather than a dialogical thinker. Secure in the knowledge of the eternal transcendent forms, humankind could dedicate itself to the pursuit of beauty and virtue without the structures of organized religion but grounded in the knowledge that transcendence existed.

Another way to put this, and one from which many German thinkers drew inspiration, emerged from the philosophy of the infinite, expounded by Immanuel Kant (1722-1804). Humankind could be logically sure that something beyond the possible sphere of human experience existed but could never fully know it in this world, even as the existence of the infinite provided mystery and inspiration to those pursuing truth.41 It was on this trajectory that the modern

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39 For context, see Beiser.
40 For the classic work on German higher education reform, see Paulsen 2:210-47.
41 See, for one example, Kant, Kritik der reinen Vernunft, Werke, vols. 3 and 4, 4: 510-12 (=Schlussanmerkung zur ganzen Antinomie der reinen Vernunft), at 4: 510-11 “[…] So bald wir aber das Unbedingte […] in demjenigen setzen, was ganz außerhalb der Sinnenwelt, mithin außer aller möglichen Erfahrung ist, so werden die Ideen transzendent; sie dienen nicht bloß zur Vollendung des empirischen Vernunftgebruchs (der immer eine nie auszuführende, aber dennoch zu befolgende Idee bleibt), sondern sie
research university was set in the early nineteenth century, in the 1810 reform of the University of Berlin. Wilhelm von Humboldt conceived of “Wissenschaft” — as he said in an inaugural address — as “something not yet wholly discovered and never entirely discoverable, and that it must incessantly be sought as such” (Humboldt 377-78). “Wissenschaft” (knowledge, science, research), then, was also an infinite goal, whose constituent branches might all ramify each in their own way, each toward its own particular goal.

At the same time a radical change in the discipline of “philosophy” — so implicated in the question of humanism — occurred. Philosophy came to be seen as a regulative discipline, one that, in its ability to evaluate truth-claims, in effect stood above all the other truth-seeking fields (the reason why scholars in diverse disciplines all possess a “doctor of philosophy” degree); as such, many leading late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century thinkers believed that philosophy could serve as something like an umbrella for all of those fast developing and self-differentiating fields of humanistic endeavor. Philosophy also became professionalized in university settings, and as the first modern histories of philosophy were written, it was the metaphysical style of philosophy, associated with the idealization of Platonism, which received most emphasis.42

Late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century “Humanism,” or what is sometimes known as “neohumanism” (Neuhumanismus), became, in effect, idealism. Yet the encyclopedic, canon-expanding, and philological style of humanist thinking never died. One saw this style of thought in Valla and Poliziano, in the great early modern philologists, and even in the propensity toward encyclopedism that so entranced Enlightenment thinkers of all philosophical bents. Detail-oriented, this type of scholarship is inherently anti-

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42 Celenza (c) and Celenza (f); for professionalization in the teaching of philosophy, see Schneider.
metaphysical, suspicious of large umbrella-like theories which tend to obscure individual counter-examples, and is best seen in its modern form in the thought of Friedrich Nietzsche (1844–1900).

When it comes to humanism and the classical tradition, Nietzsche presents the beginnings of a problem that would bedevil humanist thinking in the twentieth century. Before writing his Birth of Tragedy, Nietzsche had received one of the best classical educations available in the neohumanist mode, at a classically oriented high school known as the Schulpforta in Naumburg, relatively near Leipzig and Halle. From his graduation onward, Nietzsche began publishing precise philological articles, and though the Birth of Tragedy signaled a departure in style, in substance throughout his career he remained a devotee of philology.43 For example, in his Genealogy of Morality, Nietzsche demolishes the notion that the ancient, pre-Socratic Greeks believed in an idealized transcendent world. For Homeric Greeks, he suggests, an action that they might have designated with the word “good” (agathos) did not mean that they believed that action somehow corresponded to a transcendent realm of “goodness” (a staple of the Platonic tradition, especially as this was refracted through German idealist interpretations). Instead, the Good, Nietzsche argued, represented no more than this: what the “good people,” the agathoi — in effect, the power-wielding nobility — did or deemed acceptable.44

The case of Nietzsche reminds us both that classically influenced humanism has had two different faces and that proponents of the extreme versions of those two sides have occasionally shown a propensity to veer off into extremes. On the one hand (to present the counter-Nietzschean strand first), the dignity of humankind can sometimes be raised, rhetorically, to such a metaphysical level that it becomes anti-historical. Celebratory “humanists” of this orientation idealize humanity to such an extent that they are forced to find and ultimately bow before transcendent realms unable to be accessed in the world of day-to-day life. Often they subscribe unreflectively to (in truth only recently solidified) canons of texts as representative of putatively eternal “traditions” that themselves are believed to reflect an eternal notion of what is “human.” The danger here is that one forgets the power of culture and history to shape events and becomes instead enamored of absolute ideas. Consequently real people (with all of their historically contingent, verifiably diverse cultures) are left out.

On the other hand, the philological side of humanism — the side whose representatives want to count every example and counter-example, to leave no text out, and to expand canons ever outward — tends when taken to extremes to set no limits and to veer off into nihilistic destructiveness. Here the danger is that, with no idealism of any sort, nothing is left unscathed, so that there is no

43 See Porter; and for the Geburt der Tragödie (Birth of Tragedy), see Nietzsche, Sämtliche Werke 1: 9-156.
44 Nietzsche, Zur Genealogie der Moral 1.5, Sämtliche Werke 5: 245-412, at 262-64.
persuasive way to make a case for any rules whatsoever: socially reproduced power rules all, and one realizes one has arrived at this point only after it is too late.

Reflecting on the classical tradition and its relation to humanism, one might wonder whether we have reached that point now. Most of our current laws and public ethical frameworks are based on the notion of a stable human person. This “person” is conceived as a being in whom certain rights reside and from whom certain obligations, conditioned by learning and culture, are expected. Yet it now seems that the value of learning and culture (with its accompanying social disciplining effects, both good and ill) has been de-emphasized in favor of the seemingly more predictable controlling mechanisms of natural science. One wonders whether the classical virtues of historically informed moderation might help in returning meaningful discussion of the human to the forefront, or whether, because of the inexorable march of natural science, the human — as one of Nietzsche’s most destructive spiritual children, Michel Foucault, put it — will be “erased, like a face drawn in the sand at the edge of the sea” (387).

Johns Hopkins University

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