The Philosophy of Man in the Italian Renaissance

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The achievements of the Italian Renaissance in the fine arts, in poetry and literature, in historiography and political thought, and in the natural sciences are well known, and they have been brought home to us in a number of valuable and interesting lectures. The contributions of Renaissance Italy to learning and to philosophy are perhaps less widely understood, if I am not mistaken. To be sure, the group of natural philosophers of the later sixteenth century, which culminated in Giordano Bruno, has attracted some attention, mainly for their influence on the rise of early science. Yet I shall concentrate today on the earlier phases of Renaissance thought, which have been the center of my studies for a number of years, and accordingly, I shall emphasize, not the philosophy of nature, but the philosophy of man. I shall briefly discuss the three major currents which dominated the development of Italian thought between 1350 and 1520: Humanism, Platonism, and Aristotelianism.

In our contemporary discussions, the term “Humanism” has become one of those slogans which through their very vagueness carry an almost universal and irresistible appeal. Every person interested in “human values” or in “human welfare” is nowadays called a “humanist,” and there is hardly any person who would not like to be, or pretend to be, a humanist in this sense of the word. I am afraid, if some of you blame me that I lured you here under false pretenses by using the term “humanism” in the title of my lecture, I must plead guilty. For the humanism of the Renaissance was something quite different from present-day humanism. To be sure, Renaissance humanists were also interested in human values, but this was incidental to their major concern, which was the study and imitation of classical, Greek and Latin literature. This classical humanism of the Italian Renaissance was primarily a cultural, literary, and educational movement, and although it had a definite impact upon Renaissance thought, its philosophical ideas can never be completely de-
attached from its literary interests. The term "humanism" as applied to the classicist movement of the Renaissance was coined by historians of the nineteenth century, but the terms "humanities" and "humanist" were coined during the Renaissance itself. Already some ancient Roman authors used the term *Studia humanitatis* to ennoble the study of poetry, literature, and history, and this expression was taken up by the scholars of the early Italian Renaissance to stress the human value of the fields of study which they cultivated: grammar, rhetoric, poetry, history, and moral philosophy, in the sense in which these fields were understood at that time. Soon the professional teacher of these subjects came to be called *humanista*, a "humanist," a term which occurred first in documents of the late fifteenth century and became increasingly common during the sixteenth century.

The origin of Italian humanism is usually attributed to Petrarch who had a few forerunners, to be sure, but according to the common view, no real predecessors. There is no doubt that Petrarch was the first really great figure among the Italian humanists. Yet some of the characteristic interests and tendencies of Italian humanism preceded Petrarch at least by one generation. The origin and rise of Italian humanism, in my opinion, was due to two, or rather three, different factors. One factor was the native Italian tradition of medieval rhetoric, which had been cultivated by teachers and notaries, and handed down as a technique of composing letters, documents, and speeches. The second factor was the so-called medieval humanism, that is, the study of classical Latin poetry and literature, which had flourished in the schools of the twelfth century, especially in France, and to which Italy at that time had made a very limited contribution. Toward the end of the thirteenth century, this study of the Latin classics was introduced into the Italian schools and merged with the native rhetorical tradition that had been of a much more practical nature. Thus the scholarly study of the Latin classics began to develop once the successful imitation of the classical authors, based on their careful study, was considered as the best training for those who wanted to write and to speak well, in prose and in verse, in Latin and in the vernacular. A third factor was added to this development during the latter half of the fourteenth century: the study of classical Greek literature, which had been almost unknown to the Western Middle Ages, but had been cultivated through the centuries in the Byzantine Empire and was now brought to Italy from the
East as a result of intensified political, ecclesiastic, and scholarly contacts.

The fruit of this combination of scholarly interests was the body of humanistic learning which comprised Latin and Greek grammar, eloquence, poetry, history, and moral philosophy. The humanists occupied the chairs of all these fields at the universities, asserted their importance in relation to the other sciences, and obtained almost complete control of the secondary schools in which grammar and rhetoric always had been the core of the curriculum.

The humanists also acquired considerable prestige and power through the places they held in the various professions. For the humanists were not merely free-lance writers, as it is often asserted, and the case of Petrarch is by no means typical. Most of the humanists belonged to one of three professional groups, and sometimes to more than one at the same time: they were teachers at the universities or secondary schools; or they were secretaries of princes or cities; or they were noble or wealthy amateurs who combined their business or political activities with the fashionable intellectual interests of their time. This professional and social place of the humanists easily explains the range and content of their literary production. They edited, translated, and expounded classical Greek and Latin authors, and wrote on matters of grammar and philology; they composed speeches, letters, poems, historical works, and moral treatises. The bulk of this humanistic literature is enormous, and on the whole it is much more interesting than those who have never read it would have us believe. Much, although not all, of this literature is written in Latin, which accounts in part for the scanty interest it has encountered in recent years. The charge that the works of the humanists are studded with classical quotations and with rhetorical phrases is to some extent correct. Yet we must add that the humanists managed to express in this classicist and rhetorical Latin the nuances of their own personal experience and the realities of contemporary life. A Neolatin literature which contains descriptions of tournaments, and of snowball fights in the streets of fifteenth-century Florence certainly cannot be dismissed as academic, although its means of expression may be less accessible to us than are the paintings of the same period that reflect similar standards of form and content.

Within the framework of Renaissance learning, humanism certainly occupied a very important place. However, it would be quite wrong to assume, as modern scholars often do, that humanism repre-
sents the complete picture of Renaissance science and philosophy, and that it tended, or even hoped, to expel and to replace all those traditions of medieval learning that are usually associated with the term "scholasticism." Humanism originated and developed within the limited area of rhetorical and philological studies. In asserting the claims of their own field, the humanists were apt to become aggressive toward their colleagues in other disciplines, but they were quite unable to provide for those other fields a subject matter capable of replacing the material furnished by the medieval tradition. Humanism was and remained a cultural and literary movement bound by its classical and rhetorical interests. Its influence on other fields, such as natural philosophy, theology, law, medicine, or mathematics, could be only external and indirect.

However, this indirect influence was in many respects quite important, especially in the case of philosophical thought with which we are primarily concerned. The humanistic movement of the Renaissance provided philosophers with new standards of literary elegance and of historical criticism, with additional classical source materials, and consequently with many ancient ideas and philosophies which thus came to be restated and revived or to be combined with other old and new doctrines. Moreover, although humanism in itself was not committed to any particular philosophy, it contained in its very program a few general ideas that were of great importance for Renaissance thought. One of these ideas was the conception the humanists had of history and of their own historical position. They believed that classical antiquity was in most respects a perfect age; that it was succeeded by a long period of decline, the Dark or Middle Ages; and that it was the task and destiny of their own age to accomplish a rebirth or renaissance of classical antiquity, or of its learning, arts, and sciences. The humanists themselves thus helped to shape the concept of the Renaissance which has been so bitterly criticized by certain modern historians.

Even more important was the emphasis on man which was inherent in the cultural and educational program of the Renaissance humanists and which should endear them even to our contemporary "humanists" (although the latter would show slight sympathy for the educational ideals of their Renaissance predecessors). When the Renaissance humanists called their studies the "humanities" or Studia humanitatis, they expressed the claim that these studies contribute to the education of a desirable human being, and hence are of
vital concern for man as man. Thus they indicated a basic concern for man and his dignity, and this aspiration became quite explicit in many of their writings. When Petrarch whom we called the first great humanist describes in a famous letter his trip to the peak of Mont Ventoux, he tells us that overwhelmed by the marvelous view, he took Augustine's *Confessions* out of his pocket and opened it at random. He found the following passage: "Men go to admire the heights of mountains, the great floods of the sea, the courses of rivers, the shores of the ocean, and the orbits of the stars, and neglect themselves." "I was stunned," Petrarch continues, "closed the book and was angry at myself since I was still admiring earthly things although I should have learned long ago from pagan philosophers that nothing is admirable but the soul in comparison to which if it is great nothing is great." Petrarch thus expresses his conviction that man and his soul are the true standard of intellectual importance, but in doing so, he uses the very words of Augustine, the Christian classic, and of Seneca, the pagan classic.

About the middle of the fifteenth century, the Florentine humanist, Giannozzo Manetti, composed a lengthy treatise on the dignity and excellence of man, which was written as a conscious reply to Pope Innocent III's treatise on the miserable condition of mankind. Manetti's work is filled with quotations from Cicero and from Lactantius. Also among later humanists, the dignity of man continued to be a favorite topic. None of them expressed the link between this concern for man and the admiration of antiquity more clearly than the great author who has been called a vernacular humanist. For Machiavelli who in his enforced retirement liked to put on evening clothes to converse with the great ancient writers, the study of ancients was valuable because they were human models, and the attempt to imitate them was not vain since human nature is always the same.

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2 *De dignitate et excellentia hominis*. I am indebted to Prof. Hans Baron for making available to me his transcription of this rare text.


4 "Chi vuole vedere quello che ha a essere, consideri quello che è stato; perché tutte le cose del mondo in ogni tempo hanno il proprio riscontro con gli
Whereas the humanistic movement had a literary and cultural origin and character and hence had merely an indirect, though powerful, influence on the development of philosophical thought, the second great intellectual movement of the early Renaissance, Platonism, was philosophical in its origin and had but an incidental, though very significant, impact upon Renaissance literature. Considering the quantity of its literary production and the number of its followers, Platonism was not as broad a current as was humanism, but it was much deeper, both in the wealth of its ideas and in the response it evoked from its adherents. Platonism, to be sure, had its own centers in such informal and temporary circles as the Platonic Academy of Florence, as well as in certain literary Academies of the sixteenth century and in a few university chairs of Platonic philosophy. Yet taken as a whole, Platonism did not possess the strong institutional and professional support which both humanism and Aristotelianism were enjoying. Platonism owed its influence rather to the personal appeal of its ideas to the experiences and inclinations of individual thinkers and writers, an appeal that varied in depth and sincerity and that sometimes, as things go, degenerated into a mere fashion.

The Platonism of the Italian Renaissance as it culminated in Marsilio Ficino, the leader of the Florentine Academy, and in his friend and pupil, Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, was in many respects an offshoot of the humanistic movement. Both Ficino and Pico had enjoyed a thorough humanistic education and were imbued with the stylistic and classicist standards of the humanists. Their preference for Plato had its antecedents in Petrarch and in other early humanists. Ficino's endeavor to translate and to expound the works of Plato and of the ancient Neoplatonists was comparable to the work done by the humanists on other classical authors. His attempt to restate and to revive the teachings of Platonism reflected the general trend toward reviving ancient arts, ideas, and institutions and in one of his letters, he compared his own revival of Platonic philosophy to the rebirth of grammar, poetry, rhetoric, painting, sculpture, architecture, music, and astronomy which had been accomplished in his century. However, Renaissance Platonism had

antichi tempi. Il che nasce perché essendo quelle operate dagli uomini che hanno ed ebbono sempre le medesime passioni conviene di necessità che le sortischino il medesimo effetto" (Discorsi, πι, 43).

5 Opera Omnia (Basel, 1576), ι, p. 944.
other roots outside the traditions and interests of early humanism. One of these roots was the Aristotelianism or scholasticism of the later Middle Ages which continued to dominate the teaching of philosophy at the universities and other schools. We know now beyond any doubt that Ficino absorbed this kind of training as a student at the University of Florence, whereas it had never been questioned that Pico had studied scholastic philosophy at the universities of Padua and of Paris. This training left profound traces in their thought and writings. It enabled them to proceed beyond the amateurish and vague ideas of the earlier humanists to a serious and methodical kind of philosophical speculation which could have an influence on professionally trained philosophers and which was taken seriously even by their philosophical opponents. Consequently, Ficino and Pico abandoned the superficial polemic of the earlier humanists against scholastic philosophy, and gladly acknowledged their indebtedness to Aristotle and to the medieval thinkers. In an interesting correspondence with Ermolao Barbaro, Pico took up the defense of the medieval philosophers, stressing the point that philosophical content is much more important than literary form.6

Another source of Renaissance Platonism, which distinguishes it both from humanism and Aristotelianism, was the heritage of medieval mysticism and Augustinianism. Even after the thirteenth century when Aristotelianism had become predominant in the teaching of philosophy and theology, the older current of Augustinianism survived among the Franciscan theologians, and in a vaguer form in the growing popular religious literature which developed around the religious associations for laymen. There are several indications that Ficino was strongly influenced by this brand of religious spiritualism, and Pico's later writings and his relationship to Savonarola show that he had similar inclinations. If we realize that Ficino's Academy resembled in many respects such an association of laymen in which classical scholarship and secular philosophy were added to a basically religious atmosphere, we can better understand the impression which this Academy made upon the educated circles of Medicean Florence, and upon the imagination of later generations.

Due to these additional philosophical and religious resources, Platonism was able to transform some of the vague ideas and aspira-

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6 *Opera Omnia* (Basel, 1572), pp. 351-358.
tions of the early humanists into definite and elaborate speculative theories. Especially did the emphasis on man which had been one of the most characteristic aspirations of early humanist thought receive a more systematic philosophical expression in the works of the Renaissance Platonists.

Ficino's major philosophical work, the *Platonic Theology*, contains several passages in which the excellence and dignity of man is emphasized. Man is superior to other creatures in the variety of his arts and skills. With his thought and with his desire, he passes through all parts of the universe, is related to all of them, and has a share in them all. The human soul is directed both toward God and toward the body, that is, both toward the intelligible and toward the corporeal world. Hence it participates both in time and in eternity. These ideas are embodied in Ficino's scheme of a universal hierarchy in which the human soul occupies a privileged, central place: God, the Angelic Mind, the Rational Soul, Quality, and Body. Due to its central position, the soul is able to mediate between the upper and the lower half of reality, between the intelligible and the corporeal.

Ficino who had borrowed many elements of his scheme from Neoplatonic tradition, consciously modified it in this decisive point, the central position of the human soul. "This (the soul) is the greatest of all miracles in nature. All other things beneath God are always one single being, but the soul is all things together. . . . Therefore it may be rightly called the center of nature, the middle term of all things, the series of the world, the face of all, the bond and juncture of the universe."7

The same idea is taken up and further developed by Pico in his famous *Oration on the Dignity of Man*. Pico stresses especially man's freedom to choose his way of life. Consequently, man no longer occupies any fixed place in the universal hierarchy, not even the privileged central place, but he is entirely detached from that hierarchy and constitutes a world in himself. Illustrating this conception with a story, Pico recounts that man was created last among all things when God had already distributed all His gifts among the other creatures. "Finally, the Best of Workmen decided that that to which nothing of its very own could be given should be given, in

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7 "Hoc maximum est in natura miraculorum. Reliqua enim sub Deo unum quiddam in se singula sunt, hae omnia simul . . . ut merito dici possit centrum naturae, universorum medium, mundi series, vultus omnium nodusque et copula mundi" (*Opera*, p. 121).
composit fashion, whatsoever had belonged individually to each and every thing . . . and He spoke to him as follows: We have given thee, Adam, no fixed seat, no form of thy very own, no gift peculiarly thine, that . . . thou mayest . . . possess as thine own the seat, the form, the gifts which thou thyself shalt desire. . . . In conformity with thy free judgment in whose hands I have placed thee, thou art confined by no bonds, and thou wilt fix the limits of thy nature for thyself. . . . Neither heavenly nor earthly, neither mortal nor immortal have We made thee. Thou . . . art the moulder and maker of thyself. . . . Thou canst grow downward into the lower natures which are brutes. Thou canst again grow upward from the mind’s reason into the higher natures which are divine."

The concern for man and the meaning of his life determines also another basic theory of Ficino, the doctrine of immortality to which he devotes the largest part of his chief philosophical work, the Platonic Theology. Ficino does not condemn or minimize the practical activities of life, but he states with great emphasis that the main purpose of human life is contemplation. By contemplation he understands a spiritual experience which begins with a detachment of our mind from the outside world, which then proceeds through various degrees of knowledge and desire, and finally culminates in the immediate vision and enjoyment of God. Since this final union with God is rarely attained during the present life, Ficino postulates a future life in which this aim will be attained in a permanent fashion by all those who made the necessary effort during the present life. The immortality of the soul thus becomes the center of Ficino’s philosophy, because immortality is needed to justify his interpretation of human existence as a continuing effort of contemplation.

Without immortality, that effort would be vain, and human existence would be without any attainable end. On the other hand, a philosophy which thus centers around the theory of immortality is primarily concerned with man and his purpose, both in the present and in the future life. This concern for man and the immortality of his soul explains certain statements of Ficino which have shocked some modern theologians. For he says that “man worships the eternal God for the sake of the future life,”9 and once he exclaims: “How does it help you, O theologian, to attribute eternity to God, if you do not attribute it to yourself in order that you may enjoy divine eternity through your own eternity?”10 Ficino also links the doctrine of immortality with the dignity of man when he argues that man, the most perfect of all animals, would be more miserable than the beasts if, through the lack of immortality, he alone were deprived of attaining the natural end of his existence.11

The central place in the universe, and the immortality of the soul are privileges in which potentially every human being has a share, yet their actual significance depends on the individual and solitary effort of each person, and on his share in the contemplative life. However, in his theory of love and friendship, Ficino also gives a philosophical significance to the relationship between several persons. He does not condemn or disregard sexual love, to be sure, yet in his famous theory of Platonic love and friendship he is merely concerned with that spiritual relationship which is established between two or more persons through the share which each of them individually has in the contemplative life. In a true friendship, he claims, there are always at least three partners, two human beings, and God who founds their friendship.12 In this way, Ficino established a direct link between the highest form of human relationship and the most intimate and personal experience of contemplative life. Hence he could proclaim that friendship understood in this

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9 “aeternum colit Deum vitae sempiternae gratia” (Opera, p. 1754).
10 “Quidnam tibi theolge prodest aeternitatem asserere Deo, nisi eandem tibi quoque asseras, ut per aeternitatem tuam frui possis aeternitate divina” (Opera, p. 885).
11 “Se l’umana generazione . . . non aspectassi dopo questa ombra di vita vera vita, certamente nessuno animale nato sarebbe più misero che l’uomo . . . . Non è giusta cosa che la generatione umana . . . sia sempre più infelice che e’ bruti animali . . . però non la (that is, la divina felicità) potendo in questa mortal vita conseguitare, è necessario che nell’eterna la possa fruire . . .” (Supplementum Ficinianum, ed. P. O. Kristeller, Florence, 1937, 1, p. 10 f.).
12 Opera, p. 634.
sense was the spiritual tie that linked the members of his Platonic Academy with each other and with himself, their common master. This theory of Platonic love and friendship had a tremendous appeal to Ficino’s contemporaries and to the successive generations of the sixteenth century who wrote about it again and again in prose and in verse. The term “Platonic love” has since acquired a somewhat curious connotation, and it certainly would be difficult to defend all the vagaries contained in the love treatises of the later Renaissance. However, it is important to realize that the doctrine in its origin had a serious philosophical meaning, and that it was taken up so eagerly because it provided educated persons with a more or less superficial spiritual interpretation for their personal feelings and passions. The rather complex background of the theory which had its roots in ancient theories of love and friendship, in Christian traditions of charity and spiritual fellowship, and in medieval conceptions of courtly love, could only increase its popularity in a period in which all those currents were still very much alive.

For the Florentine Platonists, the concept of man and his dignity was not merely limited to the solitary experiences and to the personal relationships of individuals, but it also led to the conscious awareness of a solidarity of all men which imposed definite moral and intellectual obligations upon each individual. This attitude is implied in Ficino’s views about religion and its various kinds. He emphasizes that Christianity is the most perfect religion, to be sure, but he also asserts that religion as such is natural to all men and distinguishes them from the animals. The variety of religions contributes to the beauty of the universe, and each religion, at least in an indirect and unconscious manner, is related to the one, true God. Pico goes even further and emphasizes that all religious and philosophical traditions have a share in a common, universal truth. Pagan, Jewish, and Christian theologians, and also all philosophers who supposedly contradict each other, Plato and Aristotle, Avicenna and Averroes, Thomas and Scotus, and many others have had a good many insights into truth. When Pico included propositions from all these authors among his nine hundred theses, it was his underlying intention to illustrate this universality of truth which justified his endeavor to incorporate and defend doctrines from so many different sources. This syncretism of Pico which has been rightly emphasized in a recent study, really provided the foundation for a broad conception of religious and philosophical tolerance.

In a different manner, the solidarity of mankind is expressed in Ficino’s conception of *humanitas*. The Latin term is ambiguous since it stands both for the human race, and for humane feeling as a personal virtue. This ambiguity reflects the ancient Roman Stoic ideal of *humanitas* that combined with the standards of cultural refinement a high respect for other persons as fellow human beings. This concept was taken up and further elaborated by Ficino. Starting from the general notion that love and attraction constitute a force of unification in all parts of the universe, he applies it in particular to mankind as a natural species. Man proves himself a member of the human race by loving other men as his equals, by being humane. When he is inhumane and cruel, he removes himself from the community of mankind and forfeits his human dignity. “Why are boys crueler than old men?” Ficino asks in a letter to Tommaso Minerbettii. “Insane men crueler than intelligent men? Dull men crueler than the ingenious? Because they are, as it were, less men than the others. Therefore the cruel men are called inhumane and brutal. In general those who are far removed from the perfect nature of man by fault of age, a vice of the soul, a sickness of the body, or by an inimical position of the stars, hate and neglect the human species as something foreign and alien. Nero was, so to speak, not a man, but a monster, being akin to man only by his skin. Had he really been a man, he would have loved other men as members of the same body. For as individual men are under one Idea and in one species, they are like one man. Therefore, I believe, the sages called by the name of man himself only that one among all the virtues that loves and helps all men as brothers deriving in a long series from one father, in other words, humanity.”

Even Ficino’s theory of immortality is influenced by this sense of human solidarity. Ficino admits that the immediate vision of God

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14 “Cur pueri crudeliores sunt quam senes, insani quam prudentes, hebetes quam ingeniiosi? Quia minus homines ut ita dicam sunt quam ceteri. Unde qui crudelis sunt, inhumani erfferatique nominantur. Qui enim a perfecta hominis natura vel propter aetatis defectum vel propter animi vitium vitium corporisve morbum vel propter adversam siderum dispositionem procul distant, hi ut plurimum humanam speciem tamquam rem alienam extraneamque vel odere vel negligunt. Non homo ut ita loquar fuit Nero, sed monstrum quoddam pelle homini simile. Si enim revera fuisse homo, ceteros homines tamquam membra quaedam eiusdem corporis dilexisset. Singuli namque homines sub una idea et in eadem specie sunt unus homo. Ob hanc ut arbitror rationem sapientes solam illam ex omni virtutum numero hominis ipsius nomine, idest humanitatem appellaverunt, quae omnes homines quodammodo ceu fratres ex uno quodam patre longo ordine natos diligit atque curat” (*Opera*, p. 635).
can be attained in earthly life by a few individuals, but this is not considered as a sufficient fulfillment of the natural desire inherent in all men. The postulate of a future life must be maintained in order that this desire be fulfilled, if not for all men, at least for all those who tried to direct their efforts toward God. Ficino does not teach with Origen that there will be a final salvation of all souls, but he leaves us with the impression that a reasonable proportion of mankind will attain eternal happiness, the true goal of earthly existence and of human life.

The third intellectual current of the early Renaissance, Aristotelianism, had its roots in the teaching traditions of the later Middle Ages. At the Italian universities, the study of Aristotelian philosophy obtained a permanent place about the end of the thirteenth century. From its very beginning, this study was linked with medicine, not with theology. Consequently, it centered around natural philosophy, and to a lesser extent around logic. The so-called theory of double truth which characterizes the tendency of this school was meant to recognize the authority of the Church in the domain of dogmatic theology, and at the same time to preserve the independence of philosophical thought within the limits of natural reason. These Aristotelian philosophers disagreed among each other on many issues and were divided into several opposing schools, yet they had common problems, common source materials, and a common method. In contrast to the humanists and to the Platonists, the Aristotelians represent the solid, professional tradition of philosophy. They dominated the teaching of philosophy down to the end of the Renaissance, and their numerous commentaries and treatises reflect the methods and interests of that teaching. Their share in the intellectual life of the Renaissance was much larger than most scholars seem to realize, and they were by no means as foreign to the new problems of their own times as often asserted. Renaissance Aristotelianism developed without a break from the traditions of medieval Aristotelianism, to be sure, but it also assimilated many significant elements from the humanism and Platonism of its own time.

It is easy to illustrate this with the example of the most famous Aristotelian philosopher of the Italian Renaissance, Pietro Pomponazzi. He had received his training at Padua, and spent his later and most productive years as a professor of philosophy at Bologna. Pomponazzi was thoroughly familiar with the ideas and writings of
his medieval predecessors and discussed in part the same problems, with the same method of reasoning, and on the basis of the same texts of Aristotle. Yet he was indebted to the humanists for his knowledge of the Greek commentators of Aristotle, and of non-Aristotelian ancient thought, especially of Stoicism. He also utilized the writings of the Platonists and discussed or appropriated some of their ideas. This affinity of Pomponazzi with the humanists and Platonists of his time is especially apparent in his conception of man.

Pomponazzi’s concern for man is already expressed in the fact that, like Ficino, he dedicated one of his most important philosophical works to the problem of immortality. As a result of its highly provocative position, this treatise became the starting point of a lively controversy among Aristotelian philosophers and theologians which continued for many decades. In approaching the problem of immortality, Pomponazzi emphasizes with the Platonists that man occupies a middle place in the universe. “I held that the beginning of our consideration should be this: that man is not of simple but of multiple, not of fixed, but of an ambiguous nature, and is placed in the middle between mortal and immortal things. . . . Hence the ancients rightly placed him between eternal and temporal things, since he is neither purely eternal nor purely temporal, because he participates in both natures. And existing thus in the middle, he has the power to assume either nature.”

Yet in spite of this starting point, Pomponazzi proceeds to an analysis that in many respects is the exact opposite of Ficino’s. The human intellect is not material in its substance, to be sure, but its knowledge is entirely limited to corporeal objects. This is the manner in which it occupies a middle place between the pure intelligences of angels and the souls of animals. There is no evidence whatsoever that man in this life can attain a pure knowledge of intelligible objects. Consequently, there is no rational proof for the immortality of the soul, although immortality must be accepted as an article of faith.

15 “Initium autem considerationis nostrae hinc sumendum duxi, hominem scilicet non simplicis sed multiplicis, non certae sed ancipitis naturae esse mediumque inter mortalia et immortalia collocari. . . . Quapropter bene enunciaverunt antiqui cum ipsum inter aeterna et temporalia statuerunt ob eam causam quod neque pure aeternus neque pure temporalis sit, cum de utraque natura participet, ipsique sic in medio existenti data est poestas utram velit naturam induat.” (De Immortalitate Animae, ed. and tr. William Henry Hay II, Haverford, 1938, ch. 1, p. 1 f., and iii).
Pomponazzi thus demolishes the ideal of contemplation which finds its necessary fulfillment in a future life. He substitutes for it the ideal of a moral virtue which can be attained during the present life. Thus the dignity of man is not only maintained, but man’s present, earthly life is credited with a significance that does not depend on any hopes or fears for the future. Pomponazzi states this view in simple sentences that remind us of Plato and the ancient Stoics as well as of Spinoza and Kant. “There are two kinds of reward and punishment: one is essential and inseparable, the other accidental and separable. The essential reward of virtue is virtue itself which makes man happy. For human nature cannot attain anything higher than virtue. It alone makes man secure and removed from all trouble. . . . The opposite applies to vice. The punishment of the vicious person is vice itself which is more miserable and unhappy than anything else. . . . Accidental reward is more imperfect than essential reward, for gold is more imperfect than virtue; and accidental punishment is less heavy than essential punishment. For a penalty is an accidental punishment, whereas guilt is an essential punishment. Yet the punishment of guilt is much worse than that of a penalty. Therefore, it does not matter if sometimes the accidental is omitted provided that the essential remains. Moreover, when a good received an accidental reward its essential good seems to decrease and does not remain in its perfection. For example, if someone does a good deed without a hope of reward, and another with a hope of reward, the action of the latter is not considered as good as that of the former. Hence he who receives no accidental reward is more essentially rewarded than he who does. In the same way, he who acts wickedly and receives accidental punishment seems to be less punished than he who receives no accidental punishment. For the punishment of guilt is greater and worse than that of a penalty. And when a penalty is added to guilt, the latter decreases. Hence he who receives no accidental punishment is more essentially punished than he who does.”

16 “Pro quo scierendum est quod praemium et paena duplex est. Quoddam essentiale et inseparabile, quoddam vero accidentale et separabile. Praemium essentiale virtutis est ipsam virtus, quae hominem felicem facit. Nihil enim mius natura humana habere potest ipsa virtute. Quando quidem ipsa sola hominem securum facit et remotum ab omni perturbatione. . . . At opposito modo de vitio. Paena namque vitiosi est ipsum vitium, quo nihil miserius, nihil infelicius esse potest . . . accidentale praemium longe imperfectius est essentiali praemio. Aurum namque imperfectius est virtute. Paenaque accidentalis
The emphasis on moral virtue as the self-contained end of human life sets, in the first place, a standard of individual conduct. Yet Pomponazzi, like Ficino, arrives quite consistently at the notion that there is a solidarity of mankind, and that each individual, through his right actions, makes his contribution to the universal good. "We must assume and firmly keep in mind that the entire human race may be compared to one individual man." All individuals contribute to the good of mankind, just as all members of our body contribute to the welfare of the entire body. "The whole human race is like one body composed of various members which have different functions, but which are suited for the common usefulness of mankind." 

Hence the end of man must be determined in such a way that it can be attained by all men or at least by many individuals. This consideration prompted Ficino to postulate a future life in which many individuals will reach the vision of God which in the present life is experienced only by a few rare persons. The same consideration leads Pomponazzi to assert that the primary aim of human life must be found in moral action, and not in contemplation. This statement is the more interesting since it is at variance with the teaching of Aristotle. All men, Pomponazzi argues, share to some extent in three intellectual faculties, that is, in the speculative, the moral, and the technical intellect. Yet the part which men have in these intellectual faculties is different for each of them. The speculative intellect is not characteristic of man as man, but belongs properly to the gods, as

longe minor est paena essentiali. Paena namque accidentalis est paena damni, essentialis vero paena culpae. At longe deterior est paena culpae paena damni. Quare nihil refert si quandoque accidentale relinquatur dummodo essentiale remaneat. Secundo adhuc scierendum quod quando bonum accidentaliter praemiatur bonum essentiale videtur diminui neque remanet in sua perfectione. Exempli causa si aliquid virtuose operatur sine spe praemii, alter vero cum spe praemii, actus secundus non ita virtuosus habetur sicut primi. Quare magis essentialiter praemiatur qui non accidentaliter praemiatur eo qui accidentaliter praemiat. Eodem quoque modo qui vitiouse operatur et accidentaliter punitur minus videtur puniri eo qui accidentaliter non punitur. Nam paena culpae maior et deterior est paena damni. Et cum paena damni adiungitur culpae diminuit culpam. Quare non punitus accidentaliter magis punitur essentialiter eo qui accidentaliter punitur" (l. c., ch. 14, p. 49 and xxviii f.).
17 "Secundo accipiendum est et maxime memoriae mandandum quod totum genus humanum uni singulari homini comparari potest" (ibid., p. 43 and xxiv).
18 "Universum namque humanum genus est sicut unum corpus ex diversis membris constitutum, quae et diversa habent officia, in communem tamen utilitatem generis humani ordinata . . . " (ibid., p. 43 and xxv).
Aristotle says. Although all men have something of it, only very few possess it, or can possess it, fully and perfectly. On the other hand, the technical intellect is not characteristic of man since it is also shared by many animals. "Yet the practical intellect truly belongs to man. For every normal human being can attain it perfectly, and according to it a person is called good or bad in an absolute sense, whereas according to the speculative or technical intellect, a person is called good or bad only in some respect and with qualifications. For a man is called a good man or a bad man with regard to his virtues and vices. Yet a good metaphysician is not called a good man, but a good metaphysician, and a good architect is not called good in an absolute sense, but a good architect. Therefore, a man is not angry when he is not called a metaphysician, a philosopher, or a carpenter. Yet he is most angry when he is said to be a thief, intemperate, unjust, foolish, or something wicked of that sort, as if to be good or bad were human and in our power, whereas to be a philosopher or an architect is not in our power nor necessary for a man. Hence all human beings can and must be virtuous, but not all must be philosophers, mathematicians, architects, and the like. . . . Hence with regard to the practical intellect which is peculiar to man each man must be perfect. For in order that the entire human race be properly preserved each person must be morally virtuous and as much as possible free of vice. . . ."

It has been my intention to show that the three major intellectual currents of the early Renaissance were all concerned with the purpose of human life and with the place of man in the universe, and that this concern found its expression not only in definite standards
for individual conduct, but also in a strong sense for human relationships and for the solidarity of mankind. The humanistic movement which in its origin was not philosophical provided the general and still vague ideas and aspirations as well as the ancient source materials. The Platonists and Aristotelians who were professional philosophers with speculative interests and training, took up those vague ideas, developed them into definite philosophical doctrines, and assigned them an important place in their elaborate metaphysical systems.

After the first quarter of the sixteenth century, the intellectual currents of the earlier Renaissance continued to exist, but they were increasingly overshadowed, first by the theological controversies growing out of the Reformation, and later by the developments that led to the rise of modern science and of modern philosophy. Yet the early Renaissance left a heritage that remained effective at least down to the end of the eighteenth century: Renaissance humanism remained alive in the educational and literary traditions of Western Europe and in the study of history and philology; Renaissance Platonism handed down the influence of Plato and Plotinus to all those thinkers who attempted to defend some idealistic form of philosophy; and Renaissance Aristotelianism, although partly superseded by experimental physics and science, gave inspiration to many later currents of free-thought. In the last century in which so much of our present thought has its origin those older ideas and traditions were largely forgotten, except by a few scholarly specialists. Modern positivism, encouraged by scientific progress and material success, seemed to have made all other ideas more or less obsolete. Yet the startling events of our own time have shaken our confidence in the sufficiency, if not in the truth, of positivism. We wonder whether its principles are broad enough to explain our experience and to guide our endeavors. We have become more modest about our own achievements, and hence more willing to learn from the past. In the long line of philosophers and writers who constitute the history and tradition of Western thought, a distinctive place belongs to the humanists, Platonists, and Aristotelians of the early Italian Renaissance. Many of their ideas are merely a matter of historical curiosity, but some of them contain a nucleus of permanent truth and might thus become a message and an inspiration to present-day Italy, and to the rest of mankind.

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