

3. Eugerrrio Garin, "Introduction," *Italian Humanism* , pp. 1-17.

same equivocality of the words mentioned. It is only in modern English usage that we have allowed secular, scientific, technological and non-religious considerations to teach us more precise and quite rigid distinctions between mind, soul and spirit. And even then it is not certain that these precise distinctions in a field that is by its very nature by no means very precise, are to our advantage. At any rate, a translator's task is not an easy one. The equivocations upon which much of Italian thinking thrives are impermissible in English. But if an attempt had been made to eliminate them, the book would not only have lost too much of its original character, but also appeared as a distortion of the ideas it contains. And if an attempt had been made to observe them meticulously, the English text would have been, in many places, quite incomprehensible. The translation therefore had to be built on compromise and discretion. And in these I have probably not been as skilful as I ought to have been.

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Wellington, New Zealand, October 1963.

INTRODUCTION

1. HUMANISM AND PHILOSOPHY

IT is almost a century now since Renan, in his book on Averroes, transformed Padua and Florence into symbols of an antinomy, capable of characterizing—so it seemed to him—the whole orientation of the so very complex culture of the Renaissance. On one side there was Padua, the stronghold of the Aristotelian-Averroist tradition, rigorously scientific and logical, in contrast to humanism and all it implied in the way of literature, the arts and *studia humanitatis*. On the other side there was Florence, the city of Ficino and Poliziano and of many others, thinkers as well as poets, who thought the Paduan masters to be 'strange and fantastic', according to a curious expression which is to be found in a letter of the year 1491 to Lorenzo.¹ This contrast was softened by the author's knowledge, always present if not always clear, of the profound significance of humanism and of the incontrovertible value of the unprejudiced critical position of humanism. Renan knew perfectly well that the Paduan philosophy of the 15th century was tired; that the tools it had perfected and which it had used were worn out and that its sources had dried up; that its subtle rationalizations moved in a void and belonged to the past. Galileo was to know well every single development of Aristotelian physics; but he was to draw the perspective that was necessary for a new synthesis from a very different cultural environment.

Unfortunately too many historians of the Civilisation of the Renaissance have been seduced by the possibility of transforming a mere contrast into an explanation, thus mistaking a negation for a positive factor. As a result the struggle between Florence and Padua has become one of the commonplaces of history, apt to characterize an attitude as a rebellion of literature against science, of poetry against philosophy, of law against medicine, of mystical rhetoric against heretical dialectics, of humanist-

¹ A. Poliziano, *Prose volgari inedite e poesie latine e greche edite e inedite*. ed. by I. Del Lungo, Firenze, 1867, p. 80.

Platonic *pietas* against Averroist impiety.² And finally all the themes of the controversy about the Renaissance from Burckhardt onwards have converged upon this famous contrast. And thus 'science' and 'philosophy' have from time to time become the signs of medieval superiority and modernity, or of a radical deficiency and a hopeless decline, as the case may be. And alternatively, 'rhetoric' and 'grammar' have been looked upon now as a pause in the progress of the spirit and now as an expression of a clearly modern culture. And finally, a large part of modern historical writing has miraculously agreed to deny the profound significance of the speculations of the Renaissance and has declared them to be lacking in all originality. It is alleged that there was nothing new or rejuvenating in their literary aspects, and that philosophically they did not present anything original when compared with the Middle Ages. Such agreement was reached not only in obedience to a justifiable desire for continuity with the Middle Ages but also on account of a declared or hidden hostility to the values of modern philosophy.

Sarton, the historian of science, conducted a polemic against the humanists whom he considered presumptuous dilettanti. Without hesitation he came to the conclusion that they represented an indubitable regression, both from the philosophical and from the scientific point of view. Compared with the Scholasticism of the Middle Ages, which, though dense, was honest, the philosophy of the Renaissance, or better, the Neoplatonism of Florence, was a heap of ideas too vague to be of any genuine value. Nardi, a historian of philosophy, showed himself even more radical. 'If we wish to go back to the beginning of modern philosophy', he wrote, 'we must jump back beyond the age of humanism.' And Billanovich, a historian of literature, called the age of humanism an age of 'silence interrupted only by the silent declensions of the grammarians', while the 'study of philosophy was degraded to feats of philosophical and rhetorical astuteness' in the midst 'of a general intellectual disorder'.³ One would like to reply

² Cp. E. Troilo, *Averroismo e Aristotelismo padovano*, Padova, 1939 (and G. Toffanin, *Per l'Averroismo padovano, Lettera a E. Troilo, 'La Rinascita'*, 1939, 5; B. Kieszkowski, *Averroismo e Platonismo in Italia negli ultimi decenni del sec. XI*, 'Giornale Critico della Filosofia Italiana', 1933, 4).

³ G. Sarton, *Science in the Renaissance*, in J. W. Thompson, G. Rowley, F. Schevill and G. Sarton, *The Civilization of Renaissance*, Chicago, 1929, p. 79 (cp. W. F. Ferguson, *The Renaissance in Historical Thought, Five Centuries of Interpretation*, Cambridge Mass.,

that these grammarians and rhetoricians were none other than Lorenzo Valla and Leon Battista Alberti; that both Nicholas Cusanus and Paolo Toscanelli emerged from that sterile and empty atmosphere; and that the science of both Leonardo and Galilei originated precisely in that age which one is recommended to skip; that Machiavelli wrote during that very age and that the whole critical ferment that led to Bacon and Telesio took place at that time. And finally one would like to mention that neither Erasmus nor Montaigne could ever have been thought of without the specific mental climate of the 15th century. Thus one could indeed show very simply that the whole conception of an antithesis between Florence and Padua was totally wrong. The facts are at hand. If indeed 15th century humanism differed from place to place, it had nevertheless certain characteristics with which it penetrated everywhere. And thus it exercised everywhere a profoundly and radically rejuvenating influence. It was the expression of an entirely changed human attitude.

If the truth were told, the real reason for this condemnation of the philosophical significance of humanism is a very different one. One can gauge the real reason from the constant hankering for that metaphysico-theological synthesis of 'obtuse but honest scholasticism'. It is in fact nothing less than the love for a kind of philosophy which the 15th century abhorred. The people who condemn humanistic philosophy lament precisely the thing which the humanists wanted to destroy, that is the grand 'cathedrals of ideas', the great logico-theological systematisations. The humanists disliked that idea of a philosophy which deals with every problem under the sun and with all theological researches and which organizes and delimits every possibility within the pattern of a pre-established order.⁴ The age of humanism considered that philosophy vain and useless and substituted for it a programme of concrete researches, precise and defined in two senses; one in the direction of the moral sciences (ethics, politics, economics,

1948, p. 384; L. Thorndike, *Renaissance or Prerenaissance?*, 'Journal of the History of Ideas', IV (1943), pp. 65-74; B. Nardi, *Il problema della verità; Soggetto e oggetto del conoscere nella filosofia antica e medievale*, Roma, 1951, pp. 58-59 (and second ed. of 1952, p. 61, n. 105); G. Billanovich, *Petrarca letterato; I, Lo scrittoio del Petrarca*, Roma, 1947, pp. 415 sqq.

⁴ Cp. B. Croce, *Lo storicismo e l'idea tradizionale della filosofia*, 'Quaderni della Critica', 1949, pp. 84-85.

aesthetics, logic and rhetoric) and one in the direction of the natural sciences which were to be cultivated *iuxta propria principia*, free of all chains and all *auctoritas*, and which have on every level that bloom of which an honest but obtuse scholastic knew nothing.

This was the accomplishment of humanism. It permitted such inquiries and saw that the logic of man's search is not necessarily that of Aristotle; that the logic of Aristotle is not the word of God, but a product of history. It produced concrete investigations and accustomed new generations to see and to think, and educated them humanistically. All this may appear to the purveyors of well balanced theologies of small importance. But to those that think of philosophy as a conscious search for human attitudes and as a discussion of concepts, all this was an invaluable conquest. And this conquest, one might add, was by no means impious and heretical, but was very often most respectful towards religious faith as an undeniable experience, even though the various single researchers were not occupied with it. They were modest and moved in other directions. The 'philological' and historical researchers were modest indeed and willingly abandoned those grave discourses about God and the intellect. They tried to determine instead the shapes of the human city, the nature of human customs and rituals; or, as far as the natural sciences were concerned, they endeavoured to define the nature of illnesses or the structure of living bodies with a 'grammatical' precision which, as the great Antonio Benivieni insisted, they had picked up in the schools of the grammarians as a method for the understanding of reality. This is in fact the very 'philology' which, as a historiography which is today only too easily despised had well understood, was of the essence of the new 'philosophy'. This philology is an altogether new method of looking at problems, and is therefore not, as some have believed, to be considered side by side with traditional philosophy, as a secondary aspect of the Civilisation of the Renaissance. It was essentially an effective philosophical method.⁵

⁵ Cp. P. O. Kristeller, *Movimenti filosofici del Rinascimento*, 'Giornale critico della Filosofia italiana', 1950, pp. 275-88; and also, *Humanism and Scholasticism in the Italian Renaissance*, 'Byzantion', XVII, 1944-45, pp. 346-74. Cp. also the valuable contributions in which Kristeller confirms his point of view: *Studies in Renaissance Thought and Letters*, Rome, 1956.

2. NEW PHILOLOGICAL REQUIREMENTS

In this connection it is useful to take a look at the eulogy composed by Niccoletto Vernia for Ermolao Barbaro for his translation of Themistius. Or better still, to read Vernia's prefatory letter to the edition of Aristotle with Averroes' commentary. In that letter the least humanistic of all the writers of the 15th century insists at great length upon the trouble he has taken with the editing of the text and explains how he went about questioning the Greeks he knew in order to clarify the meaning of technical expressions and to understand the rendering correctly—for without being sure of the meaning of the text there would have been no point in empty discussions of non-existing problems. When one reads that prefatory letter—so important from the point of view of method—how can one stop oneself from comparing favourably the Paduan professor's edition of Aristotle with a codex that used to be kept in the library of the Monastery of St. Mark of Florence, and which contains the Latin version of Eustrach's commentary on the Nicomachean Ethics? The manuscript belonged to Coluccio Salutati. In the margin we find, by the great Chancellor's own hand, notes about the exact meaning of words and confrontations with the original Greek. Salutati was planning to obtain precise information on these matters from various Byzantine people who, for commercial as well as for political reasons, had come to live in Florence.⁶ Later he even succeeded in obtaining the services of Manuel Chrysoloras. For Salutati, good pupil of Petrarch that he was, always insisted that one should, when confronted with a philosophical text, refrain from empty discussions and occupy oneself instead with the attempt to understand it in its exact original sense. On one page of the *De Fato*, concerned with the moral interpretation of Seneca, he mentions that when confronted with difficulties due to the corrupt state of the manuscripts, he collected *multos codices . . . non modernis solum, sed antiquis scriptos litteris*. Thus he managed to take account of the things obscured by the copyists, of the marginal glosses and of those between the lines which had

⁶ An edition of Vernia appeared in Venice in 1483 (Cp. 'Rinascimento', II, 1951, pp. 57-66). The codex of Eustrazio is in the National Library of Florence, Conventi; I, V, 21.

eventually ended up as part of the text. Thus he also coped with the presumptuous ignorance of those readers who were ready to correct the text when they could not understand it. Moreover, he added, one has to take care of the things that happen when particular interests are at stake, such as when one is dealing with sacred texts or the works of the Fathers in which all sorts of motives have been the cause of various kinds of wilful alterations. Thus various barbarians *nullum omnino textum philosophorum moralium, historicorum, vel etiam poetarum non corruptissimum reliquerunt*. Hence the necessity for a collection of all copies of every work so that those that were the most expert in the language concerned and in history, would be able to restore to each its original appearance.⁷

Vernia was to try to do for Aristotle, and Nifo for the *Destructio Destructionis* of Averroes, what Salutati had tried to do for Seneca. This meeting in spirit between Salutati and Vernia has a very special significance. For one of the few writings by Vernia that have come down to us is a posthumous attack on Salutati and on his theory of the supremacy of the laws. This attack is written in a singularly antihumanistic spirit. And nevertheless, even this opponent of the supremacy of *studia humanitatis* had, without himself being aware of the fact, availed himself of the major humanistic achievement; that is, of the critical and historical habit of sizing up authors in their proper dimensions. The prejudice in favour of Aristotle was no longer confined to insinuating that a more or less repugnant text is capable of a more or less heretical interpretation. It began, on the contrary, to assume the shape of an attempt to find out what the historical Aristotle really was like. And such an attempt is an effective beginning for overcoming Aristotle altogether and with him all those positions based on Aristotelianism as a permanent truth. For this reason Ermolao Barbaro agreed with certain points made by Vernia⁸; and for that very same reason at a certain moment the lesson of the 'philologists' became decisive for the 'philosophers' who became more and more alive to the need for original sources, for correct texts, for historical accuracy. And at the same time, Aristotle

⁷ Salutati, *De Fato, Fortuna et Casu*, II, 6, Laur. 53, 18, fol. 11 v-12 r.

⁸ Cp. the edition of the *Destructio* of Averroes published by Nifo in Venice in 1497; and E. Barbaro *Epistole* ed. by V. Branca, Firenze, 1943, I, p. 45 sqq.

himself ceased to be an *auctoritas* and became a thinker like all the others, part of a certain historical age. When we find the open confession that Aristotle, because he was not aware of certain problems, no longer suffices, we are face to face with the distance between the old and the new way of thought. There is no more question of a text, given once and for all; and even less question of a certain Truth to be illustrated. There is instead a risky adventure where everything is still obscure, but where everything is possible. The real hero of the pillars of Hercules is not the man who defies the order not to sail beyond them—although he may well think himself a hero. At any rate, his heroism depends on their existence. But the real hero is the man who explains how they came into being and thus understands them and then leaves them where they are, an obsolete and elegant 'curio', to use an expression by Vespasiano da Bisticci. He leaves them alone without laughing at them and without crying over them, without contempt, but with full understanding. Compared with the true philologists, all the so-called heretics, the empty Averroists as well as the most ardent Aristotelians, are all poor fish. The philologists, though respectful of traditional forms, courageously faced every document, every piece of paper and every book, determined to treat it as it lay before them; a human fact, a vestige of human reasoning and as such to be subjected to critical examination and discussion.

3. HUMANISM AND HISTORY

On the first of February 1392 Colluccio Salutati wrote a letter to Don Juan Fernandez de Heredia. This letter is a distinguished monument of his thought. The Chancellor praised the advantages of history—the educator of mankind, the source of a knowledge far more concrete than all the subtleties of theology and philosophy. He called her the true creator of man, for humanity consists, above all, in the recollection of man's actions in this world and for this reason history is a kind of 'philanthropy', an encounter and a dialogue with all men. Civilisation takes shape and politics are defined through the dimensions of history: 'tolle de Sacris Litteris quod hystoricum est: erunt profecto reliquie res sanctissimae, res mirande; sed . . . taliter insuaves,

quod non longe poterunt te iuvare.' It cannot be a surprise, therefore, that the first historian in the modern sense of the word, was the great pupil and friend of Salutati, Leonardo Bruni. It was the wide political experience which he had acquired in the chancellery that taught him to look into the causes of the facts which, to him, were always the free decisions of good men or bad men, of men capable of being understood.⁹

In this way the age of humanism, at the end of a long crisis, both focussed upon and overcame for good in its historical pictures the ancient vision of a static reality, rigid and unchanging. Such a static reality had been presupposed by Platonic as well as by Aristotelian logic. In this presupposition all movement had been an eternal return to identical positions and had thus resolved itself into the very denial of movement, while man's life and activities had been lost in total insignificance. And this is precisely what certain critics cannot understand: without the so-called 'rhetoric' of people like Guarino, Valla, Poliziano and other such 'pedants', it would never have been possible to dethrone the 'authorities', and nobody would ever have been able to see Aristotelian logic for what it really is—an admirable tool of human thought valid for, and to be used in, certain cultural regions only. That is, as the logic of Aristotle of Stagira and perhaps also of Euclid and several other equally subtle thinkers; but not as logic in an absolute sense. All this was taught by Lorenzo Valla on the day on which he ceased to pretend that he was discussing Aristotle from within and proceeded instead to attack him. In the preamble to his *Dialectica*, Valla defined his position: he pointed out that the logic of Aristotle was not the only logic. As a result he ceased to accept the obligation of the schools to swear that Aristotle, as far as fundamentals are concerned, could never be wrong. He wanted instead to supplant Aristotle and Aristotelianism root and branch.

Then, and only then, the efforts of these same pedantic historians made it possible to gain some detachment from Aristo-

⁹ B. L. Ullman, *Leonardo Bruni and the humanistic historiography*, 'Medievalia et Humanistica', 1946, pp. 45-61 (Cp. H. Baron, *Das Erwachen des historischen Denkens im Humanismus des Quattrocento*, 'Hist. Zeitschrift', 1933). On *humanitas, studia humanitatis* ε φιλευθροπονία cp. Guarino (Nat. Library, Firenze, II, I, 67, fol. 113v.). Cp. also H. Baron, *Aulus Gellius in the Renaissance and a Manuscript from the School of Guarino*, 'Studies in Philology', 48, 1951, pp. 107-25.

telian physics and from the cosmology of Ptolemy. At one stroke people became freed from their oppressive strictures. Even though it is true enough that both physicists and logicians both in Oxford and in Paris had for some time made breaches into the systems which had trembled ever since the blow aimed at them by Occam,¹⁰ still it was only when people began to understand ancient civilisation in a historical sense—and this understanding was the essence of humanistic philology—that it began to be possible to regard those theories in a true light, that is, as human thoughts, as products of a certain culture, as results of certain partial and particular experiences. Humanistic philology ceased to look upon them as oracles either of nature or of God, revealed by either Aristotle or Averroes; and took them instead as human thoughts. In this connection it is worth while taking another look at the twelfth book of Pico's astrological discussions. In that book he gave a very precise account of the psychological and historical emergence and diffusion of astrology. As he succeeded in historicising the errors of astrology he succeeded simultaneously and with no less acumen, in historicising all human knowledge. His own nephew, Gian Francesco, pitilessly demolished all philosophical theories belonging to ancient civilisations by demonstrating their limitations. He did not want to do this, and was barely aware of doing it; but he managed, by different methods and with intentions diametrically opposed to those of his uncle, to prove precisely the same thing.¹¹ In every respect, people acquired a sense of human history. This was so when they underlined man's eternal unsatisfied search; and it was so when they fixed their gaze upon all the diverse positive achievements of man.

4. HUMANISM AND PLATONISM

In this connection it is worth remarking that the humanists' preference for Plato, which was a fairly constant factor in their thinking, was a sign of rebellion and, in a certain measure, a party

¹⁰ Cp. A. Maier, *An der Grenze von Scholastik und Naturwissenschaft*, Roma 1952; *Die Vorläufer Galileis im 14. Jahrhundert. Studien zur Naturphilosophie der Spätscholastik*, Roma, 1949; *Zwei Grundprobleme der scholastischen Naturphilosophie*, Roma 1951; *Metaphysische Hintergründe der spätscholastischen Naturphilosophie*, Roma 1955.

¹¹ *Examen Vanitatis Doctrinae Gentium*.

badge. But in the very last analysis, this preference meant a preference for the conception of an open world, discontinuous and full of contradictions, incessantly changing and hostile to any kind of systematization. To such a world one could do justice only through incessant research which would never shrink from apparent inconsistencies, but which was sufficiently mobile and subtle and variegated to be able to respect the infinite variety of existing things. Such research, moreover, would reject all rigid articulations of a static logic incapable of catching the plastic mobility of all Being. At times it might use them in order to underline the inappropriateness of all static conceptions.

There were so many possible interpretations of Plato that he appeared as some kind of a peace-maker. The reconciliation which Plato seemed to recommend was not taken as a sign of speculative weakness, but as a frank admission of the fact that two alternative terms are likely to become contradictory no sooner than they have been coined. The seeming contradictions in the Dialogues revealed clearly how much the acute eye of the 'divine' Plato had appreciated the contradictions that are present in all Reality.

Platonic philosophy was sensitive to all problems and nuances. It was a moral meditation on a life shot through with hope, and it impinged upon the borders of mythology. Thus it was a human dialogue, rather than a systematic treatise; and the exasperation with all the many problems led to corroded systematizations. For all these reasons the philosophy of Plato served as the centre of a civilisation that had rejected all old certainties, and the idea of a closed, ordered and static world; and which had found itself in a historical crisis, in the course of which all venerable unity had gone by the board and all human relationships had been changed. These dialogues were full of the enigmatic figure of Socrates and his subtle searching, a witness both to the solid certainty of his convictions and to his sense of urgency. These dialogues are so humane—full of social and mundane problems—and yet intimately concerned with the divine. Their tenor alternates between hopefulness and the realization that the things that ought to be may never come to pass. Reading them, one never quite knows whether 'those distant lands' are lost in the memory of a tradition or whether they are perhaps so near because of the expectation of

redemption. Throughout their pages one recognises that philosophy is a form of passionate love and a vision of well-nigh miraculous forms that stand over and above all sense-data; and at the same time one sees that it is also a matter of subtle logic and a discussion of different possible forms of logic. These, clearly, were the reasons why such different temperaments as those of Valla and Ficino, of Poliziano and Pico, of Bruno and Patrizi, worshipped the 'divine' Plato and contrasted him to that 'beast' Aristotle. They knew perfectly well, and lost no opportunity for saying so, that often enough Aristotle had done no more than sum up or tidy up Platonic themes with coherent rigour. But they opposed all such summations and crystallizations. It was this kind of crystallization (to mention only one example), which, in astronomy, had transformed a really elegant geometrical construction into the physical theory of the celestial spheres. And for this reason when they chose Plato, they chose, in opposition to all systematizations, the new spirit of research, unprejudiced and truly free. It was like a declaration of war on the oppressively closed, hierarchical and finite world of Aristotle. Thus the slogan *ubi spiritus, ibi libertas* joined forces with the new programme of *inuat vivere*.

5. THE ORIGINS OF HUMANISM

'The return to Plato' brings to mind an old but ever recurring misunderstanding. That is, the opinion that humanism was conditioned and characterised by the discovery of new classical texts. It is believed that the revival of civilization was due to the study of Cicero, Lucrece, Seneca, Plato and Plotinus; and it is thought that an increase in the quantity of classical reading finally led to a change in quality. This is in fact the view of all those learned historians who comb the medieval texts and translations, compilations, anthologies and quotations, and thus gradually persuade themselves that the first century of humanism was not the 14th and still less the 15th, and that the first age of humanism was not to be found in Italy. They insist instead that humanism began in the 13th century—or, better still, in the 12th century and even earlier, in the age of Alcuin and at the court of Charle-

magne.¹² One must admit willingly that it was very important—not the least reason being the desire to understand the peculiarities of the Renaissance—to dispel the myth of the Dark Ages and to show that the conception of the barbarousness of the middle ages was purely polemical. But it does not follow that one should deny that this whole question concerned the outward appearance of culture and not its content.

There can be no doubt that one ought to remember that people in the middle ages read and translated the classics; that at least in some places, at certain times, they knew Greek; that they were interested in nature, and so forth. It is equally important to recall that the middle ages, far from being dark and barbarous, showed both the light of civilization and greatness of thought and thus fed upon classical culture and appropriated it. The point, however, is that the real problem is more intricate and consists in something else. It consists precisely in the task of determining the differences between the various modes and forms of culture.

The better one knows the middle ages, the more clearly one recognises in their civilization the extension of antiquity. Methods of teaching as well as views and doctrines survived in various ways. Even though the ancient ways may have exhausted their vital impulses, there still remained their echoes, caught in manuals and in compilations, fixed by the scholastic method. Christianity by no means substituted—as Tertullian hoped—the temples of Jerusalem for the halls of Athens. Both Athens and Rome

¹² There is no need to repeat the expositions by Ferguson *op. cit.*, Cp. also F. Simone, *La coscienza della Rinascita negli umanisti francesi*, Roma, 1949 and La 'Reductio Artium ad Sacram Scripturam' quale espressione dell'umanesimo medievale fino al secolo XII, 'Convivium', 1949, pp. 887-927. On the XIIIth cent. cp. W. A. Nitze, *The so called Twelfth Century Renaissance*, 'Speculum', XXIII, 1948, pp. 464-71; Hans Liebeschütz, *Mediaeval Humanism in the Life and Writings of John of Salisbury*, London, 1950, p. 94: 'his thought . . . was determined on the whole by traditional forms of ecclesiastical literature. . . His humanistic outlook, for which antiquity was a kind of picture book illustrating the types of twelfth-century life, seems . . . to have been intimately connected with the archaic stage of European systematic thought.'

The conclusions of the learned studies by R. Weiss, *The Dawn of Humanism in Italy*, London, 1947, and *Il primo secolo dell'umanesimo*, Roma, 1949, are equally negative. They show with very certain evidence that 'primitive humanism did not result from a reaction to a certain kind of philosophical speculation or from a conscious desire to bring about a *renovatio studiorum* or from the hope for a golden age'. It was in no sense the parent of the humanism of the Renaissance but a 'spontaneous and natural development of the classical studies as cultivated during the later middle ages'. Weiss' honest conclusion emphasises correctly the distinctive character of the new form of culture—a form which amounted indeed to a new vision of life.

continued to live in the medieval schools, even though the original doctrines of Plato or Aristotle or Lucrece seemed so distant, so elevated and so solemn. They lived instead in the expressions of a tired wisdom contained in very modest handbooks. What really mattered was neither the Platonic dialogues, nor Aristotelian metaphysics, but Porphyry and compilations from Porphyry. In this way the crystallized summaries of ancient culture were transmitted by school text-books to the middle ages. And the worshipful attachment of the middle ages to these books forced the masters to confine their work to obsessively tortuous commentaries designed to unveil the truth enshrined in the page by the sacred character of the written word. Some, perhaps, added a gloss to the text; others might arbitrarily correct the text. None of them were interested in knowing the historical truth about the origin and meaning of the text. They were only interested in the one perennial Truth that somehow existed at the root of everything that had ever been written down. They took the text itself, written by someone with authority, as the object of knowledge, and therefore dispensed with all direct research. All efforts towards a more profound understanding were directed towards discovering the truth in what has been written down. And things written were no longer taken to be human documents, but were considered oracles from which one had to wrest the secret meaning. A tenth century author explained well how one could overcome all difficulties of research. One went to Chartres to read the aphorisms of Hypocrates. If that was not enough, one consulted the commentaries by Galen and then the commentaries by Sorano, and finally the commentaries on the commentaries, and so forth.¹³

It was this kind of mentality that led, in part, to the famous theory of 'the double truth'. The books of Aristotle were taken to be the revelation of natural truth: philosophy disregards every direct reference to reality, and confines itself instead to an understanding of what an author has written. In this way, the truth is completely divorced from the historical personality of a philosopher; and the material vehicle in which it became manifest is considered to be of no importance at all. The man is unimportant.

¹³ Richer, *Histoire de France* (888-995), R. Latouche ed., Paris, 1930-37, II, pp. 224-31.

The only importance attaches to the thought, and any change in the name of the person who happens to hold it is a mere accident. Hence those strange attributions and hence all those anonymous writers who make the individual disappear in the work or consider it the fruit of a collective effort. There is grandeur in all this; but also limitation. But one has to bear all this in mind in order to understand the emotion with which Valla, confronted by a word, by *verbum*, insists on the fact that we are confronted by a mere instrument of communication. This instrument, he admits, is something sublime; but all the same, something quite human. Through this new attitude both logic and dialectics were led back from the theological heavens to the plains of rhetoric and grammar, the most humble spheres of all mundane preoccupations. Guarino, at the beginning of his course on rhetoric, concurred and reminded his readers that both rhetoric and dialectics were human sciences. And, similarly, Ermolao Barbaro, at the opening of the course on Aristotle which he held in Padua at sunrise, felt it necessary to say that it was his purpose to make Aristotle come to life and to make him take part in a human conversation: *ut cum ipso vivo et praesente loqui videamur*. Aristotle was to be a man living and present, loved in all his limitations.

6. HUMANISM AND CLASSICAL ANTIQUITY

The essence of humanism is most clearly defined by its attitude to the civilization of the past. And that attitude is not confined to an admiration or a love for antiquity, nor to a greater knowledge of antiquity, but consists rather in a well marked historical consciousness. The 'barbarians' were not barbarous because they had remained ignorant of the classics, but because they had failed to understand them as a historical phenomenon. The humanists, on the other hand, discovered the classics because they managed to detach themselves from them and comprehend their Latin without confusing it with their own Latin. It is for this reason that it is true to say that antiquity was discovered by the humanists, even though both Aristotle and Virgil were equally well known to the middle ages. It was humanism which placed Virgil back into his historical context; and which tried to

explain Aristotle in terms of the problems and the sciences of the Athens of the fourth century before Christ. For this reason one should never seek to distinguish between the humanistic discovery of antiquity and the humanistic discovery of man—for they amount to exactly the same thing. For the discovery of antiquity implied that one had learnt to make a comparison between antiquity and oneself, to take a detached view of antiquity and to determine one's relation to it. And all this implied, further, the concept of time and memory and a sense of human creation, of human work in this world and of human responsibility. It was indeed no accident that the majority of the great humanists were statesmen and men of action, accustomed to participate freely in the public life of their age.

This point of view assumed concrete shape in the critical discussion which was started about the documents of the past. Such a discussion, whether or not it was to have any specific results, made it possible to establish a proper sense of distance between the humanists and the past. And in between, the humanists discovered those seven centuries of darkness—for no less were counted by Leonardo Bruni. During those centuries the spirit of criticism had been in abeyance, and all knowledge of history as a story of human activity had been absent. The 'philology' of the humanists gave concrete shape to that crisis which was occasioned by the new awareness of the past as past, by the new vision of reality as something earthly and by the new attempt to explain history as the story of men.

As soon as one opens the *Miscellanies* of Poliziano one comes across, in the very first chapter, the 'Endelechia', the soul. But the soul of which he treats has nothing to do with the Goddess of which Bernardo Silvestre had sung in the 12th century, or with the sort of soul which, according to so many Platonic commentators, was an entity of some kind or other. Nor does he discuss the unity of the possible intellect and of its relations with individual human beings. The question he discusses is a question of vocabulary: should it be *entelechia* or *endelecheia*? i.e., is it a matter of eternal movement or of a perfect act? With extreme lucidity and with classical witnesses at hand, Poliziano illustrates the origin of two conceptions of the soul by referring the whole matter to the relationship between the thought of Plato and the

thought of Aristotle. He points out the meaning of the different premisses, and thus explains the thought that resulted from these two premisses. He shows the genesis of two theories and of their historical relationship, and we are made to understand the significance of an episode in the history of philosophy.

Or let us take a look at Valla, at his famous 38th chapter of the sixth book of the *Elegantiae*. He deals there with the term *persona* and in a purely grammatical discussion, having reduced *persona* to a *quality*, he solves a grave theological problem with the help of Occam's Razor. It is no accident that Valla refers to his 'dialectics' for his dialectics is a rigorous reduction of philosophy from theology to an analysis of the structure of thought such as it is revealed in speech.

Or let us open the *Notes to the New Testament*. There we will read that 'none of the words of Christ have come to us, for Christ spoke in Hebrew and never wrote down anything'. And with reference of St. Jerome's observation that all biblical codices were corrupt, we read: 'if after only four hundred years the river had become too murky, need we be surprised that after a thousand years—for we are separated from St. Jerome by that many years—that river, never having been purged, carries both mud and refuse?'

While the most venerable texts were being re-examined in the light of their historical reality, and while the charters of ancient privileges were subjected to devastating criticism, people were also tracing back the origin of equally well enshrined ideas about the cosmic order to old superstitions and ancient errors. Poliziano smiled at the sight of the Codex of the Pandects that was exhibited in the Palazzo Vecchio by the light of candles. For these parchments were to him nothing but a historical problem, and he considered them sacred only because he considered any valid human creation sacred—that is, any human creation which was meant to open paths for mankind rather than to obstruct them for good.

This, then, is the true meaning of humanistic 'philology'. And it is not hard to understand that these same humanists were indeed extreme pedants, for they were sensitive to the fertility of their own method. For this reason they showed a very touching love in their exasperating desire to recover as many records of

human labour as possible. Poliziano, confronted by a verse of Theocritus or Statius, wanted to rediscover every flavour, every allusion.¹⁴ For the truth that is manifest to all men is entirely contained in those works which bear witness to man's indefatigable *poiesin*. To understand its meaning is to understand our own meaning, our own limitations as well as our own potentialities. Before he wrote his *Miscellanies*, Poliziano wrote some pages that contain not only a grand lesson for mankind, but also define a method valid for any kind of research. In reading those pages one understands why the Renaissance was not only an age of artists, but also an age of scientists like Toscanelli and Galilei. And one understands why the sterile, though often very subtle, debates of medieval physicists and logicians could become fertile only after the new lesson had been learnt—even though that lesson seemed still so far distant.¹⁵ One will also understand that eventually even a new kind of physician emerged from those schools of philology. And in view of this rigorous (one is tempted to say pitiless) critique, one can understand, finally, the doubt of Descartes. And similarly, one will understand why, for roughly two centuries, Italian culture should have dominated the whole of Europe, and why Italy during this period should have become a country so productive of so much philosophical talent.¹⁶

¹⁴ Cp. Laur. XXXII, 46 (Theocritus), Magliab. VII, 973 (Statius).

¹⁵ Cp. E. Callot, *La Renaissance des sciences de la vie au XI^e siècle*, Paris, 1951, pp. 14 sq. Callot notes this positive function of humanism without being able to explain it. But the explanation is not difficult to find and must be sought, precisely, in 'education' and the acquisition of a logical method.

¹⁶ Cp. the curious and important text by Naudé published by Croce, 'Quaderni della Critica', 10 March 1948, pp. 116–17. On the general questions discussed above see: B. L. Ullman, *Studies in the Italian Renaissance*, Roma 1955; G. Sarton, *The Appreciation of Ancient and Medieval Science during the Renaissance, 1450–1600*, Philadelphia 1955; C. Dionisotti, *Discorso sull'umanesimo italiano*, Verona 1956. On the problem of periodisation see D. Cantimori, *La periodizzazione dell'età del Rinascimento nella storia d'Italia e in quella d'Europa*, X Congresso Int. di Scienze Storiche, 1955, Relazioni, vol. IV, Firenze 1955, pp. 307–334. For other aspects cp. W. K. Ferguson, *Italian Humanism: Hans Baron's Contribution*, and H. Baron, *Moot Problems: Answer to Ferguson*, 'Journal of the History of Ideas', 19, 1958, pp. 14–34.

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