PHILOSOPHY - RELIGION

William of Occam and his predecessors had laid the foundations of the modern world. They had separated the function of reason from revelation and faith; they had established the realm of reason as the world of experience, of natural sensory knowledge; they had established the value of the individual in himself rather than as an actualization of eternal forms, and had thus shaken the foundations of the universals represented in the Church, the state, and a common human nature--the very elements which gave the medieval individual's life meaning, value, and stability.

The Renaissance was the working out of the implications of these new ideas. It is, therefore, a period to be subsumed under the category of history rather than philosophy, although there are some important items of philosophy we will look at. A tremendously important aspect of this period was the development of the new nations of Europe, and the philosophical question of sovereignty, therefore, became a crucial issue. This had special significance in that it involved the development of the secular state as separate from political dominance by the Church. It is true, of course, that while the new nations were developing in northern Europe, in Italy the movement toward secular society took the form of independent city-states. The problem of secular political sovereignty was not thereby changed, but because of the independent city-states, the issue emerged a little earlier in Italy than in Europe with its larger nations.

MARSIGLIO OF PADUA (c. 1274-c. 1343)

In Italy, Marsiglio of Padua applied the doctrine of the double truth of Occam to defend the view that as reason and faith serve quite separate and distinct areas of knowledge, faith--and therefore the Church--should confine its interests and authority to matters of revelation and salvation and leave philosophy (reason) to deal with problems of secular life--in this case, secular political sovereignty and civil law. By this separation he destroyed the medieval concept that civil law was but a translation of the law of God into the civil realm, specifying how people should live in society so as to achieve the divine ends. For Marsiglio, faith and revelation and the will of God had to do only with eternal and thus ecclesiastical matters. In civil matters, he said, the will of the people is sovereign. If the community is the true sovereign in the secular state, he argued, then the same principle applies to the Church; therefore, the true supremacy in the Church resides not in the pope but

in the general councils of the Church since they represent the will of all believers.

JOHN WYCLIFFE (1328?-1384) AND JOHN HUSS (1373-1415)

The issue of sovereignty in the Church was central to the doctrines of two major pre-Reformation leaders--John Wycliffe in England and his theological disciple, John Huss of Bohemia. Wycliffe taught that the scriptures are the only law of the Church, and arranged for a translation of the Bible into English. He attacked the doctrine of transubstantiation, which he saw as the basis of the power of the priesthood. While Huss did not follow Wycliffe on this point, they both maintained that the Church consisted of the whole company of the elect, or predestinate, whose true head is Christ and not the pope. Huss was condemned for heresy by the Council of Constance and burned in 1415.

MACHIAVELLI (1469-1527)

Machiavelli, on the other hand, presented a contrary image of people in his book *The Prince* (1513). He believed that most people are stupid and quite irrational and incapable of understanding or exercising sovereignty, and thus the only realistic form of government is monarchy. He was willing to admit that government by the people is theoretically to be preferred, but Christianity, he said, has so stressed the virtues of humility and long-suffering, avoidance of attachments to material possessions and honors, and the contemplative life that it has left people quite unfitted to deal with the problems of government. A strong sovereign then--presumably not weakened by being a good Christian--is necessary. He will, to be sure, be subject to the same vices as other individuals, but he will have to have an added portion of strength and shrewdness to gain the knowledge and develop the ability to serve his own interests while retaining his power and making his subjects believe that he is in fact serving their interests.

A successful sovereign (prince) then is one who can promote and maintain himself in power, and such a sovereign is a "good" sovereign. The virtue of a prince is to be successful in retaining power. The "bad" prince is one who cannot do so. Thus the concerns of power eliminate the claims of "right" except as they serve power.

To the question of how this power is to be exercised, Machiavelli named two principal instruments--force and propaganda, or fraud. Force is to be used ruthlessly when necessary to eliminate all possible seeds of rebellion. It must be exercised as radically as necessary at one time to eliminate the need for recurrent use relative to the same issue. Better to cut a dog's tail off at one stroke than to cut it off by inches.

This sort of exercise of power also leaves the sovereign free at other times to do good to people, thus winning their affection. Yet if a prince must choose between love and fear of his subjects, it is better that they should fear him than love him. But both fear and love are better still.

As for fraud, keeping faith with people is no great virtue and is to be abandoned whenever it suits the prince's needs. This default, however, is best disguised and camouflaged to appear to be in the best interests of the subjects or at least for very good cause for which the prince may be excused. Chief of the propaganda devices for defrauding people and so keeping the peace--which is much less trouble and expense than applying force--is religion. The reason for this, he held, is that people fear God more than they fear people, and the only trick is to get them to believe that what the sovereign does is in keeping with the will of God.

Such a philosophy exemplifies a very significant distinction between the theological view of medieval times, represented in Saint Thomas, and the secular view of the Renaissance. The latter is obviously part and parcel of the naturalistic view, lacking any reference to the transcendent reality, will, or norm so dominant in the former.

POMPANAZZI (1462-1525)

As the general spirit of the Renaissance developing in the new individualism, in independent city-states and national states, in new concepts of secular civil sovereignty, and in the development of physical sciences had the effect of setting aside the authority of the Church and its influence in the affairs of people in this world, so within philosophy itself it engendered an even greater threat to the entire Scholastic system.

The fall of Constantinople and the Byzantine Empire brought a flood of refugees to Italy and Europe, who brought with them much more accurate translations of Plato and Aristotle and so stimulated a revived interest in the conflict of their views. The new Platonism produced nothing very important; it tended to degenerate into a mixture of mysticism, magic, and alchemy.

It was different with Aristotle. Pompanazzi, a professor of philosophy at Padua and Ferrara, argued that the new texts, now read in the original Greek, disproved the assertions of Thomas Aquinas that Aristotle's view supported the Scholastic dogma of the immortality of the soul. Quite the contrary. In Aristotle's view, he argued, the individual soul ceases to exist at death. What is eternal is the divine Reason active in people. This also led to the questioning of the argument that immortality must be true in order to guarantee the justice of God by providing a time and place where all the injustices in this world are put right. Rather, there is nothing to put right, Pompanazzi argued, because virtue is its own reward and vice its own punishment, here and now. Thus heaven and hell are unnecessary. Furthermore, the motivation of fear used by the

Church to turn people from hell to faith in the Church and to heaven is itself immoral because it is selfishly motivated and so not really virtuous at all.

By appealing to the original Aristotle, Pompanazzi also showed that there could be no interference in the laws of nature, and hence no miracles. He also showed that Aristotle was as much at a loss to explain the conflict between the idea of divine predestination and mankind's free will as everyone else, and so here also the Church's appeal to Aristotle collapsed.

Thus the faulty Aristotelianism that had been the chief instrument in building the Thomist-Scholastic synthesis of the Church and the medieval culture was destroyed by the true Aristotle, and the Church was deprived of its hero. To make matters worse, the new Platonists and Aristotelians were reconciling their differences in a movement toward pantheism, more in line with the developing scientific naturalism.

ERASMUS (1466-1536)

One of the chief figures of the Renaissance was Erasmus, the Dutch scholar and priest. His expertise in Greek produced a new translation of the New Testament which revealed errors in the authoritative Latin Vulgate used by the Church for centuries. Thus his Renaissance scholarship was matched by his New Testament sense of morality, and he became a stinging critic not only of the ignorance of the men of the Church but of their morality also. In this at least he agreed with Luther, his contemporary in the Reformation, although in other matters he and Luther disagreed violently.

With the secularism of the Renaissance running high on the outside and its authority deteriorating on the inside, the Church was in trouble. This internal trouble climaxed in the Reformation, focused in Luther, to whom we shall turn in the next unit.

R.J.M., 1974
Rev. A.M.S., 1976

FOR FURTHER READING

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ART

". . . shapes that seem alive, wrought in hard mountain marble, will survive their maker, whom the years will to dust return."

With this prophetic verse, Michelangelo affirmed his faith in the immortality of art, the immortality of individual accomplishment in making a lasting object of beauty able to stand apart on its own terms as a beautiful object. The medieval soul had dreamed of a different kind of immortality, focused on heaven rather than on earth. The Gothic spirit was aware of the physical world and fascinated with all visible things in it, but saw it as part of God's world and was unable to consider its beauty separate from God. The Renaissance mind, while quite willing to accept the beauty of the physical world as evidence of God, was able to define beauty in its own terms and judge it on its own merits. The Renaissance represents an important change in focus from heaven to earth--from the supernatural to the natural--centered on people themselves. People became concerned (and fascinated) by their past and tried to reconstruct it, coming to believe that the Renaissance world was an inheritor of the classical world and that the two had been separated by a "dark interlude" after the fall of Rome.

The spark that fanned the flame of change came from a small rocky section of west central Italy called Tuscany, the home of the ancient Etruscans before the rise of Rome. The collective genius of the people of Tuscany initiated a miracle that has been likened to the Golden Age of Greece, in which the forces of history had also combined to produce a dazzling creativity that had transformed the ancient world. It has always been a source of speculation why two rocky, inhospitable, unproductive, and very small provinces--Attica and Tuscany--spawned the two major changes in Western civilization, at least until the twentieth century. Part of the mystery is why the Tuscans of Florence recognized the significance of the classical epoch, fallow for a thousand years, and chose to embody their new ideas in its forms. Florence, in Tuscany, was the incubator of genius, and it was Florentine intellectualism that developed the radical concept that human beings were the most important objects in nature and that the world was no longer a dreary waiting room for heaven. Most of the important men of the early formative years of the Renaissance were Florentines, either by birth or adoption. Pope Martin, a bit enviously perhaps, once remarked that the universe was made up of five elements: earth, air, fire, water--and Florentines.

Even the remarkable Florentines did not build their world in a vacuum; they applied new definitions to older forms and ideas. The Renaissance

was not a discovery of a "lost" antiquity but a reawakening to the beauty and significance of antiquity. Even in the so-called Dark Ages, the classical culture of antiquity was preserved in the monastery libraries, but its relevance was obscure and meaningless in a zealous Christian world. When in the late fourteenth century, a combination of circumstances began to accelerate the change from the medieval to the modern world, this change brought about a reapplication of ideas and philosophical concepts which had reached a high level of development in the great classical civilizations.

The humanistic movement, which started during the time of Francis of Assisi (1182-1226) and was developed by his followers in the Franciscan order, was one extremely important influence in the emergence of the Renaissance. The Franciscans began to repudiate the strict and absolute supernatural orientation of the Middle Ages and place a higher premium on the intellect of human beings, demonstrating thereby an attempt on the part of people to find a more intellectual basis for their relationship to God. The more somber pessimism of the medieval Church in Italy gave way to the more optimistic belief in the worth of mankind and its relationship to the physical world in general. The word *humanism* itself comes from Cicero to mean those studies which are "humane," that is, worthy of the dignity of man.

The humane studies were distinct, to some degree, from theological studies but not necessarily in opposition to them. Francis preached a love of God, nature, and humanity and believed that there was a relationship between the worship of God and a joyful life on earth following God's example. The Franciscans rejected the earlier monastic notion of a life removed from the real world. The idea of the worth of mankind and the value of its intelligence and capacity to do great works led to the development of the concept of "virtu," rooted in the word *virtue* but with a different meaning. Basically, *virtu* means the "assertion of the individual and his personal achievement in thought and action." In the late fourteenth century individual accomplishments became important. This eventually led to what has been called the Cult of Genius in the sixteenth century, the time of Michelangelo, Leonardo, Raphael, and Titian.

This emphasis stimulated an increased investigation into the nature of human beings, into all of their personality factors, temperaments, and individual differences, and directed attention once again to the idea of free will. This concept had been a strong one in Greek culture, with the implication, recounted in tragic drama, that part of the exercise of free will was the acceptance of all consequences. This acceptance in the Renaissance of mankind's new role in the physical world resulted in a renewed search for truths involved in the concrete studies such as mathematics, sciences (including human anatomy), statecraft, and in a concern with resolving the potential conflict between pagan philosophy and Christian theology. The belief in human capacity to create and appreciate beauty and logic became a substitute for the more narrow, supernaturally oriented tenets of the Middle Ages.

All of these ideas became very important for artists; they turned to

examples of the classical world with a new vision and purpose, and the scientific, humanistic nature of the Renaissance was now given form and character. Classical education played a major role, and the perfect Renaissance person was envisioned as an individual of balance, active and competent in many fields. This ideal provided the basis for the so-called liberal education.

The new prosperity in Italy--from the Crusades, wool export, maritime ventures, etc.--gave rise to the great banking houses of Florence such as the Pitti, Strazzi, and the Medici. At times they literally financed many of the royal dynasties of Europe and numerous wars and explorations into the new world. Financial control was thus removed from the exclusive hands of the Church and became the province of the important banking families who controlled the various Italian city-states. The growth of prosperity in Florence meant a surge of important building, providing work for architects, sculptors, and painters. In this way the Medici especially became the patrons of the arts. When members of these important families became popes and cardinals, their patronage was transferred to the Vatican.

It is relatively easy thus to sketch the broad outlines of the ideas and movements in the Renaissance, but it is more difficult to present a clear image of the artist as he moves into this world. The difficulty arises because of the inaccuracy and in many instances total lack of written records in the medieval period. The conclusion that medieval artists were not interested in personal recognition is now very much questioned. While it is undoubtedly true that the artists of the early part of the medieval age were not overly concerned about earthly rewards, a great deal of evidence can be cited to show that the late medieval mason, sculptor, and painter had begun to develop an intense pride in their skills and abilities. But a large part of the problem for historians is, again, the lack of records and the fact that artist's patrons--churchmen or laymen--had not yet begun to differentiate between the artist as a simple craftsman, no different from a good shoemaker or utilitarian potter, and the creative professional with special abilities, the special being of the Renaissance.

Early artists who were attached to courts or wealthy religious establishments during the 1300's were expected to produce painting and sculpture, but in addition, as a tenuous part of the household, they were responsible for the organization of pageants, the designing of banners, costumes, stage sets, and toys for the children of the court. Actually, more than one court artist in the thirteenth century performed the function of bodyguard and valet to a prince of Germany, France, or Italy. Where we read of an individual artist being appointed as court artist, official artist to a city-state in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, a full understanding of the facts often reveals that it was more to bolster town pride and vanity than to reward the artist.

By the middle 1300's the status of the artist, especially the painter, began to change. The Gothic age had truly been the time of the mason (architect), whose secretive mastery of engineering and design elements

during the raising of the great cathedrals had set him apart from all other craftsmen (artists). Several had enjoyed international reputations and were paid in accordance with their unique knowledge and special skill.[1] In the Renaissance it is the painter who emerges as a professional.

Although painting emerges as the major expression of the Renaissance, the rebirth of the classical style was first manifested in architecture and sculpture. In part this was because few, if any, examples of classical painting were extant (until Pompeii was excavated in the eighteenth century), while classical sculpture and architectural ruins existed in abundance. The science of archeology was really born when patrons financed excavations of known classical ruins and began to amass collections of antique sculpture. Many outstanding examples of architecture grace this period, and a great deal of important sculpture was done during the Renaissance, with the works of Michelangelo reigning supreme. Even though most Renaissance painters were also sculptors and sometimes architects as well, and some artists, such as Michelangelo, considered themselves to be sculptors first and painters second, the Renaissance was truly the age of painting--and it was in painting that the important individually creative energy was present.

THE EARLY RENAISSANCE IN FLORENCE

Renaissance painting eventually took its form from sculpture because, as has been indicated, examples of classical sculpture existed for artists to see and because they represented such an impressive level of technical ability and naturalism. Such transitional sculptors as Ghiberti had been able to absorb the lessons of the sculptors of antiquity and create a fine quality of "real" space and perspective, not to mention a very convincing anatomical naturalness in their figures. These qualities are exhibited in the Baptistry doors executed by Ghiberti, whose work became a major influence on painters.

Lorenzo Ghiberti (1378-1455) enjoyed the position of the most famous sculptor in all of northern Italy when, in 1401, he won the competition to provide a set of bronze doors for the north portal of the Bapistry of Florence. (The subject for the competitive panel, the sacrifice of Isaac, had been assigned by the city fathers and the Bishop of Florence.) A generation before, the brilliant sculptor Andrea Pisano had made the first set of doors, and the city fathers determined that the other two entrances of the Baptistry be adorned with cast bronze doors. Ghiberti's main competitor had been Brunelleschi, who subsequently abandoned a career as a sculptor and became the first major architect of the Renaissance.

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[1]Records of contracts are extant in town and parish archives.

Ghiberti completed the north doors in 1424, twenty-one years after he had begun them. In the next year he was commissioned to do the remaining doors for the east side of the Baptistry, with no limitation of time or expense. Ghiberti divided the set of doors into ten rectangular panels, each depicting an episode from the Old Testament executed in deep undercut relief (which posed a major problem in the casting). Much of the surface is gilded and polished, for Ghiberti, in addition to being a sculptor, was a painter and a master goldsmith. Castings from the original molds can be seen on the center door of Grace Cathedral in San Francisco.

It took Ghiberti twenty-seven years to complete this set of doors, which Michelangelo called worthy to be the gates of Paradise. These doors demonstrate an important grasp of the anatomical qualities of the sculpture of antiquity and, as such, profoundly influenced both the painters and sculptors among Ghiberti's contemporaries.

The importance to Florence of this undertaking is evidenced by records which indicate that, calculated by references to the economy of the period, the two sets of doors cost around two million dollars. The amount of money spent on the Baptistry commission indicates the climate in which Renaissance art flourished and the esteem in which a great artist was held.

Other important sculptors of the Early Renaissance include Jacopo della Quercia (of Siena), Nanni de Banco, and, of course, Donatello. Donatello (1386-1466) is the major figure in the new realistic treatment of both stone and bronze before Michelangelo. Donatello's figures are conceived with the convincing easy grace of the best examples of classical sculpture, of which he was an avid student, but they are also evidence that he had observed mankind and nature very carefully. His work has a fine dramatic power, and he is also credited with producing the first great nude piece since antiquity (*David*). The faces of his subjects are compelling, alert, dignified, and possessed of individual personality. The balance of the poses of his statues was a primary influence on the painters in the period immediately following his time.

One of his major commissions was awarded for five life-sized figures to be placed on the facade of the Campanile of Florence. He also worked in other Italian city-states, including Siena, where, for the baptismal font of the Baptistry of San Giovanni, he created cast bronze panels with gilded relief figures acting out the drama of Herod's feast.

Donatello's most illustrious and versatile competitor was Andrea Verrocchio (1435-1488). In addition to being a fine sculptor, he was a very creditable painter with a large workshop in Florence. His reputation attracted young Leonardo da Vinci and seems to have played a part in encouraging Leonardo's own remarkable versatility in the pursuit of the arts. Verrocchio's mastery of bronze casting methods, together with his knowledge of the classical sculptor's approach to balancing the human figure in poses with tension, led to the production of some of the most exciting pieces of the Early Renaissance. Most notable is the large bronze of General Bartolomeo Colleoni (completed in 1488) for the Campo dei San Giovanni in Venice. It is one of the first great equestrian statues of

the post-antiquity period. The completely intriguing tension established in the horse, in the rider, and between each of them imbues the statue with life and vitality. Verrocchio also depicted David in a classically inspired "S" pose with a wonderfully brash and arrogant expression.

Architects were also very busy in Florence under the patronage of the Medici as well as other important families. They executed commissions for palaces, churches, and other public buildings with brilliant results.

In 1420 Filippo Brunelleschi began work on the great dome of the Florence Cathedral. He was a major architect of his time as well as an accomplished sculptor. Although he had competed unsuccessfully for the commission for the doors of the Baptistry, won by Ghiberti, his understanding of Roman construction principles prompted him to approach various building commissions with a daring originality that made him one of the most sought after architects of his time. The cathedral in Florence had been started many years before, probably without a unified or complete plan, and was unfinished because of the challenge of spanning the 140 foot diameter of the crossing. Brunelleschi not only employed his superior knowledge of Roman engineering in solving the problem but also devised new support systems, such as the hexagon shape, to avoid either buttressing or internal support to take up the outward thrust. The basic concept is a double shell with a masonry skeleton of twenty-four ribs which reduce the weight and utilize, as in Gothic cathedrals, the principle of a skin-like shell hung between them. This very same engineering principle was adapted by Michelangelo for the great dome of St. Peter's in later years. Two other great masterpieces of architecture are evidence of Brunelleschi's genius--the Ospendale Hospital and the Church of Santo Spirito. The latter exhibits a brilliant use of the basic form of the ancient Roman basilica. In addition to his superior ability as an engineer-architect, he displayed great taste in coordinating the ornamental features with the building's structural elements, using different colored marbles, classical fluting, and blind arches. While it is quite true that Brunelleschi, like all Renaissance architects, is eclectic, his Roman forms and models are always related in exquisite taste and restraint.

Perhaps second to Brunelleschi in importance in the early Florentine Renaissance is Alberti, who not only designed some important buildings, such as the Palazzo Rucellai, but also wrote many scholarly treatises on architecture based on his research of ancient Roman ruins and of written references from the Codes of Vitruvius, plans, and drawings extant in the monastery at San Marco and the Medici library. From the Neo-Classical period of the eighteenth century until the birth of modern architecture in Chicago in the last decade of the nineteenth century, most important architecture was based on the treatises of Alberti.

The last of the great fifteenth-century architects was Bramante, uncle of the painter Raphael, who began the rebuilding of St. Peter's in Rome after designing some notable structures in Florence. After his death in 1514, Michelangelo was assigned the task of revising Bramante's plan for St. Peter's and the Vatican Square.