

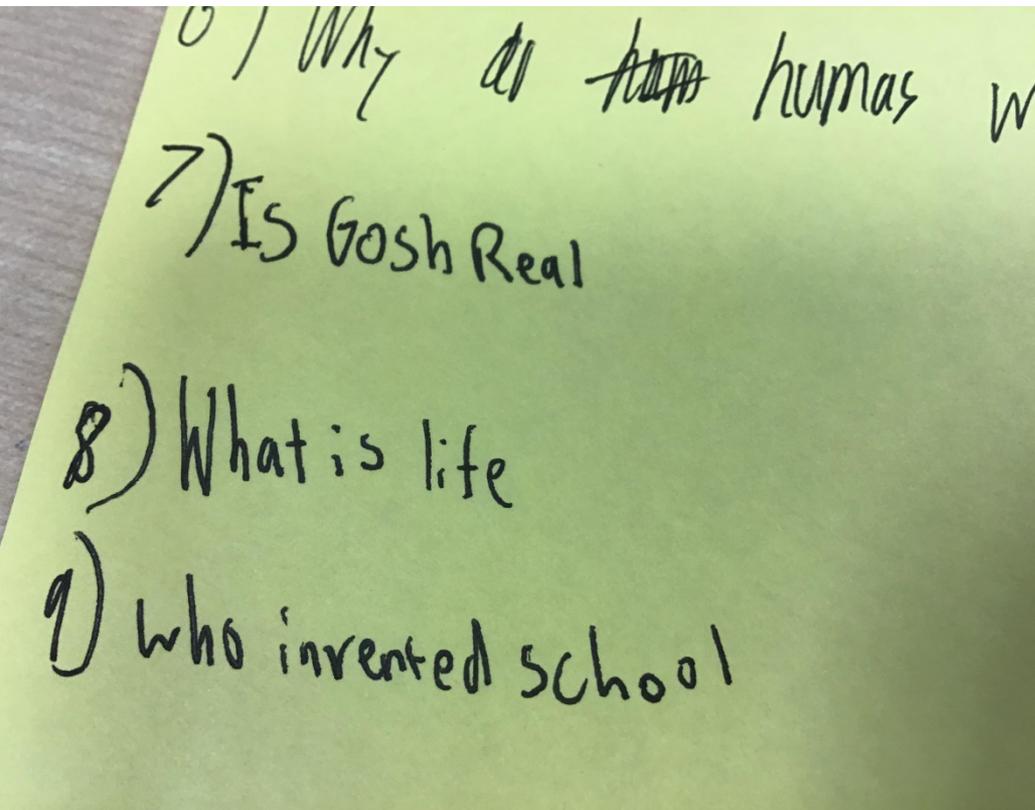


PHILOSOPHICAL QUESTIONING MAJOR TRENDS IN RENAISSANCE PHILOSOPHY

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GENT 8/408: Late Renaissance and Reformation (1520-1600)

Philosophical questions



- What happens when we die?
- Why are we here?
- How does one live the good life?
- What is the good society?
- Who are we? What does it mean to be human?
- Where did we come from?
- What is beauty? Truth? God?

Humanism

- Study of classical antiquity
- A shift in focus from exclusive study of religion towards the study of humankind
- Returning interest in the pagan classics stimulated three major shifts in European philosophy:
 - ▣ the philosophy of secularism
 - ▣ the appreciation of worldly pleasures
 - ▣ Assertion of personal independence and individual expression
- Crossroads between medieval supernaturalism and modern skeptical and scientific paradigms

Sixteenth century natural philosophy

- Century before the Scientific Revolution of the seventeenth century
- Renaissance Natural Philosophy: defies simple definition (Don't want to over simplify)
 - Reducing it to continuation of medieval science:
 - Conflation of 15th-16th century Natural Philosophy into mere continuation of medieval philosophy
 - Interpreted as conservatism (either “medieval” or “classical”)
 - “Looking Forward”/ False Teleology:
 - pressing it into false teleology which is completed in the Scientific Revolution
 - Mere “foundation” or “precursor” to modern science
 - Sometimes ignores importance of “sciences” like astrology, alchemy, and magic.

Continuities and discontinuities

From Medieval to Renaissance philosophy



Aristotle
Paolo Veronese
1560

□ **Continuities:**

- **Structure:** Discovery of Aristotelian texts in 12th-13th centuries in metaphysics, moral philosophy, and natural philosophy → would remain primary philosophical areas in the Renaissance
- **Sources:** Still using Aristotle as a main source → his *Physics* for natural philosophy; *Metaphysics* for metaphysical inquiry; *Nicomachean Ethics* for moral philosophy
- **Topics:** Aristotle had a wide range of topics from the souls of animals, the trajectory of missiles, the freedom of will, virtue, etc.
 - **Interest for Christians:** Stimulated conversation on the immortality of the soul and the eternal nature of the universe.

Continuities and discontinuities

From Medieval to Renaissance philosophy

□ **Discontinuities:**



Virgil in his basket

Lucas van Leyden, 1525

- **Structure:** Structure of moral philosophy, metaphysics, and natural philosophy still strong, but people like Thomas Aquinas would argue that the study of politics more important than ethics → politics is the ethics of the greater number
- **Sources:** Plato's work began to be more widely known through 15th century translations → Renaissance scholars would attempt to reconcile Plato, Aristotle and Christianity.
 - Thinkers like Petrarch began to see Virgil and Cicero as sources for philosophical wisdom
- **Topics:** The way topics approached were more “atheist” than in medieval philosophy
 - **Pietro Pomponazzi:** the immortality of the soul not a question that could be philosophically resolved in a way consistent with Christianity
 - Philosophers like Ficino and Pico della Mirandola would take up an interest in esoteric philosophy (Hermeticism, Gnosticism, Neoplatonism).

Illustration of an alchemy workshop in Johann Mylius, *Opus Medico-Chymicum*, 1618



John Dee

1527-1608/9

- Court astrologer to Elizabeth I
- Mathematician, occultist, astronomer, alchemist, doctor
- Straddled science and magic (but would not have felt a distinction between the two)

"A marveilous newtrality have these things mathematicall, and also a strange participation between things supernaturall and things naturall."



Unknown artist. Painted with Dee was 67.

Tale of Two Title Pages

Wm. B. Ruffield

EUCLIDES ELEMENTS OF GEOMETRY:

The first **VI** Books:
In a compendious form contracted
and Demonstrated.

By Captain **THOMAS RUDD**,
Chiefe Engineer to his late Majesty.

Whereunto is added,
The *Mathematicall Preface* of
M^r. **JOHN DEE**.



L O N D O N :

Printed by **ROBERT** and **WILLIAM LEYBOURN**
for **RICHARD TOMLINS** and **ROBERT BOYDELL** at
the *Sun & Bible* neer *Pie-corner*, and at the *Bulmark*
neer the *Tower*. **MDC LI.**

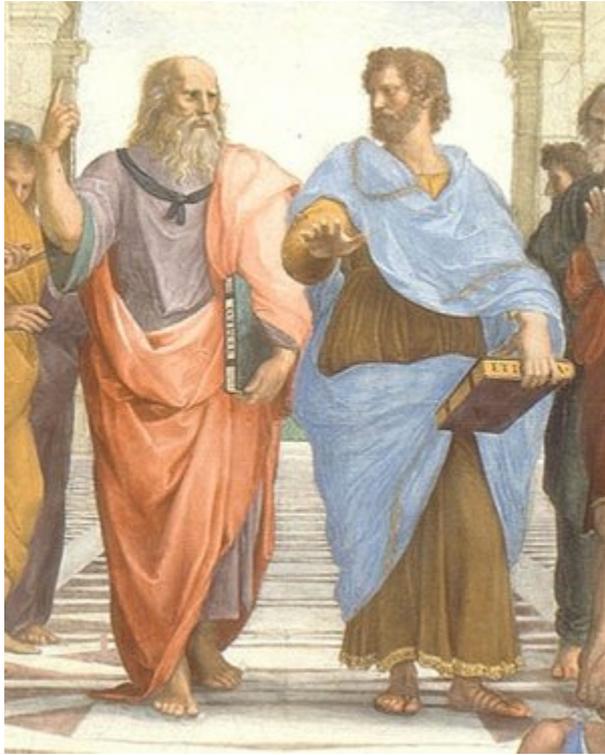


John Dee's Angelic Conversations

- In the late sixteenth-century, John Dee and Edward Kelly began their “angelic experiments”: attempts to communicate with angels.
- Believed there was a connection between the material world and the suprasensory world.
- Would attempt to discover the location of the Spanish Armada for Elizabeth.

John Dee
Heinrich Cornelius Agrippa
Marsilio Ficino
Giovanni Pico della Mirandola
Johann Reuchlin
Giordano Bruno
Paracelsus

The beginning of separation from Natural Sciences and Philosophy

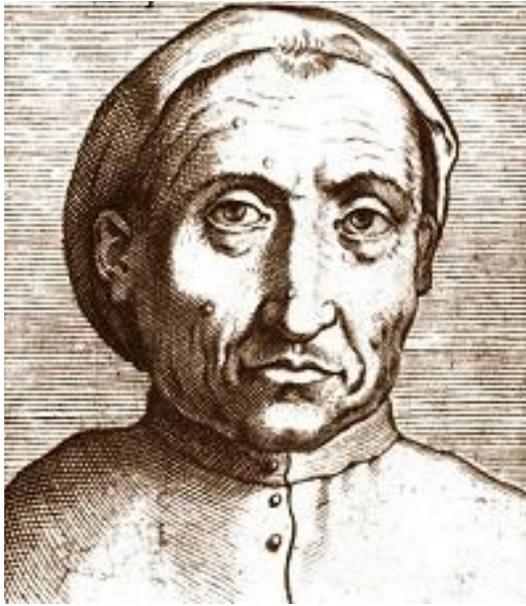


School of Athens,
Raphael, c. 1509

- Plato's philosophy didn't wane in influence
- Brought together as part of the fifteenth century Neo-Platonic project.
- Creation of clear distinction between Aristotle and Plato.
- Plato: thinker of metaphysical realities, theology
- Aristotle: perceived as thinker of metaphysical realities; investigator of the physical world.

Pietro Pomponazzi (1462–1525)

Removing the Theological from Aristotle



- Pietro Pomponazzi read Aristotle for secular/scientific reasons → removal of focus on theological.
- Developed his philosophies entirely from the field of natural philosophy
- *Treatise on the Immortality of the Soul*, 1516: If some part of the intellect is to survive the body's death, then there must be evidence in the action or activity of the intellect → must function independently of the body.
 - ▣ No Independence found
 - ▣ Intellect always mediated by sense impression
 - ▣ Therefore, according to Aristotelian principles, the soul dies with the body

Jacopo Zabarella (1533-1589)

Aristotle and the Scientific Method

- Jacopo Zabarella → wrote prolifically on the subject of the scientific method and the nature of logic
- Aristotle's authority should be subject to rational criticism and should be independent of theology.
- Goal: Discovery of the authentic Aristotelian ideas of science and the scientific method → unarguable demonstration of nature and principles of the natural world.
- *Regressus*: method developed that he believed was the best method for reaching knowledge in the theoretical sciences.
 - ▣ *Combination of the deductive methods of composition and the inductive methods of resolution*
- *Opera logica* (1578): mainly devoted to the theory of demonstration
- *De rebus naturalibus* (1590): major work in natural philosophy → helped a renewal of natural philosophy, methodology, and theory of knowledge.



The Study of the Human



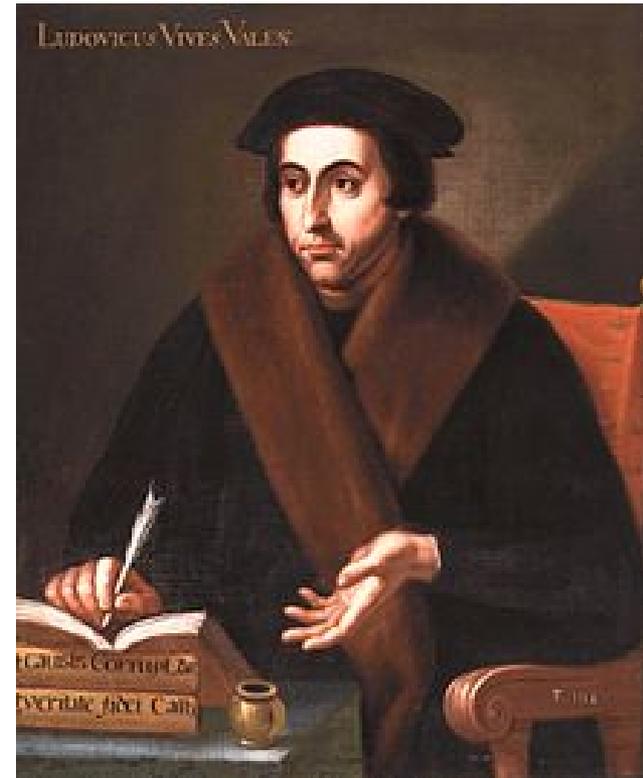
Gregor Reisch, Margarita philosophica, 1504

- 16th century: mixture of scholastic and humanist traditions.
- Development of more human centered disciplines.
- Creation of new vocabulary:
 - “Psychology”: Study of the human soul.
 - Coined by Marko Marulić, d. 1524 – Croatian poet and philosopher
 - “Anthropology”: study of relationship between body and soul – both comprising human nature.

Juan Luis Vives (1493-1540)

The Father of Modern Psychology

- Many philosophers in the sixteenth century interested in Aristotle's idea of the soul as operating on two axes:
 - ▣ Emotions and desires (sensitive-intellective)
 - ▣ The Will (cognitive-appetitive)
- However, Juan Luis Vives (Humanist, scholar, philosopher), explored an alternative to Aristotle's model of psychology
 - ▣ Rejected metaphysical approaches to the soul
 - ▣ Emphasizes understanding the soul through its functionality
 - ▣ We do not have the intellectual ability to completely grasp what the soul is.



Two competing Scottish views on Witchcraft

The Discoverie of Witchcraft, 1587

Reginald Scot, Edinburgh

- Skeptical of the reality of witchcraft, sorcery, magic
- Attempted to prove that magicians were charlatans
- The persecution of witches was un-Christian

Daemonologie, 1597

James VI of Scotland

- Witches, sorcery, magic (learned or unlearned) was Satanic
- Threatens the nation-state, anarchic
- No place for sorcery in learned institutions

John Dee and the Ascension of James VI of Scotland, James I of England

- Death of Elizabeth, John Dee's patron
- Ascension of James VI of Scotland, 1603
- New and more hard-lined approach to the uses of magic in universities and in courts



- Effect:
 - ▣ Magic and science no longer continuous in the courts → magic no longer used politically
 - ▣ Much less commonplace in the universities (this is also to do with other trends)