

Humanities I

Part II

Unit 6: What is Man: A Humanists Answer

Note Pico's definition of the nature of man, namely, that God created man with potential to be anything he wanted to be and with free will to determine his own role in the world.

Discussion notes and questions:

- 1) According to Pico, what makes man so wonderful?
- 2) Do you think man has free will? That is, do you think that man can determine what sort of life he will lead and what sort of person he will be?
- 4) How would a good man who had free-will, behave?
- 5) What sort of society, or environment, would encourage the development of Pico's good man?
- 6) Should a man rely on his judgments of himself (see the last paragraph of the Oration) or on the opinions of others?

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#### Unit 7: The Good Life as Striving: Petrarch

Petrarch the great Renaissance poet led a strenuous life but was torn between activity and contemplation of an ideal.

(Examine the "Ascent of Mount Ventoux" for its allegorical meaning and symbolism)

Discussion questions and study notes:

- 1) What was this essay about? What does it probably mean?
- 2) Let's speculate about the allegorical meaning of the essay. What may the mountain represent? The old man who gave advice? The valleys and ridges over which Petrarch climbed? The summit?
- 3) What seems to be the dilemma that Petrarch is trying to face up to in this allegary?
- 4) Do you think everyone should try to live an active life, striving for higher goals? What happens if you fail to reach your goals? What if you do not contemplate the meaning of the goals you set?
- 5) Can you lead a happier life at an easier pace by being more contemplative rather than constantly busy?
- 6) Is the pace of modern life, and the demands of our modern society, too fast and too much for the average man of our times? What might we learn from Pico and Petrarch?

*The business, the passions, and the achievement*

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#### Unit 8. A Religious Reformer: Girolamo Savonarola

Savonarola thought that the good man renounced earthly pleasure for heavenly regard; that the good life was one spent in the contemplation and glorification of God; and that the good society provided for the basic necessities and spiritual comfort of all people in the community.

Discussion questions and study notes:

- 1) What aspects of Florentine life troubled Savonarola?
- 2) What do Savonarola's sermons imply about the nature of the good man? The good life? The good society?
- 3) Savonarola's followers included many "common people" of Florence. Why do you think this was so? What kind of leadership might he have been supplying that the Medici were not supplying?
- 4) Should leaders exercise moral leadership as well as social, cultural, and political leadership? Do people today look for moral or ethical ideals from their leaders?
- 5) Do you think there are any good reasons for limiting your pursuit of material and other earthly pleasures? Whatever position you take on this question, weigh your opinions carefully against the arguments made by Savonarola and against reasons suggested by classmates.

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#### Unit 9. Ideals of Love: Lyric Poetry of the Renaissance.

Renaissance poets usually wrote about love: as the worship of a woman who represents an unattainable ideal; as the enjoyment of the companionship of a gay playmate; and as striving to be worthy of a woman's affection.

Discussion questions and study notes:

- 1) Have you encountered any of the authors of these poems before in this course? Did you know them primarily as poets? What about those authors who are new to you? Were they known mainly as poets?
- 2) Why would such men turn their attention to writing poetry? Would any of these reasons appeal to you?
- 3) Discuss the relationship between men and women conveyed by all the poems.
- 4) Which of these ways of viewing the relationship between man and woman most appeals to you?
- 5) Are there any aspects of the relationship between men and women that are not illuminated by these poems, but should be included in a good relationship between men and women? (give examples)

Other poems to read which have particular Renaissance style:

The Rape of Lucrese:	Shakespeare
My Last Duchess:	Browning
The Eve of St. Agnes:	Keats
The Divine Comedy:	Dante

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Unit 10: Boccaccio's Stories of Renaissance Life

Boccaccio who was a brilliant theologian and philosopher of his time wrote the famous Decameron Tales in his early manhood. Later in his ecclesiastic and academic life he chose to deny his authorship of the Decameron. It is something of an irony that Boccaccio is known primarily in literature for his Decameron Tales rather than the masterly researches of his later years. However, at the time of writing the Tales it is obvious that he intended them to be morally instructive as well as entertaining. Make research into the background and life history of Boccaccio. Note also that Shakespeare coined many themes for his comedies from Boccaccio's tales-- can you match some of the Shakespearian comedies to their Florentine counterpart?

Discussion questions and study notes:

- 1) According to his conclusion, how did Boccaccio intend readers to regard his tales?
- 2) Consider carefully the substance of the stories you have read and in group discussion decide what attributes Boccaccio admired in the characters, and describe what the characters thought were the "good things in life". Try to take each story and each set of characters separately.
- 3) Do you think these attributes define some of the qualities of the good man?
- 4) From each of the three class groups make a report on the group's conclusions about the nature of the good life.