

of Epicharmus the poet, and many other Latin and Greek women? Admittedly, Gaius Curio knew next to nothing about literature, yet was numbered among the orators for the splendor and richness of his choice vocabulary.²⁰ Granted he did not pursue these higher studies [i.e., literature], yet this same Curio did write down his orations and dialogues. Can we call a man ignorant of literature who commits his thoughts to writing? Admittedly, his domestic life contributed to the size of his vocabulary. I admit it; educated parents and slaves, even mothers if they are well-bred, can aid the eloquence of their sons. Indeed, even today Roman women in my judgment speak in a very well-bred fashion, and certainly more purely than their men. And while their speech is not educated, the very manner of their speech and the polish of their words can still contribute to well-bred [speech]. In my hearing a certain Roman matron, because a lower-class woman had preceded her, grew angry and said, "Heavens! Has all due deference and propriety of conduct disappeared these days? Are all classes and ranks in society to be confounded?" Then, turning to the woman she had taken offense at, she said, "Are you not ashamed, with your common father and common husband, to be taking precedence over me, a woman of equestrian rank married to a Roman knight? But why should I bother about myself? Next, so it please God, you'll be taking precedence over noblewomen!" She spoke all this in a pure and native Roman dialect, in such fashion that I was quite delighted; since the words showed breeding and dignity in their expression, and the very pronunciation too had a kind of vernacular charm. This is the way I think that mothers and nurses assisted their children and charges to well-bred habits of speech. They didn't inflect their cases, use *variatio*, or terminate their sentences in the literary fashion,²¹ but they instilled in them a pure, polished, and by no means barbarous speech. Indeed, the vulgar speech too has its proper esteem, as is evident in the case of the poet Dante and certain others who speak it correctly.

This is the response I wished to make to your book: if by it I have influenced you against this view of yours, well and good; if you persist in your opinion and do not yield to necessary arguments, I promise you I shall say still more against this view hereafter.

Farewell.

F I V E

The New Education

1: Introduction

Humanist Education

Among the more lasting and influential contributions of the humanist movement to the civilization of modern Europe was the humanistic school. For five hundred years, until the First World War, the educated classes of Europe were taught in establishments—the *lycée* of France and the *liceo* of Italy, the German *Gymnasium* and England's great public schools—closely modelled on the schools of Renaissance Italy. From the humanist school they drew their curriculum, which consisted almost exclusively of the reading of classical authors, and of composition in the classical languages; their techniques of study were developed from methods invented by humanist schoolmasters in fifteenth-century Italy; above all, their views of the aims and purposes of education were directly descended from views first expressed, in a series of popular educational tracts, by Renaissance humanists. For the purpose of the humanistic school and its modern descendants was never to train men in skills needed for a specific trade or profession. Instead, the humanists believed that a certain kind of knowledge, which they called liberal knowledge, developed not only a man's intellectual capacities, but his moral and spiritual ones as well. The humanists were by and large much less interested in the social and practical goals of education—providing society with men trained for jobs requiring intellectual skills—than in its individualistic

and moral goals. They wanted above all to create a certain kind of man, rich in political and moral wisdom, faithful to his religion, loyal to his country, eloquent in the defense of good and the condemnation of evil, and without a man of culture, polished, courteous and civilized.

Before asking how the humanists thought to achieve this end, it will be worthwhile to consider the state of the schools in the age immediately preceding that of the humanists. And it must be said at the outset that, with certain exceptions, in the arts faculties of European universities the two centuries before 1400 were almost uniformly bad for liberal studies. The literary and humane interests of the earlier Middle Ages had grown by the thirteenth century more and more weak and had become subordinate to the practical studies of law, theology, and medicine. More and more for the reading of the classical text had been substituted some compendium or textbook: the *Doctrinale* of Alexander Villadei for Servius and Priscian, treatises on *dictamen* for Cicero. As the humanists were later to complain, more time was spent memorizing grammatical rules than reading the poets. Even when a classical author was read, the scholastic technique of the *lectio*, or class lecture, kept the student far from the actual text of the classical author, and was designed more to provide information than improvement, whether literary or moral.¹

This state of affairs was bound to undergo changes in the new conditions of early fifteenth-century Italy. Political changes in the republics, for one thing, had enhanced the value of speaking and writing well, and the growing similarity of their oligarchic constitutions to that of late republican Rome had encouraged a rediscovery of Ciceronian teachings on the perfect orator and the duties of a citizen.² In the authoritarian régimes, with their shallow roots and questionable legitimacy, some differentia was needed, some special mark of breeding or culture whereby the prince could show others (and perhaps himself as well) that he was truly noble, in spirit if not in blood. It was, moreover, an age particularly anxious, for a variety of reasons, to secure moral and especially religious reforms, and to such an age the possibilities for renewal through the education of the privileged could not long go unmeditated.

Such were the conditions which called forth the humanistic school. Do the republican city-states require virtuous and eloquent citizens? Very well, then, the humanist schoolmaster would provide an education that promised to develop moral character and train the powers of self-expression. Does the prince wish to show himself worthy of his title? Let him imitate those princes of old, Caesar and Alexander, of whose greatness there can be no doubt: let him learn, that is, to express himself forcefully and well like Caesar, let him study how best to govern, as Alexander did with Aristotle. Is the

Church in need of reform? How much better it would be then for young clerics to leave the pointless wranglings of the scholastic theologians and read instead the great and ancient Fathers of the Church who not only tell us what is right, but through their eloquence persuade us to do it!

Of course, to promise virtue and eloquence was one thing, to produce it another. The humanists had also to develop plausible methods to achieve their educational goals, and they did so. Aided by Cicero's *Orator* and Quintilian's *Institutes* they developed a new kind of education whose chief instrument was a thorough steeping in the literary texts of classical antiquity. The learning by rote of grammars and rules was reduced to a minimum, and subjects considered less useful *ad vitam et mores* were eliminated. The emphasis was laid upon the reading of the best classical Greek and Latin authors in oratory, history, poetry, and moral philosophy, and on the Fathers of the Church. Further, the authors were to be read in a new way. The closest attention, first of all, was to be paid to their manner of expression, for the after exercise of imitation. Thus might a man acquire eloquence. Secondly, the scholar should study the author's doctrine and let himself be moved by the examples of noble conduct (*exempla*) eloquently described in his works. For thus he would learn to desire the good.

The Italian humanists produced many treatises in which they defended their educational ideals and explained their programs and methods. The most famous of these from the early period was Pier Paolo Vergerio's *The Behavior of a Gentleman* (*De ingenius moribus*), Aeneas Silvius Piccolomini's *On the Education of Children* (*De liberorum educatione*), a work of similar title by Maffeus Vegius, Francesco Barbaro's *On Marriage* (*De re uxoria*), and the epistolatory essay with which we are now concerned, Bruni's *On the Study of Literature* (*De studiis et litteris*).³

The Treatise on the Study of Literature

The task Bruni sets himself in the present treatise is somewhat narrower than in the other humanists' treatises we have just mentioned. Bruni does not attempt to describe a full humanistic program of reform, that is, to set out a program for the complete moral, physical, and intellectual formation of youth, but is addressing himself solely to the question of literary education: which authors should be read, and how they should be read. It is, moreover, a treatise which purports to direct the literary education of a woman, and a woman, as Bruni is at pains to point out, of large intellectual gifts. So it remains partly a matter of conjecture what Bruni would have prescribed had he been inclined to state his views at a higher level of generality.

Nevertheless, certain observations may be made. Bruni says in the section on curriculum that all our reading, especially of the historians, poets and orators, is to be subordinate and auxiliary to divinity and moral philosophy. It is suggested that, were the education of a male in question, rhetoric would have to be added to those two as a third master-subject. The implications of this are obvious. All our studies, all our reading are directed to those sciences that order our relations with God and with other men; in the case of a male, this includes relations of a larger, political nature. In other words, knowledge for its own sake, research, is ruled out, or at least strongly discouraged; only that knowledge is to be acquired that contributes to our excellence as moral beings.

But Bruni prescribes not only knowledge of religious and moral doctrine; he also insists that the student be himself a skilled writer and speaker. It is with this end in view that his methods of reading are designed. This is the point of his long digression into the value of knowing quantity and observing prose rhythm. For we are not, like the schoolmen, simply to read the ancients for their doctrine, squabbling endlessly about their meaning and how they are to be reconciled one with the other; we must measure ourselves against the ancients, acquire for ourselves the quality that gives them *autoritas*. This is what is at the bottom of the Renaissance doctrine of imitation, at least in its origins. Why were the ancients better than we? Because they were wiser, and more virtuous, because their language, with its clarity, subtlety, and noble strength, was a finer instrument of thought and persuasion than ours. How then can we attain to their stature? By imitating their virtues (as seen in *exempla*) and by acquiring their language and their wisdom. But we want no mere antiquarian posings, no precious mimicry of style, no rodomontade. It is power we want, power to do what the ancients did: to reform, to unite, to beautify, to persuade men to the good. No servile copiers we, but independent beings with a greatness and an eloquence borrowed from the ancients, but solving our own problems, beautifying our own universe, pursuing our own ends.

Of this, Bruni himself gives us an example in the very treatise under discussion. Its fine, clear, simple style takes its standards from the ancients, even includes certain phrases from Cicero and Seneca, but is his own. Its form, the epistolatory essay, is borrowed from Seneca but is perfectly and sincerely realized. The ideas it contains owe much to ancient books on rhetoric and education, especially Cicero's *Orator* and *De oratore*, but are informed by Bruni's own wide reading, expressed with the force of his own conviction, and transformed with the aid of his own experience to suit the circumstances and needs of his own day. And the educational plan it proposed was no mere hot-house plant, dependent on passing fashion for its survival,

but a real, workable program which in fact became one of the treatises that influenced most the humanistic school, and hence European education for more than five hundred years.

Two Letters on Education

Two letters from the 1430s enable us to round out our picture of Bruni's educational philosophy, and to glimpse some of his more mature thought on the subject. The first, dated between 1431 and 1434, was written to Nanni Strozzi's young son, Niccolò (1413-1477),⁴ who was evidently meditating just then the choice of a career, and had already shown considerable interest in the *studia humanitatis*. This gave Bruni the chance to restate some points he had made earlier in *On the Study of Literature*, and to add some further refinements. Bruni still thinks the best education provides both useful knowledge and literary skill, but so far has his allegiance to Aristotle strengthened since the early 1420s that he now regards the philosopher's works (and presumably he means here primarily his rhetoric and moral philosophy) as the best source for useful knowledge (*scientia rerum*). Cicero is predictably chosen as the model of eloquence. In the second part of the letter Bruni addresses a favorite theme of the fifteenth-century humanists, the superiority of the humanities to the study of law.⁵ The humanities, Bruni says, are more truly useful, more honorable, and more fun. Like many another classicist from his day to our own, he tries to stimulate interest by an appeal to snobbery: kings and nobles take pride in their literary acquirements, but would never willingly befool themselves by touching the petty squabbles of the law.

That a prince should in fact be accomplished in the humanities is the theme of the second letter, written in 1436 to King John II of Castile.⁶ This is Bruni's sole contribution to the "Mirror-of-Princes" literature⁷ that flourished in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, and is entirely typical of humanist productions in the genre. The prince, too, needs a humanistic education, Bruni says, so that his speech may be as beautiful and ornate as his raiment and equipage. The knowledge gained from study of the humanities, especially history, will likewise be serviceable as a guide and a spur to good government.

2: On the Study of Literature (1424)

to Lady Battista Malatesta of Montefeltro

[TEXT: Baron, *Schriften*, pp. 5-19, with corrections in Berlatot, *Studien*, 2: 430-31. This text has also been collated with the more recent and improved text in Garin, ed., *Il pensiero pedagogico dell'Umanesimo* (Florence, 1968), pp. 147-71.]

I feel myself constrained, dear lady, by many successive reports of your wonderful virtues to write to you in commendation of the perfect development of those innate powers of which I have heard so much that is excellent, or, if that is too much, at least to urge you, through these literary efforts of mine, to bring them to such a perfection. There is, indeed, no lack of examples of women renowned for their letters and their eloquence that I could mention to exhort you to excellence. Cornelia, the daughter of Scipio, wrote letters in the most elegant of styles, which letters survived for many centuries after her death. The poetical works of Sappho were held in the highest honor among the Greeks for their unique eloquence and literary skill. Then, too, there was Aspasia, a learned lady of the time of Socrates, who was outstanding in eloquence and literature, and from whom even so great a philosopher as Socrates did not blush to admit he had learned certain things.² I could mention still others, but let these three stand sufficient as examples of the most renowned women. Be encouraged and elevated by their excellence! It is not fitting that such understanding and intellectual power as you possess were given you in vain, not fitting that you should be satisfied with mediocrity; such gifts expect and encourage the highest excellence. And your glory will be all the brighter, for those other women flourished in ages when there was an abundance of learned persons whose very number decreases the estimation in which we must hold them, while you live in these times when learning has so far decayed that it is regarded as positively miraculous to meet a learned man, let alone a woman. By learning, however, I do not mean that confused and vulgar sort such as is possessed by those who nowadays profess theology, but a legitimate and liberal³ kind which joins literary skill with factual knowledge,⁴ a learning Lactantius possessed, and Augustine, and Jerome, all of whom were finished men of letters as well as great theologians. It is shameful, by contrast, how very little modern theologians know of letters.

But I digress. Let me rather pursue our discourse, not for you to be in-

structed by me (for of that I imagine you have no need), but simply for you to understand my views on the subject of literary study.

The person aiming at the kind of excellence which I am calling you to needs first, I think, to acquire no slender or common, but a wide and exact, even *recherché* familiarity with literature. Without this basis, no one can build himself any high or splendid thing. The one who lacks knowledge of literature will neither understand sufficiently the writings of the learned, nor will he be able, if he should himself attempt to write, to avoid making a laughingstock of himself. To attain this knowledge, elementary instruction⁵ has its place, but much more important is our own effort and study. Elementary instruction, indeed, need hardly detain us. Everyone knows that in the first instance the mind needs an instructor to train and as it were initiate it so that it can recognize not only the parts of speech and their function, but also those smaller details and elements of speech. But these we absorb in childhood as though dreaming; afterwards when we have moved on to greater things, they somehow come back to our lips, and it is only then that we taste their sweetness and true flavor. There is another more robust kind of elementary instruction, useful more to adults than children: the instruction, I mean, of those who are called grammarians, those who have thoroughly investigated every detail in our books, and in so doing have created a kind of literary discipline. Servius and Priscian are grammarians of this sort. But believe me, our own study is far more important. Study reveals and explains to us not only the words and syllables but also the tropes and figures of speech in all their beauty and polish. Through study we receive our literary formation, and, as it were, our teaching; through it, indeed, we learn much that a teacher could never teach us: vocalic melody, elegance, concinnity, charm. The most important rule of study is to see to it that we study only those works that are written by the best and most approved authors, and avoid the crude and ignorant writings which only ruin and degrade our natural abilities. The reading of clumsy and corrupt writers imbues the reader with their own vices, and infests his mind with a similar corruption. Study is, so to speak, the pabulum of the mind by which the intellect is trained and nourished. For this reason, just as gastronomes are careful in the choice of what they put in their stomachs, so those who wish to preserve purity of taste will only allow certain reading to enter their minds.

This then will be our first study: to read only the best and most approved authors. Our second will be to bring to this reading a keen critical sense. The reader must study the reasons why the words are placed as they are, and the meaning and force of each element of the sentence, the smaller as well as the larger; he must thoroughly understand the force of the several particles whose idiom and usage he will copy from the authors he reads.⁶

Hence a woman who enjoys sacred literature and who wished to observe stylistic propriety will take up Augustine and Jerome and any authors she finds similar to them, such as Ambrose and Cyprian. But the greatest of all those who have ever written of the Christian religion, the one who excels them all with his brilliance and richness of expression, is Lactantius Firmianus, without doubt the most eloquent of all Christian authors, and the one whose eloquence and technique are best able to nourish and educate the type of ability I am considering. I recommend most of all his volumes *Against False Religion*, and also *On the Wrath of God*, and *The Creation of Man*. Please do read them if you love literature, and you will enjoy a pleasure like ambrosia and nectar. If you have any translations by you of Gregory Nazianzen, John Chrysostom, or St. Basil the Great, the Greek Doctors of the Church, I would advise you to read them, too—so long as you read them in good Latin translations, not perversions.⁷ A woman, on the other hand, who enjoys secular literature will choose Cicero, a man—Good God!—so eloquent! so rich in expression! so polished! so unique in every *genus* of glory! Next will be Vergil, the delight and ornament of our literature, then Livy and Sallust and the other poets and writers in their order. With them she will train and strengthen her taste, and she will be careful, when she is obliged to say or write something, to use no word she has not first met in one of these authors.

It will moreover be profitable for her from time to time to make an effort to read well aloud. For in prose, as well as in verse, there are certain rhythms, inflexions, and paces, an orchestration, as it were, recognized and measured by the sense of hearing, which causes the voice at one moment to drop and at another to rise, and to create beautifully ordered connections between the cola, commata, and periods.⁸ This will be readily apparent in every good writer. She will clearly grasp this when she reads aloud and she will fill her ears with it as with a harmony, and will hear it also afterwards when she writes, and will imitate it. Another result of her reading will be to have each word drop in place at its proper time, so that there is never haste when there should be emphasis, nor emphasis when haste is called for.

Again, I would not have her ignorant of writing. I do not now speak of calligraphy (although I commend whoever possesses that skill), but the formation of phonemes and syllables. She should understand how each is to be written, the nature of the letters and word division, which abbreviations may be employed and which should be avoided. This is a small matter, of course, but it is a mark of our education, to lack which betrays manifest ignorance. She ought also to know and memorize the quantity of every syllable, that is, whether it is long, short, or common. This knowledge is

necessary to understand many passages which would otherwise be unintelligible, such as that of Vergil,

Omnibus in morem tonsâ coma pressa coronâ,
Each with his hair bound by a trimmed garland in
the traditional manner?

and a thousand other examples. It is likewise unseemly for one who fancies oneself a *littérateur* to misunderstand so basic a thing as the quantity of syllables, especially since verse is universally held to be no contemptible part of literature; but verses are made up of feet; and feet are constituted by the quantity of their syllables. What a person has to offer who does not understand quantity, what poetical taste he can possibly have, is something I do not for my part clearly understand.

This knowledge is likewise necessary, I believe, in composing and writing prose.¹⁰ Metre is not absent from prose simply because the multitude do not perceive it; it is in fact the source of aural sweetness and pleasure. It makes a great difference, according to Aristotle, which metres are used at the beginning and end of a sentence, and even in the middle there are certain metres which are preferable and others which should be avoided. He himself particularly approved the paeon, which has two forms: a long followed by three short beats, or three shorts followed by a long. He thought the latter suitable for *clausulae*, and the former for the beginnings of sentences and perfectly appropriate in the middle as well. He disapproved of the dactyl and the iamb: the former he thought too elevated, and the latter too low.¹¹ Cicero's favorite metres in *clausulae* were the dichoreus, which is made up of two trochees, the cretic, which is long-short-long, and the aforementioned paeon. He held the iamb to be the most appropriate in the middle of the period when we are employing a low or ordinary style, and when a fuller style is being employed, the dactyl, the paeon, or the dochimius (a five-syllable foot: a short, two long, a short, and a long), which latter rhythm he considered to be suitable in all parts of the sentence.¹² Moreover, it is clear that argument, narration, and lamentation all have their several rhythms appropriate to them. Anger and mental excitation will not accept the spondee, requiring as they do a quick and hasty rhythm; narration and instruction, on the contrary, demand deliberate and stable rhythms, and so are averse to "headlong" feet. Thus, every variety of communication has its appropriate rhythm. Any writer who ignores this fact will be writing as chance directs, like a man stumbling in the dark.

There will, perhaps, be many who think exaggerated my attention to this point. They must remember, however, that I am speaking of persons of great

abilities and promise. Mediocrities may go, or rather crawl, as they can. It is sure that no one reaches the pinnacle of literary skill except by knowledge of and practice in all these things. Then, too, the purpose of my treatise is to cover the whole field of literature: not only normal practice, but also the glories, the elegancies, and the finer charms of discourse. I would have our writer possess a rhetorical *garmiture de toilette*, a fine wardrobe, an abundant stock of domestic furniture, if I may call it that, which she can produce and display as the need arises.

Having said that genuine learning was a combination of literary skill and factual knowledge, we have set forth our view of what literary skill is. Let us now, therefore, say something about knowledge. Here again I have in mind someone whose intellect shows the greatest promise, who despises no branch of learning, who holds all the world as her province, who, in a word, burns marvellously with a desire for knowledge and understanding. An ardent and well-motivated person like this needs, I think, to be applauded and spurred on in some directions, while in others she must be discouraged and held back. Disciplines there are, of whose rudiments some knowledge is fitting, yet whereof to obtain the mastery is a thing by no means glorious. In geometry and arithmetic, for example, if she waste a great deal of time worrying their subtle obscurities, I should seize her and tear her away from them. I should do the same in astrology, and even, perhaps, in the art of rhetoric. I say this with some hesitation, since if any living men have labored in this art, I would profess myself to be of their number. But there are many things here to be taken into account, the first of which is the person whom I am addressing. For why should the subtleties of the *status*, the *epicheiremata*, the *krimena*,¹³ and a thousand other rhetorical conundrums consume the powers of a woman, who never sees the forum? That art of delivery, which the Greeks call *hypothesis* and we *pronomiatio*, and which Demosthenes said was the first, the second, and the third most important acquirement of the orator,¹⁴ so far is that from being the concern of a woman that if she should gesture energetically with her arms as she spoke and shout with violent emphasis, she would probably be thought mad and put under restraint. The contests of the forum, like those of warfare and battle, are the sphere of men. Hers is not the task of learning to speak for and against witnesses, for and against torture, for and against reputation; she will not practice the commonplaces, the syllogisms, the sly anticipation of an opponent's arguments. She will, in a word, leave the rough-and-tumble of the forum entirely to men.

When, then, do I encourage her, when do I spur her on? Just when she devotes herself to divinity and moral philosophy. It is there I would beg her to spread her wings, there apply her mind, there spend her vigils. It will

be worth our while to dwell on this in some detail. First, let the Christian woman desire for herself a knowledge of sacred letters. What better advice could I give? Let her search much, weigh much, acquire much in this branch of study. But let her fondness be for the older authors. The moderns, if they are good men, she will honor and revere, but she should pay scant attention to their writings. A woman of literature will find no instruction in them that is not in St. Augustine, and St. Augustine, moreover, unlike them, has the diction of an educated person, and one well worth attending to.

Nor would I have her rest content with a knowledge of sacred literature; let her broaden her interests into the secular studies as well. Let her know what the most excellent minds among the philosophers have taught about moral philosophy, what their doctrines are concerning continence, temperance, modesty, justice, courage, liberality. She should understand their beliefs about happiness: whether virtue is in itself sufficient for happiness, or whether torture, poverty, exile, or prison can affect it. Whether, when such misfortunes befall the blessed, they are made miserable thereby, or whether they simply take away happiness without inducing actual misery. Whether human felicity consists in pleasure and the absence of pain, as Epicurus would have it, or in moral worth, as Zeno believed, or in the exercise of virtue, which was Aristotle's view.¹⁵ Believe me, such subjects as these are beautiful and intellectually rewarding. They are valuable not only for the guidance they give in life, but they also supply us with a marvelous stock of knowledge which can be used in every variety of oral and written expression.

These two subjects, then, divinity and moral philosophy, will be her most important goals, the *raisons d'être* of her studies. Other subjects will be related to them in proportion as they contribute to them or to their embellishment. It is true that the marvel of human excellence, that excellence which raises a name to genuine celebrity, is a direct result of a wide and various knowledge; and it is true, too, that we should read much and learn much, selecting, acquiring, weighing, and examining all things from all points of view, from which process we derive great benefit for our studies. Yet at the same time we should choose carefully and consider thoughtfully the time at our disposal in order to give first place to those things that are most important and most useful.¹⁶

To the aforesaid subjects there should first be joined, in my view, a knowledge of history, which is a subject no scholar should neglect. It is a fit and seemly thing to be familiar with the origins and progress of one's own nation, and with the deeds in peace and in war of great kings and free peoples. Knowledge of the past gives guidance to our counsels and our practical judgment, and the consequences of similar undertakings [in the past]

will encourage or deter us according to our circumstances in the present. History, moreover, is the most commodious source of that stock of examples of outstanding conduct with which it is fitting frequently to embellish our conversation. Then, too, some of the outstanding historians are distinguished and polished writers as well, and so make valuable reading for literary purposes: Livy, I mean, and Sallust and Tacitus and Curtius, and especially Julius Caesar, who described his own deeds with the greatest ease and elegance in his *Commentaries*. These, then, the woman of high promise will go on to acquire, the more so as they make pleasant reading. For here there are no subtleties to be unravelled, no knotty *quaestiones* to be untied; only narrations of facts that are easy to grasp, and, once grasped (at least by an outstanding mind such as I am considering), will never be forgotten.

I would further urge her not to neglect the orators. Where else is virtue praised with such passion, and vice condemned with such ferocity? It is the orators who teach us to praise the good deed and to hate the bad; it is they who teach us how to soothe, encourage, stimulate, or deter. All these things the philosophers do, it is true, but in some special way anger, mercy and the arousal and pacification of the mind are completely within the power of the orator. Then, too, those figures of speech and thought, which like stars or torches illuminate our diction and give it distinction, are the proper tools of the orator which we borrow from them when we speak or write, and turn to our use as the occasion demands. In sum, all the richness, power, and polish in our expression, its lifeblood, as it were, we derive from the orators.

The poets, too, I would have her read and understand. This is a knowledge which all great men have possessed. Aristotle, at least, frequently cites passages of Homer, Hesiod, Pindar, Euripides, and the other poets, showing by his familiar knowledge and ready quotation of them that he was no less a student of the poets than of the philosophers. Plato as well makes frequent use of the poets, bringing them in freely, even gratuitously; indeed, he often uses their authority to confirm his own. So much for the Greeks; what of the Latin writers? Is Cicero to be thought too little versed in poetical knowledge when, not content with Ennius, Pacuvius, Accius, and the other Latin poets, he fills his works with his own renderings from the Greek poets? What of the austere and hard-boiled Seneca: did not even he write poems and entire works in verse? I pass over Augustine, Jerome, Lactantius and Boethius, whose writings show a great knowledge of poetry. In my view, the man who has not read the poets is, as it were, maimed as regards literature. The poets have many wise and useful things to say about life and how it should be lived; in them are to be found the principles and causes of nature and birth—the seeds, as it were, of all teachings—by their antiquity and their

reputation for wisdom they possess a high authority, by their elegance they have acquired a splendor and a distinction, by their nobility and liberality they have so far made themselves a worthy study for free men, that he who knows them not seems to be something of a rustic. Does Homer lack any sort of wisdom that we should refuse him the repute of being most wise? Some say that his poetry provides a complete doctrine of life, divided into periods of peace and war. And indeed in the affairs of war, what has he not told us of the prudence of the general, of the cunning and bravery of the soldier, of the kinds of trickery to be allowed or omitted, of advice, of counsel? Aeneas, being in a certain battle the leader of the Trojans, has driven the Greeks with great force of arms back to their lines, and is recklessly urging his men on, when, just as he is about to throw his entire force against the Greeks, Hector speeds to him and advises him to act with caution and prudence, saying that a man who leads an army needs caution more than reckless bravery. How valuable a precept, by the immortal God, especially coming from the brave Hector!¹⁷ Nowadays our generals, ignoring this counsel and using rashness instead of caution, have brought ruin and slaughter upon themselves and their men. In the same author, we see Iris, having been sent to Agamemnon and found him asleep, rouse him and reprove him for sleeping when so great a responsibility was his and the safety of his people had been committed to his care.¹⁸ Here again, how wise this is!—whether you want to call it a doctrine or a counsel or an admonition. Did Socrates or Plato or Pythagoras ever give better or holier advice to a general? And he has ten thousand more such counsels which I would gladly speak of, did I not fear being too prolix. And again in the affairs of peace his precepts are as many and as excellent.

But come, lest we attribute all to Homer and the Greeks, let us consider the great value of our Vergil's wisdom when he reveals, as from an oracle or from the secret places of nature:

Know first, the heav'ns, and earth's broad glist'ning fields,
Fair Cynthia's seat, and far, the starry seas,
An inward spirit feeds; and through each joint,
Throughout the shapeless mass infused, doth stir
A Mind that mingles with the mighty whole.
Thence man- and cattle-kind, thence soar th'aerial
Beasts, and thence from 'neath the flashing waves
Doth Ocean's shudd'ring prodigies come forth;
Fire throughout each vein doth lively surge
And every seed tells of its heav'nly birth.¹⁹

And so on. Can we esteem the philosophers at such a rate when we read

passages such as this? Which of them ever laid bare the nature and essence of soul with such knowledge? What about when the same poet, as though divinely inspired, prophesied just before Our Lord's birth in the words:

Now comes the earth's last age, now in full Time
 Springs th' order new: thus spake the Cumaean rhyme.
 Now comes the Virgin, now Saturnian states
 Return anew, and now from Heaven's gate
 Comes down Heav'n's offspring, Earth's renewed race.²⁰

The wisest of the ancients tell us that the divine mind dwells in the poets, and that they are called *vates*²¹ because they speak not so much of their own accord as through a divine inspiration, in a kind of higher mental state. Though here Vergil appeals to the authority of the Cumaean Sibyl, who, as Lactantius shows, had predicted the advent of Christ.²² The Sibyl then did prophesy Christ's coming, but did not clearly reveal the time when He would come; but Vergil, born many ages after the Sibyl, recognized that that time was now come and announced in wonder and amazement "the new offspring sent from Heaven." And still some say we should not read the poets, that we should never taste a branch of literature that I might with exact truth pronounce divine! Such persons are most often those who, having no training in polite learning themselves, in consequence neither understand nor value in literature any excellent thing. My view of the matter is that poetical knowledge is of primary importance in our education, alike for its utility, as aforesaid—that wide and various acquaintance we get with facts—and for the brilliance of its language. Moreover, it is the *quickest* of our studies: we learn it while young when we can concentrate on practically nothing else; its rounded rhythms make it easy to retain; it accompanies us everywhere, and comes back to us spontaneously without need for books so that it can be done even when doing something else. And the degree to which poetry accords with nature may, I think, be seen from the fact that common, uneducated persons without any knowledge of letters or learning, if they have the wit, enjoy the employment of their crude powers in making certain sounds and rhythms. Even when their sense would be better and more easily expressed in prose, they think they have made something worth hearing only when they have stuck it into verse. Again, when Mass is being said in church, we sometimes yawn and fall asleep even when it is being done very beautifully, but when once that poetical refrain breaks out, the *Primo dierum omnium*, or the *Iste Confessor*, or the *Ut queant laxis resonare fibris*, which of us is so earthbound as not to feel some lifting up of the soul, some inspired feeling? It is for this reason that certain of the ancients believed the soul to be a number and a harmony.²³ It was certain

(they thought) that all things in accordance with nature enjoyed that which was most similar and related to themselves, and there was nothing which so softened and delighted our souls as harmony and number. But this is another and greater subject. For the moment, this only would I have understood: that it is to poetry, more than to any other branch of letters, that nature attracts us; that it possesses utility, pleasure, and nobility; and that that man who has no knowledge of it can by no means be said to be liberally educated.

I have, I realize, gone on about poetry rather more than I had at first intended; once started, it is more difficult to control the multitude of ideas that seem to come thronging around of their own accord than to mind what it is one should be saying. But I was the more inclined to do so as I am aware that a prince of your house, if he should happen to hear of this discourse of mine, will be the first to object to it.²⁴ He is, to be sure, a man of the noblest birth and outstanding for the number and greatness of his virtues, but a stubborn fellow in debate, who is reluctant to abandon a position once taken. So having sometime declared that we should not read the poets, he pursues his error even unto death. But I want no quarrel with him, especially in writing, for though far removed, I owe him the deepest reverence; but I am perfectly willing to ask of a certain other person among those who attack the poets why it is we should not read them. Having no clear case against them, he charges the poets with containing tales of love affairs and unnatural vice. But I would dare affirm that in no other writers can be found so many examples of womanly modesty and goodness: Penelope's chastity and faithfulness to Ulysses, Alcestis' wonderful modesty towards Admetus, the marvelous constancy of both in the face of calamities and long separation from their husbands. Many such instances can be read in the poets, the finest patterns of the wifely arts. Yes; *amours* are sometimes described, such as the tale of Phoebus and Daphne, and of Vulcan and Venus, but who is so doltish as not to understand that such things are fictional and allegorical? The things to be condemned, moreover, are very few, while many are the things that are good and well worth the knowing, as I showed above with Homer and Vergil. It is the height of injustice to forget about the things that truly deserve praise, and to remember only those things that suit one's own argument. "I would be pure," says my austere critic; "I would rather abandon the good in fear of the evil than run the risk of evil in hope of something good; hence I may neither read the poets myself nor allow others to do so." But Plato and Aristotle studied them, and I refuse to allow that they yield to you either in moral seriousness or in practical understanding. Or do you think you see farther than they? "I am a Christian," my critic says; "their mores are not mine." As though honor and moral seriousness

were something different than from what they are now! As though the same and even worse cannot be found in the Holy Scriptures! Do we not find there depicted Samson's wild lusts, when he put his mighty head in a wench's lap and was shorn of his strength-giving hair? Is this not poetical? And is this not shameful? I pass over in silence the shocking crime of Lot's daughters, the detestable filthiness of the Sodomites, two circumstances that I, praiser of poets though I be, can hardly suffer myself to relate. Why speak of David's passion for Bathsheba, his crime against Uriah, Solomon's fratricide and his flock of concubines? All of these stories are wicked, obscene, and disgusting, yet do we say that the Bible is not therefore to be read? Surely not. Then neither are the poets to be rejected because of the occasional reference to human pleasures. For my part, whenever I read Vergil's account of the *affaire* of Dido and Aeneas, I am so lost in admiration of his poetical genius that I scarcely attend to the thing itself, knowing it to be a fiction. Other poetical fictions affect me the same way. My concupiscence is not aroused, since I know the circumstances to be fictional and allegorical in intent. When I read the Scriptures, on the contrary, knowing the facts to be true, I suffer temptation. But I don't insist; I am perfectly willing to abandon a little of my ground, especially given that I am addressing a woman. I admit that, just as there are distinctions between nobles and commoners, so too among the poets there are certain grades of respectability. If somewhere a comic poet has made his theme too explicit, if a satirist excoriates vice a little too frankly, let her avert her gaze and not read them. For these are the plebeian poets. The aristocrats of poesy, Vergil, I mean, and Seneca and Statius and the others of their sort, must be read if she is not to do without the greatest ornaments of literature. And without them, she may not hope for glory.

In sum, then, the excellence I speak of comes only from a wide and various knowledge. It is needful to read and comprehend a great deal, and to bestow great pains on the philosophers, the poets, the orators and historians and all the other writers. For thus comes that full and sufficient knowledge we need to appear eloquent, well-rounded, refined, and widely cultivated. Needed too is a well-developed and respectable literary skill of our own. For the two together reinforce each other and are mutually beneficial. Literary skill without knowledge is useless and sterile; and knowledge, however extensive, fades into the shadows without the glorious lamp of literature.²⁵ Of what advantage is it to know many fine things if one has neither the ability to talk of them with distinction or write of them with praise? And so, literary skill and factual knowledge are in a manner of speaking wedded to each other. It was the two joined together that advanced the glory and fame of those ancients whose memory we venerate: Plato, Democritus, Aristotle,

Theophrastus, Varro, Cicero, Seneca, Augustine, Lactantius, Jerome, with all of whom we can scarce decide whether it is their knowledge or their literary power that is the greater.

To conclude: the intellect that aspires to the best, I maintain, must be in this way doubly educated, and it is for the sake of acquiring these two knowledges that we mass up our reading; yet we must also take stock of the time at our disposal, devoting ourselves only to the most important and the most useful subjects, and not wasting time with the obscure and profitless. It is religion and moral philosophy that ought to be our particular studies, I think, and the rest studied in relation to them as their handmaids, in proportion as they aid or illustrate their meaning; and it is with this in mind that we must fix upon the poets, orators and other writers. In literary study care should be taken to employ noble precepts and long and perceptive observation, and never to read any but the best and most approved books.

Such are my opinions about the study of literature, though if you hold different views, I shall willingly yield to you. For I do not write as master to pupil (I should not presume so much), but simply as one of the crowd of your admirers, who want to unite my convictions with yours and, as they say, cheer the runner on to victory. Farewell.

3: Two Letters on Education

A Letter to Niccolò Strozzi

[TEXT: *Ep.* VI:6, ed. Mehus, from 1431/1434.]

Your letter, the first you have ever written me, gave me the greatest pleasure. For it gave evidence of outstanding natural ability, which is the sign of intelligence, and of deep and careful learning, which is the sign of study and diligence. And when I took into account your age and the understanding displayed in your letter, your maturity seemed to me truly wonderful, and beyond your years. I have no doubt that, so long as you do not fail yourself, you will succeed in becoming an outstanding man. Study hard, then, and each day add something more to your stock of knowledge, mindful of the enormous rewards such study affords for your establishment in life, and for the fame and glory of your name. Both these rewards, believe me, and ample wealth as well will follow, things which never fail great men. and men

who seek after virtue. You have a distinguished teacher¹ whose diligence and assiduity you should imitate.

Let your studies have two aspects: first, an expertise in literature that shows great diligence and learning, not the usual mediocre competence. In this I would very much like to see you excell. Second, a thorough acquaintance with those subjects that are related to life and behavior, which are called the humanities (*studia humanitatis*) because they become a man, and perfect him. In this branch of knowledge let your acquaintance be so wide, varied and extensive that you omit nothing that appears to pertain to the ordering and enhancement of life and to your reputation. In my opinion you should read only those books which are of service to you not merely for their learning, but for their brilliant style and literary knowledge as well. Such are the books of Cicero, and those who come nearest him. But if you will heed my counsel, you will acquire your basic knowledge in these subjects from Aristotle, while borrowing from Cicero copiousness, all of his rich vocabulary, and what I might call stylistic dexterity. I would have an outstanding man possess both an abundant knowledge and the ability to express that knowledge, arraying it in beautiful language. This, however, no one can do unless he has read much, learned much, and acquired much from every source. For this reason you should not only be learned in the philosophers, which is the basis of this study, but you should also come prepared from the poets, orators and historians to make your style copious, varied and free from rusticity. I do not linger over this much, since I know you have read my little book *On the Study of Literature* where I set out, or at least implied, a program of learning.

But if, as I hope, you should achieve this excellence, what riches can there be comparable to the rewards of the humanities? Granted that the study of the civil law is more saleable, it is still surpassed by the humanities in usefulness and dignity. For all the humanities try to produce good men, than which nothing more useful can be imagined; but civil law has nothing to do with this. Why should a good man take pains to keep off the rain, and find out what will happen the day after next? How is he the better for knowing how to decide the portion of some domestic or other in the income? A good man will discharge his obligations and observe the directions of a testator even if it does not fulfill the formalities of having seven witnesses, and the civil law determines the opposite. Furthermore, goodness and virtue are invariable, but law varies according to the time and place, so that often what is legal in Florence is illegal in Ferrara. Again, it is not seemly for great and distinguished men to intermeddle themselves in the mercenary business of quarrels and litigation. This is why the rich and noble take pride in the honor of knighthood, but regard the doctorate [of laws] as low and

dishonorable. The dignity and worth of the humanities is, by contrast, so great that no prince or king thinks it a shameful thing to gain distinction for literary knowledge and eloquence. Philip surely did not entrust his son Alexander to Aristotle for him to learn the civil law, which would have been but a mean acquirement for so great a king, but in order for him to be taught about life and correct behavior, and to learn eloquence. I need not mention the pleasure and fun these studies afford, so great that it is difficult to tear the mind away from them. But to study the civil law is sheer boredom, which is why the ancients, with perfect truth, named it the "yawning science." Enough. I had rather spoken to you of these matters than of familial or parental affection: such things can wait, and have been said before. But it seemed best not to put off encouraging you in your liberal studies. Farewell.

A Letter to the King of Castile

[TEXT: Ep. VII:6, ed. Mehus, from 1435.]

Most Serene and Superexcellent King: I am delighted that my letter² to Your Royal Sublimity pleased you, and that you answered it with such kindness and condescension. Yet what pleased me the most was to learn that Your Serenity, when the press of affairs permits it, is accustomed to bestow pains on literary study. The enemies of literature may laugh if they like, but I scarce think him a king who is ignorant of letters. Indeed there is nothing so kingly, in my view, as exceptional knowledge joined with literary distinction. These two acquirements are, I believe, necessary to royal greatness. Not that I beseech a king to engage in all branches of knowledge, but only those proper to him. Whatever literature then prepares us and encourages us towards the correct kind of government—towards justice, clemency, magnanimity and glory—that is what I think a king ought to read and make his own. Thus will a king learn how to acquit himself in times of peace and war. However great his natural abilities, it is yet a marvelous thing to what a degree the writings and records of learned men will be of service to him. For he will see how great is the splendor of glory; how great the reward of well-doing, even in this life; what distinguishes a king from a tyrant; what vices deform, and what virtues most make a ruler great and famous. Such knowledge he will acquire, not from the half-learned babblers who confuse everything with their inept writing, but from those outstanding men of old, who joined the true way of philosophizing to brilliant and eloquent writing. As horses and splendid dress are fitting to a king, so also is a fine, elegant and weighty address. And how great the rewards history, the mistress of

life,³ grants to a ruler! To be acquainted with the deeds and origins of the most potent kings and princes, and the great peoples, is a source of intellectual pleasure as well as being in the highest degree a preparation for life. This branch of learning, moreover, possesses the finest writers, polished, neat, and graceful, whom to read is sweet, and to study is easy indeed. Thus I exhort the king to these studies, not in arrogance, but in duty. Enough: a letter should be short. But, Most Serene Majesty, whereas somewhat of my writings has been desired by your royal missive, I have prepared the small gift which I give to your Majesty. There will be with this letter a little book containing various of my small works, not especially selected by me, but, as it were, written by chance. I would have them be a kind of foretaste of my writings for Your Royal Serenity, introducing me.

S I X

The New Philosophy

1: Introduction

Humanist Moral Philosophy

cf. 201 ff.

It is nowadays widely understood that the achievement of the humanist movement was not that it "revived learning," as used to be said in the eighteenth century. Learning (which until recently always meant knowledge of classical antiquity) had already been revived by the clerical culture of the medieval universities and monastic orders; indeed, in some disciplines, especially philosophy, law, and medicine, the scholastic contribution to the revival of learning was far greater than the humanistic. The special mark of the humanist movement was its new attitude to the heritage of classical antiquity. Medieval thinkers had been content to preserve the shattered fragments of antiquity, incorporating what bits they found useful into their own schemes of education and of culture. The humanists attempted, with varying degrees of success, to reassemble the pieces, and to rebuild in its wholeness the cultural life of the ancient world. They wanted to speak the way the ancients spoke, to live the way they lived, to think the way they thought. They borrowed their literary genres, their artistic techniques and principles, and (they thought) their musical forms. And finally, reaching back beyond medieval Catholicism, they tried to recreate the Christianity of the primitive Church—a movement of which the Protestant revolution was but a part.

The Humanism of Leonardo Bruni

Selected Texts

Translations and Introductions by

GORDON GRIFFITHS

JAMES HANKINS

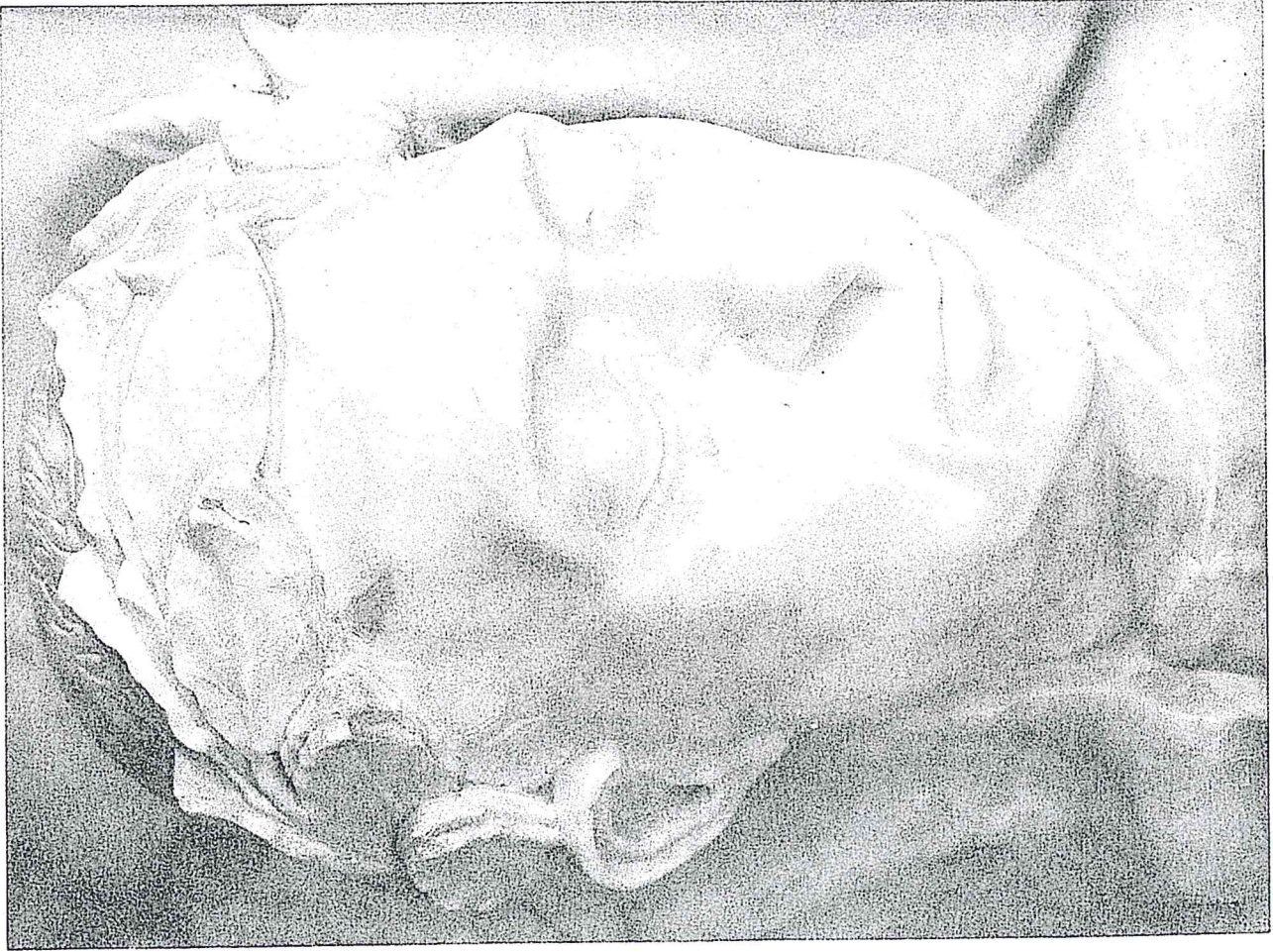
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*Detail of an effigy of Leonardo Bruni from his tomb
in the church of Santa Croce, Florence. The portrait was carved*