



THIS WEEK'S RESEARCH REFLECTION

THE HISTORY OF IDEAS 1

"THAT WHICH IS, IS."

"THAT WHICH IS NOT, IS NOT."

PARMENIDES

The Meaning School has undergone a Renaissance. Upcoming logbooks will be dedicated to the **History of Ideas**. How ideas about knowledge, truth, innovation, and what it means to be human have traveled and continue to travel. Overwhelmingly bored by my field of education, I was obliged to return to the sources, to move forward, now and tomorrow.

I have, to the great delight of my soul, encountered my own Renaissance. With full-time studies in the subject, my pen has found its spark. Finally, I want to read. I want to shape, I want to remember. For the group that follows my Re[framing] logbooks, I offer ideas!

Working in Florence, Athen, Istanbul, London, Paris, Venice, London, Prague the last year has made me... wonder even more about the story we all share. The Story of Ideas.

MALIN PEDRO



The Meaning School

I begin where I am, at the Renaissance (1300-1600 BC), with the starting point in Florence, but remember that this period mostly concerned a small elite. It was a time of rebirth, when the cultural heritage of antiquity was rediscovered. The Italian princely courts served as catalysts for a new aesthetic, philosophical, and scientific development, where the idea of education was based on admiration for antiquity. Does the world need the history of ideas today, in 2025? Well, one can philosophize over that, and yes, I highly believe we are in the sweet spot of this.

We begin with the Legacy of Antiquity (600 BC - 500 AD), a period whose influence was lost during the Middle Ages, but translated into Arabic later made them come back. During this period, Greek philosophy and democracy flourished in Athens, with thinkers like Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle, while the Roman Empire structured its laws, architecture, and administration shaping Western world. The greek city of Sparta known for its military discipline, operated under a unique system with two kings and a council of 60 elders chosen for life. Fascinating, isn't it? Two kings!

Socrates, through his method of questioning and challenging established beliefs, laid the foundation for western philosophical dialogue and emphasized the importance of self-awareness and critical thinking. His student, Plato, further developed his ideas through his theory of the world of ideas, where he argued that the material world is just a shadow of a higher, eternal reality, and that knowledge is the pursuit of understanding this ideal world.

Aristotle shaped logic and the scientific method, which would influence thinking for centuries. Meanwhile, Neoplatonism arose, a philosophical direction where the soul strives to return to its origin through knowledge and contemplation. Another central figure during this period was Alexander the Great (356–323 BC), Aristotle's pupil, who, through his military conquests, spread



Greek culture over vast parts of the world. His empire stretched from Greece to Egypt and all the way to India, laying the foundation for a cosmopolitan worldview where philosophy, science, and art developed in new directions.

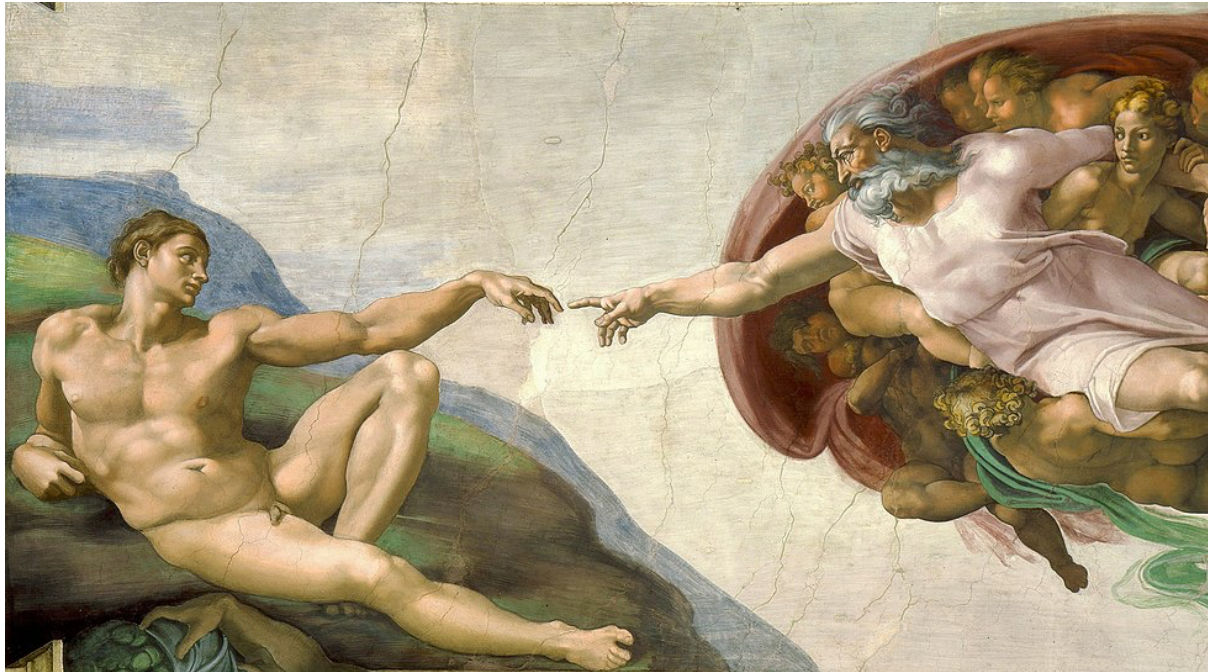
So far so good. Then we move on to the dark Middle Ages, starting with the fall of the Roman Empire in 476 AD, where the ancient knowledge was preserved and developed by Arabic, Byzantine, and Latin scholars. Aristotle's philosophy and Ptolemy's geography became central to the scholastic tradition. Scholasticism refers to combining and reconciling faith with reason through a systematic and analytical method to understand God, the world, and human existence. A rough period characterized by a witch hunt.

Initially, religious institutions like monasteries and cathedral schools played a central role in preserving and transmitting knowledge. The monks read and translated books together. Later Medieval universities in Paris, Bologna, Padua, and Oxford played a key role in systematizing and preserving ancient knowledge. Alexandro, my partner's son is studying astronomy in Padua, imagine to focusing on black holes and difficult mathematics, every day! In the same school as where Galileo Galilei was teaching. This was a shift from an education system centered around the church's needs and doctrines to a more secular and academic system that promoted a broader understanding of the world and learning. But it was through Renaissance humanism that critical textual analysis emerged.

To see the light at the end of the tunnel, it's important to look back. Renaissance humanism emerged through the contributions of figures like Francesco Petrarca, often called the father of humanism, Leonardo Bruni, who translated Plato's works into Latin, and Lorenzo Valla, who revealed the falsity of church documents claiming ownership of land they did not possess. Oops! Language and rhetoric played a central role in understanding humanity.

The idea of "returning to the sources" - *Ad fontes* - became an intellectual driving force that led to a thorough examination of ancient texts. The view of humanity shifted from a theological worldview to one where the individual could shape their own destiny through knowledge and reflection. Martin Luther who criticized the Catholic Church's practices with his 95 theses nailed to a door, stating that we should believe and not buy the forgiveness of sins and Jean Calvin, a Protestant figure, redefined the church's power, initiating a change in the future of Europe.

True Colors let's make a detour into the world of art. During the Renaissance art reflected the change of shaping one's own fate, with a focus on placing humanity at the center. Leonardo da Vinci and Michelangelo depicted the human body with a new realism.



In Michelangelo's *Creation of Adam*, God and Adam stretch their hands toward each other, with only a small gap between their fingertips, an electric spark of creative power, symbolizing the divine transfer of life and intellect. God's sweeping mantle embraces a collection of figures, as if the future of all humanity is already contained within the act of creation, while Adam, resting and almost passive, receives the gift of consciousness and movement. This powerful image can be read as a metaphor for the Renaissance's ideological currents, where humanity awakens to its own potential and intellect, encouraged by the light of knowledge. Unfortunately, I think of Trump and Elon Musk now when I see this picture. What is happening with our world of today? This is the picture I had above my bed throughout my upbringing, so I've certainly looked at it a lot.

Sandro Botticelli brought ancient mythological figures to life. Below beautiful *Venus* by Botticelli.





Women's opportunities in art were limited, but artists like Sofonisba Anguissola paved the way and conveyed psychological presence and intimacy, setting her apart from many of her male contemporaries.



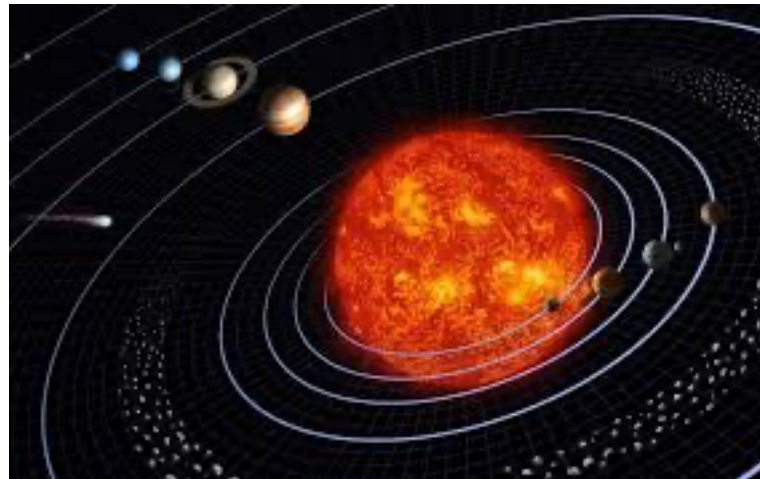
All of this brings us to the Scientific Revolution of the 1500s and 1600s, which marked a break from authority and a shift toward empirical e.g. experience, observation, experimentation and mathematical research. Nicolaus Copernicus, argued the sun at the center of the solar system, challenged the geocentric worldview and presented a heliocentric model.



The compass revolutionized navigation by enabling long-distance sea voyages, strengthening European trade empires. Gunpowder changed warfare by replacing traditional medieval battle tactics with firearms and cannons, contributing to the centralization of power and the rise of stronger nation-states.



Galileo Galilei seeing Jupiter's moons using the telescope to provide empirical evidence for this new worldview, lead to a conflict with the Catholic Church. Meanwhile, Johannes Kepler developed theories about the planets' elliptical orbits, and Newton summarized the scientific revolution with his theory of gravity, laying the foundation for a new mechanistic understanding of the world. All fine for mathematics, but this view came to dominate our way of thinking very much. Quite a difficult assumption when looking at an organization for an example.



The view of knowledge fundamentally changed during this period. A new epistemological picture (view of knowledge) emerges at the same time as the Reformation, inspired by textual criticism and the spread of the printing press, leading to religious diversity and a new understanding of the individual's role in relation to God. Thomas More wrote *Utopia* 1516, where he describes an Utopia, an idealized Society.

Here are some two philosophers I've recently studied, and they are worth mentioning when it come to knowledge. I start with Francis Bacon and René Descartes. Bacon advocated an inductive method for science e.g. collecting data and then drawing conclusions, while René Descartes sought a rationalist foundation (deduction) for knowledge through methodical doubt "Cogito, ergo sum".

Descartes, as a mathematician, wanted certainty, and the only thing he could be sure of was that he doubted, so in doubting, he existed. His conclusions: 1. All the senses tell us is unreliable. 2. Everything we think could be a dream. 3. The only thing I cannot doubt is that I exist! Descartes is perhaps best known for his metaphysics when he modified the theory of atoms. He also wondered: If the body and soul are separate, how can the soul influence the body? This was a problem for him. Both Bacon and Descartes were Christians, Bacon a Protestant, Descartes a Catholic, so they viewed the world through those filters.



Finally, I conclude this text with Spinoza and Locke. Baruch de Spinoza went further and suggested a monistic worldview where God and nature were one. From the perspective of eternity, he said: How does everything really connect? John Locke emphasized that humans are born as a “tabula rasa”, and that knowledge is created through experience. What do we really need to know to manage our everyday lives? he asked, while advocating for rights and justice. One starts as a blank sheet, and the human capacity for understanding is limited. It's best to show humility.

Spinoza, Descartes and Locke are some of my favorites. What do we need to know? How does everything connect? Without a doubt, one is not quite sane. Someone else who set off for discoveries, I won't get into here but, Cristopher Columbus was a contemporary to these gentlemen. The discovery of America and its consequences for the European worldview is an extensive journey that will be treated in a separate logbook.

Lots of wonder,

MALIN PEDRO