

MATTHEW ARNOLD

LIBERAL HUMANISM

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EXERCISE

- CHOOSE 3 theorists to COMPARE with Arnold with regard to the following ideas:
- THE IDEAL;
- THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN ART AND SOCIETY;
- THE RESPONSIBILITY OF THE READER.

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Matthew Arnold: Key Terms

- Liberal Humanism
- Touchstones
- Criticism
- Order of Ideas
- Epochs
- Disinterestedness

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HUMANISM ACCORDING TO ARNOLD

- "...culture... places human perfection in an *internal* condition, in the growth and predominance of our humanity proper, as distinguished from our animality. It places it in the ever-increasing efficacy and in the general harmonious expansion of those gifts of thought and feeling, which make the peculiar dignity, wealth and happiness of human nature."

(*Culture and Anarchy* 717)

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How we add the LIBERAL to the HUMANISM

"And because men are all members of **one great whole**, and the sympathy which is in **human nature** will not allow one member to be indifferent to the rest or to have a perfect welfare independent of the rest, the expansion of our humanity, to suit the idea of perfection which culture forms, **must be a general expansion**. Perfection, as culture conceives it, is not possible while the individual remains isolated."

(*Culture and Anarchy* 717)

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Liberal Humanism: Break it down

- PROGRESSIVISM
- EXPANSIONISM
- PERFECTABILITY
- POTENTIAL
- SOCIAL JUSTICE

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Liberal Humanism and Criticism

- How do the precepts of LIBERAL HUMANISM shape Arnold's definition of CRITICISM and its relationship to
 - Literary creation?
 - Society?

What is the relationship between CREATIVITY and CRITICISM?

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The Purpose of Culture

Culture = "social impulses"

"...the desire for removing human error, clearing human confusion, and diminishing human misery, the noble aspiration to leave the world better and happier than we found it..." (*Culture and Anarchy* 715).

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TOUCHSTONES

- Texts that represent "the best that is known and thought in the world" (*The Function of Criticism* 712/701) and against which we can measure literary and cultural VALUE.
- LITERATURE becomes the antidote to material preoccupations and partisanship by providing a SHARED CULTURE of VALUES.
- A means of shifting the spirit of the age: "in no other way will these songs of triumph be induced gradually to moderate themselves, to get rid of what in them is excessive and offensive, and to fall into a softer and truer key" (695).

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ORDER OF IDEAS

- What is the "order of ideas?"
- What is the "atmosphere?" (697/686)
 - "power of the man"
 - "power of the moment"

"...an intellectual situation of which the creative power can profitably avail itself.... Presently these new ideas reach society, the touch of truth is the touch of life, and there is a stir and growth everywhere; out of this stir and growth come the creative epochs of literature" (697/686).

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SOCIAL CLIMATE AND GENIUS

- What does Arnold mean when he suggests that Wordsworth and Byron needed to "read more books" (698/687)?
- How, according to Arnold, was Shakespeare at the advantage (698/687)?
- In other words, what is the relationship between social climate and genius?

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EPOCHS

- EPOCH OF CONCENTRATION (690)
 - CRITICAL;
 - Amassing of "material";
 - The cultivation of an "order of ideas" that can support the
- EPOCH OF EXPANSION (692)
 - CREATIVE;
 - Synthesizing
 - Grounded in the "order of ideas."

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DISINTERESTEDNESS

- What, according to Arnold, distinguished the French Revolution from the time of the Renaissance? (699-700/688-89)
 - Politics
 - Pragmatics

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DISINTERESTEDNESS

"[Criticism] obeys an instinct prompting it to try to know the best that is known and thought in the world, irrespectively of practice and politics, and everything of the kind; and to value knowledge and thought as they approach this best, **without the intrusion of any other considerations whatever.**"
(702/691)

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WHAT IS THE "FUNCTION OF CRITICISM AT THE PRESENT TIME?"

- How does criticism serve "the cause of perfection" (706/693)?

IDENTIFY EXEMPLAE: "to learn and propagate the best that is known and thought in the world, and thus to establish a current of fresh and true ideas" (712/701);

PREPARE THE GROUND: "to make a beginning for that more free speculative treatment of things, which may perhaps one day make its benefits felt even in this [pragmatic] sphere, but in a natural and thence irresistible manner" (696);

AIM FOR THE IDEAL: "to be perpetually dissatisfied with these works [of one's party], while they perpetually fall short of a high and perfect ideal" (700)

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DISINTERESTEDNESS AND AESTHETICS

- How is Arnold's notion of DISINTERESTEDNESS and the "free play of the mind" (702/691-92) similar to Wilde's notion of art for art's sake?
- How is it DIFFERENT?
- Consider:
 - The "liberal" in liberal humanism;
 - The social role of criticism (693);
 - Perpetual dissatisfaction (700);
 - The ideal (700);
 - Resistance to partisanship (697)

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LOCATING BEAUTY

- Where does Arnold locate BEAUTY? In the art object or in the beholder?
 - "absolute beauty and fitness of things" (704/693).

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EXERCISE: NEXT DAY

- CHOOSE 3 theorists to COMPARE with Arnold with regard to the following ideas:
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