

Lecture 6: The Romans & the Middle Ages

Objectives: Today we will

1. Revise Non-Western & Ancient Greek thought on Language
2. Trace the Sophistic *Nomos/Phusis* Debate through the centuries up to the Middle Ages and beyond (the *analogists* vs. the *anomalists*)
3. Learn a little about life in Rome in those days, and about some later developments in Greek and Roman thought; and finally,
4. Focus on, and find the reasons for, the general decline in intellectual activity in Europe during the Middle Ages.

1. A Re-Cap of Ancient Non-Western and Greek thought on Language

In the past 8 weeks we have strained to hear the echoes of human thoughts about language from millennia ago. We mentioned the achievements of Chinese scholars in terms of the development of a unique writing system (hieroglyphics) and discussed the brilliant writings of some Indian thinkers, including

- **Panini** (~ 5th century BC), whose grammar of Sanskrit had used (long before the so-called “Western” linguistics) concepts like the *phoneme*, and the general principles of *word formation* through the successive application of *morphological rules*, and
- **Bhartrhari** (~ 5th century AD), who believed (a truly logical observation!) that the sentence should be interpreted as a single unit of meaning which, like a picture, conveys its meaning 'in a flash'. In other words, he observed all those hundreds of years ago that the human mind does not process each sentence as a sequence of words put together, but that the full meaning of each word is only understood in the context of the other words around it.

We also ‘caught’ a few echoes from the Ancient Greeks:

- **The Sophists**, who taught language and rhetoric to Athenian citizens as part of the ‘survival skills’ (since Athenians citizens had to personally represent themselves in the court of law).
 - **Protagoras** believed that “**Man is the measure of all things**” (relativism). He is credited with distinguishing *sentence types* (i.e., narration, prayer, question, answer, command, report & invitation), as well as *gender & tense*
 - **Gorgias** taught the use of figures of speech (analogy, metaphor, etc.)
 - **Prodicus** examined synonyms, and **Hippias** – the sound system of Greek.

“One of the most famous doctrines associated with the Sophistic movement was the **opposition between nature and custom or convention** in morals” (Encyclopedia Britannica, 2004 Edition). This debate extended also to language origins and etymology, and continued through the centuries by other philosophers, such as:

- **Socrates (469-399 BC) & Plato (428-354 BC)** analyzed the relationship between language and thought, focusing on issues ranging from the nature, origins and purpose of language to its sounds and structures. Words are the proper names of ideal and eternal Forms that are independent and separate from physical reality, but are ‘graspable’ by the human mind/ ‘intelligible.’
- **Aristotle (384-322 BC)** argued that the physical reality (including language) is ‘knowable’ through observation and analysis (inductive logic, on which the Scientific Method is based). He classified all human knowledge (‘The Categories’) and explained the causes (driving forces) behind all physical reality (Aristotelean *Four Causes*).

Extending his analysis to language in *De Interpretatione*, Aristotle examined the relation between words, thoughts and things. He asserted that:

- Words are symbols, i.e. conventional tokens, for thoughts, as well as 'signs' of things. Truth emerges from the correct or incorrect 'combination' of these basic words in an assertion
- Both nouns (*onoma*) and verbs (*rhema*) signify meanings, but **the verb has an ‘additional meaning’ which together with the meaning of the noun made an assertion or negation possible. The verb**

thus contains three elements: a basic signification, a binding function equivalent to the role of the copula 'is', and an indication of time, which forms a second type of 'additional signification'.

Aristotle defined longer utterances, distinguishing those, which possess truth-value, from those such as prayers, which do not. He also stated that

- No single word is an assertion, since an assertion must represent a predicate as truly holding of a subject; and
- Similarly, no *part* of a word can have signification. At best, the elements of a compound word can only 'tend to signify'.

Most of the developments in theoretical grammar grew out of philosophy, and often stemmed from the *Nomos/ Physis* debate, which distinguished between that which exists “*by nature*” (*physis*) and that which exists “*by convention*” (*nomos*). According to Guthrie, *nomos* and *physis* were the ‘*catchwords*’ of Greek thought:

“The two terms *nomos* (pl. *nomoi*) and *physis* are key-words — in the fifth and fourth centuries one might rather say catchwords — of Greek thought. In earlier writers they do not necessarily appear incompatible or antithetical, but in the intellectual climate of the fifth century they came to be commonly regarded as opposed and mutually exclusive: what existed 'by *nomos*' was not 'by *physis*' and *vice versa* ... *Physis* ... can safely be translated 'nature', though when it occurs in conjunction with *nomos* the word 'reality' will sometimes make the contrast more immediately clear. *Nomos* for the men of classical times is something that ... which is believed in, practised or held to be right . That is to say, it presupposes an acting subject — believer, practitioner or apportioner — a mind from which the *nomos* emanates.” (Guthrie, p. 55).

With regard to language, the adherents of the *physis* approach accounted for words as ordained *by nature* (by *onomatopoeia*—*i.e.*, by imitation of natural sounds), whereas the adherents of the *nomos* approach believed they came about arbitrarily, *by a social convention*. We witnessed this dispute regarding the origin of language and meanings in Plato’s dialogue *Cratylus*, where Hermogenes, Cratylus and Socrates argue about the ‘truth’ or ‘correctness’ of names.

Subsequently, the *nomos/ physis* debate gave rise to two divergent views:

- The “*analogists*,” who looked on language as possessing an essential regularity as a result of convention, and
- The “*anomalists*,” who explained the lack of linguistic regularity by the inherent irregularities of nature.

It will be useful at this point to remind ourselves about the various approaches to the study of language which you must have discussed in your Introduction to Linguistics course – you will see how the two divergent views have affected linguistic thought right up to the present. You will see that Structuralists (like analogists) typically emphasize regularity in the forms of language, whereas Transformationalists (like anomalists) focus more on the deeper meaning, created by different superficial forms.

Later Greek Thought & the Romans

The Alexandrians* of the 1st century BC (they were *analogists*) further developed Greek grammar in order to preserve the purity of the language. **Dionysius Thrax (2nd century BC)**, for example, wrote the first systematic grammar of Western tradition, *The Art of Grammar*, in which he analyzed literary texts in terms of letters, syllables, and **eight parts of speech**.

***Alexandria** – the ancient center of civilization and capital of Egypt for more than a thousand years, founded by Alexander the Great in **331 BC**. Now with a population of over 5 million, it is the 2nd largest city in Egypt.

The Romans adopted the grammatical system of the Greeks and applied it to Latin. Except for **Varro** of the **1st century BC**, who believed that grammarians should discover structures, not dictate them, most Latin grammarians did not attempt to alter the Greek system and also sought to protect their language from decay.

So the Romans are important not as originators but as *transmitters* of knowledge attained by the Greeks. **Aelius Donatus**, (**4th century AD**), and **Priscian**, an African of the **6th century**, were slightly more systematic than their Greek models but were essentially retrospective rather than original. Up to this point, *ars grammatica* (or ‘the Art of Grammar’) was a mix of investigations in general philosophy, logic, and rhetoric.

The *anomalists* of that time concentrated on surface irregularity and looked then for regularities deeper down (i.e., Stoics sought them in logic) – they resemble contemporary scholars of the **transformationalist** school. The philological *analogists*, on the other hand, with their regularizing surface segmentation resemble the spirit of the modern school of **structural** grammatical theorists.

The works of **Donatus (4th century AD)** and **Priscian (6th century AD)**, the most important Latin grammarians, were widely used to teach Latin grammar during the European **Middle Ages**.

Middle Ages is a period of European history between the fall of the Roman Empire in the 5th century and the *Renaissance* in the 15th. Among the period’s distinctive features were the unity of Western Europe within the Roman Catholic Church, the feudal organization of political, social and economic relations, and the use of art for largely religious purposes.

It can be divided into three sub-periods:

The **early Middle Ages**, **5th-11th** centuries, when Europe was settled by pagan Germanic tribes who adopted the vestiges of Roman institutions and traditions, were converted to Christianity by the church (which had preserved Latin culture after the fall of Rome), and who then founded the feudal kingdoms;

The **high Middle Ages**, **12th-13th** centuries, which saw the consolidation of feudal states, the expansion of European influence during the Crusades, the flowering of scholasticism and monasteries, and the growth of population and trade;

The **later Middle Ages**, **14th-15th** centuries, when Europe was devastated by Black Death and incessant warfare, feudalism was transformed under the influence of incipient **nation-states** and new modes of social and economic organization, and the first voyages of discovery were made (The Wordsworth Encyclopedia, 1995)

From the information box above, you can see that “unity of Western Europe within the Roman Catholic Church, the *feudal* organization of political, social and economic relations, and the use of art for largely religious purposes” characterized the Middle Ages.

Feudalism is a “term that emerged in the 17th century and has been used to describe European economic, legal, political, and social relationships that existed in the Middle Ages. Derived from the Latin word feudum (fief) but unknown to people of the Middle Ages, the term feudalism has been used ... to refer to medieval society as a whole and ... to describe relations between **lords** and **vassals**. ... As described by Karl Marx, it is the stage in history that preceded capitalism and, as

such, involved the entire social and economic structure of medieval Europe. ... feudalism in this sense is a mode of agricultural production based on the relation between *lords* and the *peasants* who worked their own land and that of the lord. The peasants owed labour service to the lords, who provided military protection and also had extensive police, judicial, and other rights over the peasants”(2).

The Middle Ages, sometimes referred to as the **Dark Ages**, were not a very nice time to live: constant wars between the rival feudal lords and backbreaking labour dominated common people’s lives. In medieval* Europe, education was inaccessible to ordinary people; it was mainly the monks in the monasteries that were taught how to read and write, for the purpose of re-writing the holy scripts. All education then was conducted in Latin. **Aelfric**, the abbot of Eynsham (**11th century**), who wrote **the first Latin grammar in Anglo-Saxon**, proposed that this work serve as an introduction to English grammar as well. Thus began the tradition of devising English grammar according to a Latin model.

*Note the spelling: **Medieval**, not *Medieval*, as it was once spelt on CNN! ☺

In the **mid-13th to mid-14th century**, in the so-called **Proto-Renaissance** period, a slow re-awakening of intellectual thought became evident in, for example, *speculative grammar** (a theory promulgated by the *modistae* grammarians, who viewed language as a reflection of reality and looked to philosophy for explanations of grammatical rules). The *modistae* sought one “**universal**” **grammar** that would serve as a means of understanding the nature of being.

***Speculative grammar**: a linguistic theory of the Middle Ages, especially the **second half of the 13th century**. It is “speculative” not in the modern sense but as the word is derived from the Latin *speculum* (“mirror”), indicating a belief that language reflects the reality of the physical world. **In accordance with this belief, speculative grammarians searched for a universal grammar, valid for all languages despite the “accidents” of their differences. The categories of this grammar would correlate with the categories of logic, epistemology, and metaphysics; e.g., nouns and pronouns were thought to express the metaphysical category of “permanence,” whereas verbs and participles expressed “becoming.”** Speculative grammarians took over **Priscian** grammar but relabeled the parts of speech to show their “modes of signifying.” So many of their works were titled **De modis significandi** (“The Modes of Signifying”) that they have come to be called the Modistae.

The search by speculative grammarians for a universal grammar has been criticized as the result of their shortsightedness: the privileged, predominant position of Latin in their culture made “universality” seem more likely. Nevertheless, speculative grammar was more coherent and theoretical than any previous grammar, and its proponents investigated ideas still of interest today, such as deep structure, the incorporation of meaning into grammatical systems, and universals (2).

From Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2004 De Luxe online edition:

Certainly the most obviously interesting theorizing to be found in this period is contained in the “speculative grammar” of the *modistae*, who were so called because the titles of their works were often phrased **De modis significandi tractatus** (“Treatise Concerning the Modes of Signifying”). For the development of the Western grammatical tradition, work of this genre was the second great

milestone after the crystallization of Greek thought with the Stoics and Alexandrians. The scholastic philosophers were occupied with relating words and things—i.e., the structure of sentences with the nature of the real world—hence their preoccupation with signification. The aim of the grammarians was to explore how a word (an element of language) matched things apprehended by the mind and how it signified reality. Since a word cannot signify the nature of reality directly, it must stand for the thing signified in one of its modes or properties; it is this discrimination of modes that the study of categories and parts of speech is all about. Thus the study of sentences should lead one to the nature of reality by way of the modes of signifying.

The *modistae* did not innovate in discriminating categories and parts of speech; they accepted those that had come down from the Greeks through Donatus and Priscian. The great contribution of these grammarians, who flourished between the mid-13th and mid-14th century, was their insistence on a grammar to explicate the distinctions found by their forerunners in the languages known to them. Whether they made the best choice in selecting logic, metaphysics, and epistemology (as they knew them) as the fields to be included with grammar as a basis for the grand account of universal knowledge is less important than the breadth of their conception of the place of grammar. Before the *modistae*, grammar had not been viewed as a separate discipline but had been considered in conjunction with other studies or skills (such as criticism, preservation of valued texts, foreign-language learning). The Greek view of grammar was rather narrow and fragmented; the Roman view was largely technical. The speculative medieval grammarians (who dealt with language as a *speculum*, “mirror” of reality) inquired into the fundamentals underlying language and grammar. They wondered whether grammarians or philosophers discovered grammar, whether grammar was the same for all languages, what the fundamental topic of grammar was, and what the basic and irreducible grammatical primes are. Signification was reached by imposition of words on things; i.e., the sign was arbitrary. Those questions sound remarkably like current issues of linguistics, which serves to illustrate how slow and repetitious progress in the field is. While the *modistae* accepted, by modern standards, a restrictive set of categories, the acumen and sweep they brought to their task resulted in numerous subtle and fresh syntactic observations. A thorough study of the medieval period would greatly enrich the discussion of current questions.

Reminder: Linguistic thought in Mesopotamia (now part of Iraq), however, was thriving during the Middle Ages, driven by the religious inspiration to share the Koran with non-Arabic speaking peoples. The so-called Basra School produced eminent Arab scholars, such as:

- **Asma’il** (740-828): he was a scholar and anthologist, one of the three leading members of the Basra school of Arabic philology. A gifted student of Abu Amr ibn al-Alaa, the founder of the Basra school, Asma’il possessed an outstanding knowledge of the classical Arabic language. On the basis of the principles that he laid down, his disciples later prepared most of the existing collections of the pre-Islamic Arab poets. He also wrote an anthology of mostly religious poetry.
- **Sibawayh** (760-793?) was a celebrated grammarian of the Arabic language. After studying in Basra, Iraq, with a prominent grammarian **Khalil**, Sībawayh received recognition as a grammarian himself. Sībawayh is said to have left Iraq and retired to Shīrāz after losing a debate with a rival on Bedouin Arabic usage. His monumental work is *al-Kitāb* (“The Book”) was frequently used by later scholars.
- **Khalil** (718 – betw. 776 & 791): an Arab philologist who compiled the first Arabic dictionary and is credited with the formulation of the rules of Arabic prosody. His dictionary

is arranged according to a novel alphabetical order based on pronunciation, beginning with the letter *ayn*.

Conclusion

Donatus (4th century AD) and **Priscian (6th century AD)** were the most important Latin grammarians, whose books were commonly used to teach Latin grammar during the European Middle Ages.

There was a general decline in intellectual activity (and, consequently, in all linguistic thought) in Europe during the Middle Ages. This was due to the prevailing economic conditions and the resulting social relationships of the time: political fragmentation of Europe after the fall of the Roman Empire (the Western part of it, anyway) in the 5th century, left most people (subsistence farmers) vulnerable to the many marauding war lords, fighting for land and influence. Seeking protection, the common people were forced to submit to a new form of subjugation (compared to slavery): *serfdom*. In exchange for military protection, they worked the fields to feed their Lord and his army, and took up arms themselves to fight for the Lord, if called upon.

Trying to survive between constant wars and strife was not a conducive environment for philosophical reflection. There were no books, and no schools – education was mostly the function of the monasteries. The wisdom of the ancients was all but forgotten, kept alive only by the industrious monks, scribbling away in the scattered monasteries, copying the holy texts... Dominated by the Roman Catholic Church, education was mostly based on Latin texts. What vernacular grammars were written during that time, were all based on Latin standards (the traditional, or prescriptive grammars).

People, however, cannot stop thinking: a gradual accumulation of general and technical knowledge, the development of more sophisticated means of production/ technologies, increased trade, the formation of nation states and national languages brought about the highlight of medieval linguistics: the *modistae*, who attempted to prove that all human languages had common (universal) traits, because they all reflect reality (the physical world).

References

1. Guthrie, W.K.C. *A History of Greek Philosophy*, Volume III, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 1969.
2. Encyclopedia Britannica 2004 De Luxe Online Edition: History of Linguistics

Appendix I

A brief Social History of the Roman Empire

One of the striking features of Roman life was that Rome (under both the Republic and the Empire) was very much an urban culture. Most cities had populations of about 20,000 but there were a few exceeding 75,000. Rome had more than 500,000 residents, and might even have reached one million! The hustle and bustle of Roman life must have been quite intimidating to provincial visitors.

The homes of the wealthy (*domus*) were spacious one-story houses with a central courtyard. Public buildings and squares took up about one quarter of Rome. Most Romans lived in overcrowded poor areas of the city, in seedy multi-storied apartment buildings without water or toilet facilities. Despite some cultural benefits of the city, life was tough, and streets were dirty.

Of Patrons and Clients

Since the earliest days of the Republic, Roman society was a society of status. Institutionalized in what is called the patron-client system, Roman society was really a network of personal relationships that obligated people to one another in a legal fashion. The man of superior talent and status was a patron (*patronus*). It was he who could provide benefits to those people of lower status, who then paid him special attention. These were his clients who, in return for the benefits bestowed upon them, owed the patron specific duties. Of course, since we are talking about a network of relationships, a patron was often the client of a more superior patron.

There were various forms of benefits as well as duties. Political careers and loans on easy terms could all be had with the proper patron-client relationship. Clients had to serve their patrons at all times -- this was true whether the issues at stake were legal, financial or political. The clients of a patron would also accompany him to the forum every morning, and the more clients that accompanied the patron, the greater his status and prestige. The patron-client relationship was an important one and was built upon the Roman idea that social stability would result from maintaining the social hierarchy that managed to link all people to one another.

The Roman Family

At the heart of the Roman family was the *paterfamilias*, the father of the family. It was the *paterfamilias* who possessed the *patria potestas*, or power of a father, over his children, regardless of their age. This power made the father the sole owner of all property acquired by his sons. You can imagine the kind of difficulties this might create. A son would work hard and acquire wealth but that wealth was not his, but his father's. And although it was typical for both parents to have died by the time their child may have reached thirty years of age, if a father managed to live to old age his son may have built up so extreme a resentment, that he may have resorted to the murder of his father. By law, the *paterfamilias* could kill his wife if he found her in bed with another man. He could not only sell any of his children into slavery, he could kill them as well. And the Romans are known for practicing infanticide.

The Roman household was quite large and could include the *paterfamilias*, his wife, his sons with their wives and children, unmarried daughters and slaves. The household, then, could be considered to be a small state within a state.

Most marriages were arranged but mothers and daughters could, and often did, influence final decisions. Family life was similar to today: some marriages were happy, others not. Divorce was introduced in the 2nd century B.C. and was relatively easy to obtain -- no one needed to prove grounds. Girls were pushed into marriage at an early age. Although the legal age for marriage among women was twelve, fourteen was more common in practice. For example, Tullia (c.79-45 B.C.), the daughter of the Roman orator, Cicero (106-43 B.C.), was married at sixteen, widowed at twenty-two, married at twenty-three, divorced at twenty-eight, married again at twenty-nine, divorced again at thirty-three and died in her thirty-fourth year.

Roman women were not segregated as they had been at Athens. Wives were appreciated as enjoyable company and were the center of the social life of the household. Women talked in public, visited shops, went to the games, temples, and theaters. In other words, unlike ancient Athens, Roman women led a very visible existence. However, women could not participate in public life. The basic function of motherhood was to shape the moral outlook of her children. Roman upper-class women had considerable freedom in early Empire. They could acquire the rights to own a control

as well as inherit property and some women owned and operated businesses in shipping and trade. And although women could still not partake in politics they could forcibly influence their husbands: for instance, what would Augustus have been without Livia, or Trajan without Plotina?

During the *Pax Romana*, there was a decline in the number of children, especially among the upper classes of Roman society. The situation got so bad that there were imperial laws requiring parents to raise more children, but still the birthrate dropped. (On childbirth see Childbirth and Midwifery in the Roman Empire) The Romans practiced infanticide, contraception and abortion in order to limit the number of children born to the Roman family. In terms of contraception, the Romans used amulets, magic potions, formulas, potions, oils and appointments. Most were ineffective. The Romans did have condoms made from the bladder of a goat but they were very expensive

Education

In the early days of the Roman Republic, Rome did not have any public education. What education there was, and we're speaking of education for the citizens of Rome, was done within the context of the family. In other words, it was within the family that children learned the basic techniques of farming, developed physical skills for war, learned Roman traditions and legends, and in the case of young boys, became acquainted with public affairs. However, in the second and third centuries B.C., contact with the Greek world during the Macedonian Wars stimulated new ideas and education. The wealthiest classes wanted their children exposed to Greek studies, especially rhetoric and philosophy. This was necessary, so they thought, to make them fit for successful public careers. This was a practical ideal because these children would eventually serve Rome as administrators, officials, and perhaps even members of the Senate. Incorporated in this new educational ideal was the concept of *humanitas*, an education in the liberal arts or humanities. It was hoped that such an education in the liberal arts would prevent overspecialization and instead promote sound character. A sound knowledge of Greek was positively essential and schools taught by professional scholars began to emerge. And, of course, the Romans already had the example of Plato's Academy and Aristotle's Lyceum.

The very wealthy provided Greek tutors for their children. For the less wealthy there were private schools in which Greek educated slaves would instruct students. Children learned the basic requirements of reading, writing and arithmetic. By the age of twelve or thirteen, and if the child had shown promise, he could attend the *grammaticus*, or grammar school. The standard curriculum in the liberal arts included literature, dialectics (or the art of reasoning), arithmetic, geometry, astronomy, and music. At the core of this curriculum was, of course, Greek literature. So, students were exposed to Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, Hesiod's *Theogony* and *Works and Days*, as well as Pindar's *Odes*. The philosophies of Plato, Aristotle and Zeno of Elea, the histories of Herodotus and Thucydides and dramas of Sophocles and Aeschylus were also standard fare. One result of all this is that the Romans were bilingual -- they knew Latin and Greek. And with the growth of empire, students also knew a third language, their local dialect. Very promising students would end their education by studying Greek oratory, the best schools being found at Athens. Schools in the Empire were important vehicles for spreading Roman culture and ideas. The influx of Greek scholars, language, and writers also stimulated the Roman mind. And there were first rate Roman writers: Virgil's *Aeneid*, Ovid's *Metamorphosis*, the *Odes* of Horace, Livy's *History of Rome*, Tacitus' *Histories*, and the *Satires* of Juvenal are just a few examples.

Many of these writers simply copied Greek themes of the past and incorporated them into their own works. Virgil (70-19) is the prime example. For instance, his *Georgics* had its model in Hesiod's *Works and Days*, but the purpose was clearly didactic -- Virgil clearly celebrated the virtues of the cults, traditions and greatness of Rome. His *Aeneid* traces the return of Aeneas after the Trojan War. But Aeneas does not go to Syracuse as did Homer's Odysseus. Instead he lands at Rome. The *Aeneid*, written during the reign of Augustus, does not glorify of the excellence of the Greek hero, but the civic greatness of Augustus Caesar.

With all this literature, there were also libraries to hold books. Books were treasured possessions but were usually owned privately. So, in many wealthy Roman households, we could find slaves called "copyists" who copied texts. By A.D. 400, Rome had more than thirty libraries in existence, the most important one was located at Alexandria, and was literally a storehouse of Greek knowledge.

Medicine

The Roman idea of medicine and medical treatment was borrowed directly from the Greeks. This meant that cures and treatments were herbal in nature. The father of the family would prepare remedies to heal wounds and treat illnesses and this information was passed down from generation to generation and was bound up with religious practices. One

formula to prevent baldness included a mixture of wine, saffron, pepper, vinegar and rat dung. Besides herbs and ointments borrowed from Greek practice, the Romans also borrowed the Greek god of healing, Aesculapius. Temples found throughout the Empire testify to the power of Aesculapius in Roman medicine. Usual remedies included going to the temple, sniffing herbs, praying to Aesculapius, composing poetry, bathing, exercising, and studying philosophy.

During the late Republic and throughout the Empire, the Romans also use professional doctors, who were quite fashionable and at times quite hated. They didn't pay taxes and their cures were often worse than the illness itself. The Roman army had its own doctors, so too did gladiatorial schools. One most famous doctor to emerge from the gladiatorial schools was the Greek physician, Galen (129-199), who was the court physician to Marcus Aurelius. Being situated at the gladiatorial school, Galen was well-placed to observe human anatomy firsthand. (For more, see Etruscan and Roman Medicine)

Slavery

The number of slaves increased dramatically during the reign of Augustus and continued to increase for almost two centuries. Slaves were obtained during warfare, a bankrupt citizen could sell himself into slavery, and the *paterfamilias* could sell any of his children into slavery as well. As a result of this increase, slaves were highly visible during the Empire. The homes of the rich and were filled with slaves. The more slaves a man owned the greater was his status and prestige in Roman society. Roman slaves served as hairdressers, footmen, messengers, accountants, tutors, secretaries, carpenters, plumbers, librarians, and goldsmiths. Some slaves possessed high status jobs and served as doctors, architects, managers of business, and many educated slaves were members of the imperial bureaucracy.

Slaves could be acquired like any other form of property, that is, by inheritance, gift, or purchase. The historian Pliny the Elder knew of one large landowners who owned more than 4000 slaves. It is probable that most people of middling income and prominence had less than 10 slaves and more often than not, only one or two. Slaves were bound to promote their master's welfare at all times and without question. For example, if a master had been murdered, all his slaves were put to death without trial. Since they had not prevented the murder as they should have, they were all considered accessories to the crime. This notion was also applied to those slaves of a master who committed suicide. Although the majority of slaves lived and died in bondage, the intelligent and enterprising slave lived in the hope of eventually buying his freedom, a practice known as *manumission*. Full *manumission* brought freedom and Roman citizenship at the same time. Slavery is a prime example of how a Roman strength became an eventual weakness during the later Roman Empire.

Slavery, as an economic institution, is efficient, but only up to a point. That point was reached as the Romans built their entire economy around slavery. With *manumission*, the number of slaves declined. Of those slaves that remained in slavery, few care to work hard and they were unwilling to produce more children. So, in the late Empire, manpower was declining, and this is one possible cause for Rome's ultimate decline.

The conditions under which a slave existed varied according to the whim of his master. Some masters were kind and just, others were not. If slaves who worked in the mines experienced the worst conditions, household slaves experienced perhaps the best. (For more on slavery, see John Madden's excellent essay, "Slavery in the Roman Empire: Numbers and Origins")

Bread and Circuses

Beginning with Augustus Caesar, the city of Rome provided bread, oil and wine to its urban population. What this meant, is that almost 250,000 inhabitants of Rome consumed about 6 million sacks of grain per year, free. Rome provided citizens with food -- it also provided them with entertainment. Of the poor, the poet Juvenal could write:

with no vote to sell, their motto is "couldn't care less," Time was when their plebiscite elected generals, heads of state, commanders of legions: but now they've pulled in their horns, there's only two things than concern them: BREAD and CIRCUSES.

For instance, at the *Venatio*, animals were led into an amphitheater where heavily armed men fought and killed them. This was a popular pastime which was provided to the urban poor and aristocracy by the benevolence of the emperor. These events were held in a structure called the Circus Maximus which was built during the second century B.C.

between the Capitoline and Aventine Hills in Rome. After being destroyed by fire, it was reconstructed in A.D. 200 and had a capacity for 250,000 spectators. Races were held there until 549.

The Romans were fascinated with wild animals -- they like looking at them, seeing them perform tricks, or watching them being hunted and killed. Wolves, bears, bores, deer, and goats were indigenous to Rome and other animals were brought to Rome by imperial conquest. Elephants, ostriches, leopards and lions were imported in the first century B.C., followed by hippopotamus, rhinoceros, camels and giraffes. There were no zoos in Rome and most animals were privately owned as status symbols. Monkeys were dressed as soldiers and rode atop goats harnessed to a small chariot. The elephant was the most popular show animal and was initially used to transport wealthy men and women to dinner. However, animals were not only used for show but for what we can only call blood sports.

During the reign of Augustus Caesar, 3500 animals died during the days devoted to twenty-six festivals. 9000 were killed at the games celebrating the completion of the Coliseum in A.D. 80. Finally, 11,000 were killed at the celebration of a military victory in A.D. 107, a celebration lasting 123 days.

There were three kinds of blood sports: armed men fighting animals, animals fighting animals, or armed men and women exposed to starving vicious beasts, the latter usually reserved for criminals. The victim was tied to a stake, wheeled out into the arena, and exposed to a starving lion. The Romans also engaged in public hunting in which animals were simply killed in front of an audience. Before any sort of public display the animals were usually starved and perhaps beaten with a whip. The Romans also had public events called the *Ludi*, or the Games of Rome. By the 4th century A.D., nearly 177 days per year were devoted to the Games, held at the circus.

Gladiatorial contests were originally an Etruscan practice and so date back to the days before the Roman Republic was founded. For the Etruscans, armed combat between individuals was connected to religious practice. Men fought to the death beside the tomb of their chief in order to strengthen their spirits as well as the spirits of others. The first Roman practice of these contests took place in 264 B.C. By the reign of Augustus Caesar, however, the gladiatorial contests were made public and although gladiatorial contests were a source of entertainment for everyone, there were those like SENECA who thought differently. The gladiators were usually criminals, slaves or prisoners of war. The Romans, as is well-known, forced the gladiators to attend combat schools where they would learn the necessary skills of killing. At these schools, there were three groups of gladiators, based on defense: those who were heavily armed and wore helmets; those who carried a light shield and sword; and those who carried a net, trident and dagger.

The Romans also had other events during the gladiatorial contests. In one case, boxers wore leather gloves laden with metal studs. Artificial lakes were often created and ships conducted a mock battle (called the *Naumachia*). These "sea" battles were often recreations of past victories.

The chariot races were the passion of all social classes and bound wealthy and poor together. There were keen rivalries between teams -- Reds, Whites, Blues and Greens. Each team had its own faction who would find the best horses and riders. Carried out in the Hippodrome, there were 12 starting boxes, six on either side of the gate above which sat the starter. The drivers cast lots for their starting position. The races were usually seven laps in length, counted by the lowering of an egg or figure of a dolphin, and lasted about 20 minutes. Each race was run for a sum of money and prizes were given for second, third, and fourth place. When two or three chariots from one faction raced, they did so as a team and not individually. There is evidence, as in all sports, of cheating, bribery, throwing an event, and even the doping of horses. The chariot races occupied an entire day of festivities, and there were usually about 24 races. The Romans were not that much fascinated with the skill of either driver or horse, but rather, which color crossed the finish line first. In other words, allegiance was to color and not to skill. Obviously, the major attraction of the races was to place bets and people bet both at the course and off. In fact, the Romans are known for betting on the outcome of just about anything.

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Appendix II

The Decline & Fall of the Roman Empire

One of the reasons for the success of the Roman Empire was that the Romans treated their Empire as the world. In other words, the world was equated with the Empire. This belief formed the social cement which kept the Empire sustained. However, this bond, this social cohesion, was temporary at best. There were, after all, forces outside the Roman Empire which were eating away at the Empire itself. And regardless of whether we accept the fact that Rome fell as a result of internal pressure or invasions from the outside, or both at one and the same time, one thing is abundantly clear: Rome fell, and did so with a loud noise. It would take Western Civilization nearly ten centuries to recover and refashion a world which could be the rival of the civilization of Rome.

By the third and fourth centuries AD, it is proper to speak of a Greco-Roman tradition of thought. The Romans tried to limit the influence of Greek thought in the early days of the Empire. However, over time Greek ideas joined with Roman conceptions and a new tradition of thought was forged. In some respects, the Hellenistic world became Romanized. This is just one more example of how the Romans succeeded by assimilated other cultures. Furthermore, the Greco-Roman tradition refers as much to classical and Hellenistic Greece as it does the days of the Roman Republic and the Empire. Both civilizations produced a world view which we could only call pagan. This world view was secular through and through. Gods and goddesses were common to both civilizations and yet as time passed it was the virtuous life of the good citizen that was of supreme importance. The emphasis was on living the good life in the here and now, whether in the city state or the cosmopolis.

The Greco-Roman tradition was fashioned over the one thousand year history of the classical world, the world of Greece and Rome. The Renaissance of the 14th through 16th centuries attempted to revive the ideals of the classical world, and so the humanists of the Renaissance tried to imitate the humanism of centuries past. Humanist scholars took great pains to study the texts of the ancient world, not just to "harvest" the virtuous life of classical man, but to learn classical Greek and Latin. If ancient texts needed to be studied, then they needed to be studied in the language in which they were composed. What had happened between the fall of Rome and the Renaissance was the bastardization of classical languages. As scholars, the humanists needed the classical world for its language as much as it did for its ideas.

However, it was also during the age of the *Pax Romana* that this pagan tradition, this Greco-Roman tradition, was joined by another important tradition, by another world view. This world view is called the Judeo-Christian tradition. That is, the ethical and ordering principles of the Jewish and Christian faiths.

The Greco-Roman tradition was secular: it proposed no one God and formal religion as we know it today, did not exist. While the Greeks would pay homage to their many deities, as would the Romans, there is no doubt that they placed their true faith in the hands of man. In other words, humanism: man the thinker, man the doer, man the maker. For the Greeks, man was endowed with Reason, the capacity to think and use his intellect. This initially took the form of glorifying the city state: the city state was the world. Anything outside the city state was somehow inferior, barbarian. In an important respect such an attitude was narrow in focus and provided the Greeks with a tunnel vision that prevented them from further growth during the Hellenistic Age.

The Greeks were also obsessed with the personal cultivation of the individual. "Know thyself," repeated Socrates. The good man ought to seek the good life and so become a good citizen, a virtuous citizen. And a collection of virtuous citizens would constitute the virtuous city state. The only way that the good life was at all possible was through personal examination. Or, as Socrates again argued, "the unexamined life is not worth living."

Above all, the Greeks asked questions. What is knowledge? What is the state? What is beauty? What is virtue? What is justice? Was the best form of government? The Greeks, in the last analysis, were thinkers rather than doers. In time, the Greek world view came or to be based on the intellect more than it was on action. The best illustration of this world view -- a view of thought rather than of action-- was the Stoic and Epicurean therapies of the Hellenistic Age. These therapies taught resignation in the face of chaos and disorder -- they taught men to resign themselves in private reflection and thought.

The Romans, on the other hand, were doers, they were men of action. They succeeded in translating into action what the Greeks had only thought possible. The Romans also asked questions about the world, about nature, and about man. To be sure, they inhabited the same world as the Hellenistic Greeks. They understood and accepted the chaos and disorder of the world. However, they were clearly more prepared to develop their thought of the world in relation to what kind of world in which they wanted to live. The Romans also had the example of the Greeks and their history. In other words,

the Romans were cognizant of what the Greeks had accomplished and not accomplished. The Greeks had no such history to which they could refer.

The end result for the Romans was that they managed to create their own world and they called it the Roman Empire. And their world view became embodied in a pagan cult. This cult was nothing less than the patriotic worship of Rome itself. And throughout the Empire we find the expression *Genius Populi Romani* celebrated by all Romans. If anything sustained the Empire, it was the conception of the "Genius of the Roman People." The Romans were taught to believe that the destiny of Rome was the destiny of the world and this became embodied in a civil religion which embraced the genius of the Roman people. This civil religion was a secular, pagan religion, in which all men devoted their energies toward public service to state. It was their duty to serve the state. It was virtuous. These duties consisted of service and responsibility because only through responsible service would one come to know virtue.

Despite the obvious fact that the majority of Roman emperors were scheming, devious, opportunistic, or plainly insane, the world view dominated the social life of the Roman citizen of the Empire. The history of the Empire is dotted with political assassinations, strangulations, emperors playing fiddles while Rome burned, court intrigue and rivalry not to mention a widespread incidence of downright insanity or paranoid schizophrenia. In the end, it is extraordinary that the Roman Empire existed for as long as it did. For Edward Gibbon, author of the *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* (3 vols, 1770s), the decline of Rome was natural and required little explanation: "The decline of Rome was the natural and inevitable effect of immoderate greatness. Prosperity ripened the principle of decay; the cause of the destruction multiplied with the extent of conquest; and, as soon as time or accident removed the artificial supports, the stupendous fabric yielded to the pressure of its own weight. The story of the ruin is simple and obvious: and instead of inquiring why the Roman Empire was destroyed we should rather be surprised that it has subsisted for so long." [Gibbon, *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, 2nd ed., vol. 4, ed. by J. B. Bury (London, 1909), pp. 173-174.]

It's a complicated question and has occupied the attention of historians for centuries. One thing can be said with certainty -- although Rome ultimately fell in A.D. 476, its decline was a process that had been going on for centuries. This goes back to the comment we've been making all along, that Roman strengths eventually became Roman weaknesses. Another thing which we ought to remember is that the Roman Empire was large, and when we speak of the fall of Rome, we are talking about the western half of the Empire. The eastern half survived as the Byzantine Empire until 1453. Lastly, there is no one explanation that accounts for Rome's decline and fall.

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