



Oration on the Dignity of Man: De hominis dignitate (The Manifesto of the Renaissance)

Giovanni Pico della Mirandola

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The Manifesto of the Renaissance Oration on the Dignity of Man - De hominis dignitate - Giovanni Pico della Mirandola The Oration on the Dignity of Man (De hominis dignitate) is a famous public discourse pronounced in 1486 by Pico della Mirandola, an Italian scholar and philosopher of the Renaissance. It has been called the "Manifesto of the Renaissance". Pico, who belonged to the family that had long dwelt in the Castle of Mirandola, left his share of the ancestral principality to his two brothers to devote himself wholly to study. In his fourteenth year, he went to Bologna to study canon law and fit himself for the ecclesiastical career. Repelled by the purely positive science of law, he devoted himself to the study of philosophy and theology, and spent seven years wandering through the chief universities of Italy and France, studying Greek, Latin, Hebrew, Syriac, and Arabic. Pico's Oration attempted to remap the human landscape to center all attention on human capacity and human perspective. Arriving in a place near Florence, this famous Renaissance philosopher taught the amazing capacity of human achievement. "Pico himself had a massive intellect and studied everything there was to be studied in the university curriculum of the Renaissance; the Oration in part is meant to be a preface to a massive compendium of all the intellectual achievements of humanity, a compendium that never appeared because of Pico's early death." Pico della Mirandola spoke in front of hostile clerics of the dignity of the liberal arts and about the dignity and glory of angels. Of these angels he spoke of three divisions in particular: the Seraphim, Cherubim, and Thrones. These are the top three choirs in the angel hierarchy; each one embodying a different virtue. The Seraphim represent charity, and in order to obtain the status of Seraphim Mirandola declares that one must "burn with love for the Creator." The Cherubim represent intelligence. This status is obtained through contemplation and meditation. Finally, Thrones represent justice, and this is obtained by being just in ruling over "inferior things." Of these three, the Thrones is the lowest, Cherubim the middle, and Seraphim the highest. In this speech, Mirandola emphasizes the Cherubim and that by embodying the values of the Cherub, one can be equally prepared for "the fire of the Seraphim and the judgement of the Thrones." This deviation into the hierarchy of angels makes sense when Pico della Mirandola makes his point that a philosopher "is a creature of Heaven and not of earth" because they are capable of obtaining any one of the statuses.

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