

THE HUMANITIES AS *PAIDEIA* IN JULIÁN MARÍAS

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The crisis of the humanities as a field of study is evident both within and outside the discipline, as well as among practitioners of humanistic disciplines and those who simply appreciate the humanities. This crisis is especially pronounced amid the rise of scientism. Given this situation, there is a need to reaffirm the lasting importance of the humanities in education, particularly the role of humanistic disciplines in liberal education. To accomplish this, this paper introduces the core concepts of Julián Marías's philosophy of the human person, which serves as an entry point for emphasizing the ongoing relevance of the humanities. Using Marías's philosophical anthropology, I demonstrate how the humanities are fundamentally the paideia of modern education. Accordingly, this paper aims to clarify: (1) what the humanities are and why they are considered the paideia today, (2) the development of the concept of the humanities as a field of study, (3) how Julián Marías's philosophy deepens our understanding of humanistic disciplines, and (4) the philosophical foundation that supports the study of the humanities, justifying their central role in liberal education.

Keywords: humanities, Julián Marías, liberal education, paideia

INTRODUCTION

Today, the human person faces the scourge of relativism and scientism, which reduces him or her to a *thing*. These enticing ideologies employ explanations that are proper to things, rather than to persons, replacing the enduring truths of human reality and personal condition with evolutionary, biological, or psychological explanations — a situation unseen before in the history of the humanities. I am not a lone witness to these attacks on the reality of the human person, especially laid bare in Sir Roger Scruton's excellent work, *On Human Nature* (2017), to which little more may be added. The general air of displeasure and discontent with recent humanistic products and pursuits is evidence that, for the person of today, it is becoming easier to realize that the humanities is declining. The humanities themselves have been infiltrated by external pressures that make the humanities, as an area of study, implode. Naturally, this produces undesirable consequences with respect to how the humanities are taught, studied, and produced. Such a dire situation, however, does not justify discouragement

in pursuing the humanities and producing humanistic works; much less does it justify abandoning hope and excitement for the future of the humanities.

Given this, it is useful to turn to Julián Marías, whose central claim is that the human person is a *dramatic event*. When this understanding of the person is taken to its ultimate consequences, it will admit that the person has a biographical life, which means the person has a past, present, and future (the realm of history); that the person's life unfolds as in a drama (the realm of literature); and that the person imagines and thus experiments with an alternative life which can inform his or her own life (the realm of art).

At each significant era in its development, the humanities turned to a justification — a reason for why it must be practiced, pursued, produced, and preserved. But the justification, the philosophical foundation, that must be sought in this era must also address why the humanities proclaim truths about the person. It is not enough to restore previous justifications of the humanities, for those were justifications made according to situations so distant from today. Rather, one must turn to the human person of today and human life as it is lived here and now, revealing the real historical situation in which a person finds himself or herself: all the ills and symptoms of degradation that shackle the humanities.

Marías laid the groundwork for abating this crisis through his philosophy of the human person and human life, holding that the human person, far from a thing, is a dramatic reality, a dynamic task, an ongoing enterprise. This led him to discoveries about the person that confirm the products and study of the humanities as faithful reflections and interpretations of human life. His philosophy, which sheds light on those hidden yet enduring human realities found in the person *qua* person, makes it possible to derive from human life a justification of the humanities within the crisis it confronts. Hence, the goal of this paper is to explain why the humanities are fundamental to education through Marías's philosophy of human life. To facilitate this, the paper briefly discusses Marías's philosophy, explains what the humanities are and the current situation in which this area of study finds itself, and how Marías's philosophy provides a theoretical foundation for the humanities as the *paideia* of today.

JULIÁN MARÍAS AND A PHILOSOPHY OF THE HUMANITIES

Julián Marías (1914-2005) was a Spanish philosopher known as the foremost disciple of José Ortega y Gasset (1883-1955). He wrote about a wide array of topics, including sociology, historiography, politics, Christianity, and most especially films. A commentator described him as someone “who mastered all fields of culture, from philosophical thought to journalism, essay writing, and oratory” (Pérez 2006, 200). Marías was originally a student of the sciences until he met Ortega after a lecture. From then on, he did not let go of philosophy: Ortega took him under his wing, and in 1949, they established the short-lived *Instituto de Humanidades* in Madrid. As a university student, he discovered how philosophy served as the theoretical foundation, the conceptual justification, for the humanities. In the three-volume memoir he completed in 1989, he recounted studying philosophy at the university with Ortega: “I discovered my deep vocation... the profound connection, so unknown today, of all the disciplines

of the humanities — with philosophy as their organizing center, from which I had to look at everything, which was to constitute, in a decisive dimension, the story of my life” (Marías 2017, 73).

Experts on Marías’s philosophy established three major intellectual phases in his career: (1) the analytical (1931 to 1946); (2) the empirical (1946 to 1976), and (3) the personal (1976 to 1996), culminating in his major work *Persona* (Roldán 1998, 27). For the purposes of this paper, most insights are derived from the final phase of his philosophical career, since it is the stage where Marías becomes clear on how philosophy serves as the “organizing center,” that is, the foundation of the humanities. But here Marías was not referring to philosophy as such; rather, he was referring to a specific form of philosophy: the *philosophy of vital reason*, which was the system of thought developed by Ortega.

For Marías, following his mentor Ortega, human life is the *radical reality* (from the Latin *radix*, “root”) from which other realities are encountered. The proper mode of human life is not “existence” or “being,” or any other conceptual explanation — since these would not be the root reality but instead an interpretation of reality, one step removed from fundamental reality. Strictly speaking, these concepts are theoretical. Marías believes that the basic mode of reality is *living*, since human life is the first reality that one encounters. Quite simply, vital reason means *living as understanding*: to live is to understand, and to understand is to live. Living is the very justification of reality; living is *reason* in its executive and explicative mode (Raley 1997, 29). The philosophy of vital reason, therefore, is essentially a philosophy of human life.

Since Marías saw living as the way to justify life and its contents, actions, projects, and trajectory, he had to turn to the products of the humanities: literature, history, philosophy, and the arts. He saw that the products of the humanities present and explain human reality just as he saw the person in his philosophy of vital reason. That is to say, with his philosophy of vital reason, he was able to verify or confirm that the humanities — at least those products which endure and are crowned as “classics” by each generation — have been correctly showing who the human person is.

SCIENTISM AND THE CRISIS OF THE HUMANITIES

The decline of the humanities is both a crisis within and outside of it. On the one hand, there is a program to dismantle the unity of the humanities from the inside, where the content and method of humanistic scholarship are infected by materialism, relativism, and historicism, on the basis that the humanities ought to be open to ideas beyond what Western civilization established as canon (Bloom 1987, 373). There is also the problem of the ever-expanding fields of learning splitting knowledge into more compartments (Jaspers 2003, 137).

As early as the nineteenth century, John Henry Newman cautioned against the ills this poses, not just on the method of education, but on its aim: the actualization of the human person through the training and nourishment of the human intellect. Today, there is a greater threat to the humanities that strikes from both inside and outside of it. It goes by the name, *scientism*. It is a blind trust in and an absolutization of scientific

inquiry, positing that only the knowledge arrived at through the scientific method has epistemic value. Allan Bloom describes this as “the suicide of science” (Bloom 1987, 39). Its advent was not unexpected, because it appears as the synthesis of all the ills that contaminate the humanities: materialism rejects the human spirit; relativism, human values; historicism, human transcendence; scientism, far worse, rejects the *human person*, for the product of the scientific perspective is depersonalization (Burgos 2022, 4-5).

Scruton puts the issue of scientism more eloquently: “It involves the use of scientific forms and categories in order to revert to another and prescientific way of thinking. It is a form of magic — a bid to reassemble the complex matter of human life, at the magician’s command, in a shape over which he can exert control. It is an attempt to *subdue* what it does not understand” (Scruton 2015, 145). In some way Newman, though not having scientism in mind but that of the unity of knowledge, offers a description of the scientific scheme: “[I]f you drop any science out of the circle of knowledge, you cannot keep its place vacant for it; that science is forgotten; the other sciences close up, or, in other words, they exceed their proper bounds, and intrude where they have no right” (Newman 1962, 55). Similarly, scientism tries to banish the humanities and usurp their areas of knowledge. Through intellectual maneuvers so enticing to believe because of the empirical evidence it puts forward, scientism proposes undue claims on areas that are originally and fundamentally foreign to it, such as the meaning of human life, the nature of love, the reality of happiness, and the purpose of human suffering and tragedy, among others (Hildebrand 2021, 26).

It is not surprising, therefore, that scientism now has a firm grip over the university and scholarship, which has now degraded into “research,” in part caused by the changes in the aim of scholarship, evidenced by the growing obsession with citations, metrics, and university rankings. Western civilization, which was the seat and patron of the humanities for most of history, “embraced all sorts of ideas, some of which advocated the separation of cult from culture, of science from wisdom, of the secular from the sacred” (Torre 1989, 4). The words of José Ortega y Gasset are almost prophetic: “There is need to humanize the scientist, who rebelled, about the middle of the [nineteenth] century, and to his shame let himself be contaminated by the gospel of insubordination,” that is, the reduction of the person through scientific explanations, “which has been thenceforth the great vulgarity and the great falsity of the age” (2014, 79). On these grounds, C. P. Snow’s controversial description of intellectual life being split into “two cultures,” the sciences and the humanities, weighs more poignantly (1961, 45).

“Let us not be the dupes of science. For if science is the grandest creation of man, it is made possible, after all, by human life. A crime perpetrated against the fundamental conditions of human life cannot be atoned for through science” (Ortega 2014, 45). This is not a deposition of science, but to seek its return to its domain — what must be deposed is *scientism*. If authentic to their role as a *scientia* or *episteme*, in the original Aristotelian sense of “science” as a knowledge of causes, then the sciences should not be opposed to the humanities. The only kind of science the humanities are opposed to is scientism. Aristotle, the “Shakespeare of science” (as Iris Murdoch fittingly described him), the “supreme Greek humanist” (as Henry Gass called him), wrote across a wide array of subject matters, from the natural sciences to

moral philosophy (Murdoch 2014, 33; Gass 1929, 152). But as Newman notes, mankind's experience of the palpable and effective intellectual and human formation wrought by the humanities proves that they are superior to the sciences (Newman 1962, 34-5, 80-1). Even Viktor Frankl, a neurologist and psychiatrist, alluded to the limits of science, particularly his own field: "[E]very human being has the freedom to change at any instant. Therefore, we can predict his future only within the large framework of a statistical survey referring to a whole group; the individual personality, however, remains essentially unpredictable" (Frankl 2014, 122). Science reaches a certain point when it can no longer extract truths from the impenetrable and inexhaustible human person, and higher truths about the person are left to the humanities to discover.

However, this does not mean that the sciences should be ignored. They are valuable when supporting the humanities or when the sciences are approached with a humanistic perspective. "When these subjects are approached in a certain way, they are as much a part of the humanities as are philosophy, history, and the social sciences, or the fine arts of poetry, music, painting, and sculpture" (Adler 1988, 147). Put another way, scientific conclusions "should draw [a person] to the human rather than make the human submit to their measure" (Maritain 1973, 5). In line with this, Newman declared that "in order to have possession of truth at all, we must have the whole truth; and no one science, no two sciences, no one family of sciences, nay, not even all of secular sciences, is the whole truth ... the various branches of science are intimately connected with each other, and form one whole" (Newman 1962, 54).¹

The *actual* situation today splits the sciences and the humanities when there should be no split in the first place. As stated, the danger is that the cult of scientism holds sway, for "[i]t is characteristic of our present culture that a great part of its content proceeds out of science" (Ortega 2014, 44). Scientism, as the weapon responsible for disrupting the original unity of culture between the humanistic and scientific perspectives, cunningly presents itself as another way to access and comprehend the human being, the individual, the unrepeatable, irreducible person. However, scientism always leads to a reification of the human person. So, the humanities find themselves more and more in need of standing up against scientism by rediscovering and restating why the humanities are enduring and necessary.

THE *STUDIA HUMANITATIS* AS *PAIDEIA*

As mentioned, the humanities face a crisis both internally and externally. From the outside, scientism and relativism are the main threats because they threaten to erase the core of the humanities, which is the human person. They diminish the person, the meaning of life, the experience of beauty and the sublime, and the bonds of friendship to explanations disconnected from the person. They cause one to speak of the person not as a *person* but as a *thing*. Furthermore, the internal crisis of the humanities also draws our attention to the fact that students and teachers of the humanities are losing sight of what the humanities truly are, their purpose, and why they are important. Much of the "internal problems" of the humanities boil down to the challenge of answering

the fundamental question: What are the humanities? Or better yet, what was the original insight that gave rise to the “humanities”?

At the heart of this crisis is the difficulty in defining the humanities, penetrating the ideas through which the humanities were conceived, and, on a broader level, their place in liberal education, because the humanities are inseparable from the notion of liberal education. They are at the core of authentic liberal education, the education proper to the *homo liber*, the education that is sought for its own sake (College of Arts and Sciences 1995, 11). If education is to be *liberal*, that is, an education in freedom and for freedom, it will have three aims that co-implicate each other: professional development, civic formation, and the shaping of the latent powers and faculties of the human person, which all synthesize in an education of the human *qua* human (Eliot 1970, 90). These are the aims that Cicero might call the arts proper to a human: “[T]hough others may be called men, only those are men who are perfected in the arts appropriate to humanity [*propriis humanitatis artibus*]” (Cicero 1961, 50-1).

Liberal education’s object lies in “disinterested knowledge, understanding, and the untrammelled ability to think.” Hence, it involves the acquisition of the basic arts and sciences — grounded on content and values referring to truth, goodness, and beauty — by which the human person, the *homo liber*, is brought to the highest possible reaches of his or her humanity, and is lifted to the most elevated of human activities, namely, contemplation. It is an “[e]ducation directed toward wisdom, *centered on the humanities*, aiming to develop in people the capacity to think correctly and to enjoy truth and beauty, is education for freedom, or liberal education [emphasis added]” (Maritain 1962, 69).

It is important to clarify that liberal education was not a product of the university system, although it was transmitted through the university. The concept of liberal education draws from the tradition of the ancient Greeks and their notion of *paideia*. This included the study of poetry, rhetoric, music, Pythagorean mathematics, gymnastics, politics, and philosophy, the sum of which formed the person in *arete*, loosely translated as “virtue,” which was “the quintessence of early Greek aristocratic education” (Jaeger 1946, xxvii, 5, 164). For the Greeks, *paideia* meant general learning or erudition as opposed to specialized learning; in a manner of speaking, *paideia* is to the generalist as *episteme* is to the specialist. In the Latin world, they appropriated the Greek *paideia* and translated it as *humanitas*, not simply to refer to general learning and erudition but also to the influence of the Greek arts and sciences on Roman culture. In continuity with the Greek distinction of *paideia* and *episteme*, the Romans held the notion of *humanitas* in contrast with *scientia* as a specialized knowledge” (Adler 1988, 283; McKeon 1949, 292). Hence, “[h]umanities, *humanitas*, is strictly the equivalent of *paideia*, which means general, unspecialized, untechnical human learning” (Adler 1988, 279).

The Roman *humanitas*, of which Cicero is credited to be its foremost champion, was not a defined program of studies. Rather, *humanitas* was a way of looking at the world, a lens by which a person could understand his or her place in the cosmos, in the *mundus* he or she inhabits. Yet at the same time, it involved the study of certain skills and sciences. Cicero once remarked with great reverence to the patrimony bestowed on them by the Greeks: “We, however, taught no doubt by Greek example, both read and learn by heart from boyhood the words of the poets and regard such instruction

and teaching as a free man's heritage" (Cicero 1950, 174-5). All those led to the cultivation of the human person. In other words, their pursuit of *humanitas* was a search for what Cicero called the *specimen humanitatis*, the "pattern of humanity," the model of humanness (Cicero 1950, 480-1). This was the original idea that Cicero held when he spoke about the "pursuits of culture and literature [*studiis humanitatis ac litterarum*]" (Cicero 1892, 18[2]).

Liberal education, in a word, aims to produce in each one "a cultivated intellect, a delicate taste, a candid, equitable, dispassionate mind, a noble and courteous bearing in the conduct of life," all hinged on the idea that "liberal education and liberal pursuits are exercises of mind, of reason, of reflection" (Newman 1962, 80, 91). The content of liberal education, if it is to be an education centered on the refinement of human intelligence, of "[bringing] the mind into form," must contain "the great books, the master productions in all fields, philosophy, science, history, and belles lettres" (Adler 1988, 75; Newman 1962, xlii). Recalling those felicitous words of Matthew Arnold, liberal education directs one to a knowledge of "the best which has been thought and said in the world," which is nothing other than the stuff of the *humanities* (Arnold 1960, 6). The humanities, therefore, are at the core of liberal education (College of Arts and Sciences 1995, 11).

The humanities are far from hollow antiquarianism, an empty fascination for what is ancient. There is that irreplaceable feature of the humanities, which the present university has seemed to have forgotten, and that is the preeminence they give to the classics: "the best works of the best minds of mankind," which effect delight and stimulate the search for truth whether in youth or senility (College of Arts and Sciences 1995, 47; Newman 1962, 84). The humanities are not about "a return to the classics... [or] simply going back to Greek and Roman antiquities," or the attempt to recover what humanity has lost over the centuries. Rather, the humanities and humanistic education consist of a disinterested enterprise in the "classics where the classics mean anything of enduring value," which is to say, those works of human genius that have shown themselves to be *timeless and yet timely* (Adler 1988, 280). For, as Seneca said, "[w]isdom does not reside in letters"; wisdom is not *in the text* of the great books — wisdom is not reduced to text, as postmodern literary criticism might believe — but in the way a person wields the content of the text to inform his or her own life (2015, 315). This is the attitude preserved by the humanities. Hence, the humanities constitute the "food of civilization" (Newman 1962, 196). The whole of humanity is reared and nourished by the study of the humanities, by the classics, by the great ideas and the great conversations that have contributed to the civilization we now enjoy.

Nevertheless, the humanities are not entirely immune to the ongoing risk of encountering "a kind of euphoria that seizes man... [wherein] he turns toward the documents of pagan antiquity with a fever which the pagans had not known; he believes he can possess the totality of himself and of life, without having need of passing by the path of interior purification," of seeing how the pursuit of the humanities can serve as material for living (Maritain 1973, 25). T. S. Eliot offers an idea of how the humanities are less focused — though still concerned — about their content and methods than about their goal: the humanization of a person, the intensity and authenticity of personal life. Eliot said that Shakespeare's knowledge of classical arts and letters came from vernacular translations of the great texts, not from reading them

in their original language. Yet in his works, he was able to explore the depths of the human heart and reach the heights of the human mind because “he lived in a world in which the wisdom of the ancients was respected, and their poetry admired and enjoyed” (Eliot 1970, 149; Maritain 1962, 90-1).² Shakespeare’s attitude, undoubtedly shaped by the attitude of his generation and the historical context of his time, aligns with the ancient Latin’s reverence for their Greek heritage, just as the tradition of liberal education and humanities keeps this attitude alive in people. “From [the Greeks’] writings and teachings,” Cicero wrote, “can be learned the whole of liberal culture, of history and of style; moreover they include such a variety of sciences, that without the equipment that they give no one can be adequately prepared to embark on any of the higher careers” (1931, 398-9).

What was important was not the ability to read in the original language in which the great writers wrote, because knowledge of classical languages is a tool, not an end in itself. It is, by all means, a great skill to learn and a necessary one for somebody serious about the humanities, but the important thing is to quench, if it is quenchable at all, the human spirit’s thirst for the wellsprings of the classical sources of wisdom and the enduring models of virtue. Bloom noted, “Professors of Greek forget or are unaware that Thomas Aquinas, who did not know Greek, was a better interpreter of Aristotle than any of them have proved to be, not only because he was smarter but because he took Aristotle more seriously” (Bloom 1987, 376).

It is true that “the humanities are the repository for the classics” (Bloom 1987, 372). But the classics belong to the humanities, and the humanities draw from the classics, both pagan and Christian, because among the classics (even those considered “contemporary classics”) one finds the authentic, intense, and heroic pursuit of wisdom and beauty. Thus, in some way, the humanities also deal accidentally with defining and refining the canon of great books and great ideas, an aspect almost forgotten in the current state of humanistic pursuits. This might be because building a canon can only be coupled with an authentic pursuit of the aims of the humanities, which consist of grappling with the enduring questions and themes that occur to an individual of any age. Newman said that, still during his time (around the late nineteenth century), Shakespeare and Milton were not yet among the authors included in their program of education (Newman 1962, 195). Nevertheless, even before they were incorporated into formal studies, they were already seen as great authors whose works were sources of wisdom. This is a concrete example of how a work or author’s inclusion in the canon of great books must be a product of its enduring value — which may take time to discover — and its acclaim for giving insight into the reality of the human person and the human condition.

In any case, it is the pursuit that gives value to the humanities because, although one may not *possess* wisdom, at the very least, wisdom is *sought* through the humanities. In other words, the humanities and the classics teach something true to a human *qua* human; it is a human “taking the world’s wisdom into [himself or herself]” (Wilson 2017, 57).³ Through the humanities, one stumbles upon wisdom, submerged among “the best that has been known and thought in the world,” and consequently, that flood of light pours into the human spirit and illuminates the whole house of the soul (Arnold 2018, 702). The person, and only the person among all material realities, is a vessel who possesses an exclusive biographical life created and thus meant to be

filled with the “liqueur of Wisdom” — and this is precisely the nature and function of *paideia* (Escrivá 2001, 165).

One must *experience* the humanities and see their effects to see why there is a need to justify and protect them from collapse. Otherwise, “all legitimacy [is lost] when the [humanities] cannot be believed to tell the truth” about the human person and his or her place in the world (Bloom 1987, 374). What a person meets in the humanities is deep theoretical truth and, more importantly, its practical form, *prudence*, drawn from the inexhaustible wells of immortal texts. Prudence, or practical wisdom, is a fruit of the humanistic enterprise and is brought to bear on the life of each one because “[w]isdom... has a direct relation to conduct, and to human life” (Newman 1962, 94). Such is the place of *experiencing* wisdom and beauty in the humanities that Petrarch wrote: “[W]isdom can hardly be gained without experience nor can experience be had by one who does not see and observe many things. Finally, it is hard to understand how one can see many things if he stirs not abroad, but sticks close to one little corner of this earth” (Petrarch 2023). That final sentence could undoubtedly be taken as a hint against reductionism and excessive specialization.

On this point, I cannot fail to mention that an original feature of the study of the humanities is that it is motivated by *personal* reasons, not primarily by scholarship; it is a response to Socrates’ clarion call to *know oneself*. For instance, Petrarch’s study of the great literary works of civilization was chiefly to inform his own life and to know himself (a call from Greece that has resounded down the centuries). His was a scholarship intertwined with his personal life, such that it felt less like a form of scholarship and more an intimate penetration of the person he was, of the sort of life he chose to live (Proctor 1998, 26). He scoured the classics, the great writers, to find a guide for himself, to form him into the person he wanted to be. This was, for him, the principal purpose of the study of the humanities. Petrarch saw scholarship as a simultaneous but accidental activity of humanistic pursuits. What mattered for Petrarch, and perhaps what should matter to the humanist of any age, is to discover the highest and deepest truths about himself or herself, the human condition, the world around him or her, and God. There is much truth, therefore, in John Stuart Mill’s claim that “[a]mong the works of man, which human life is rightly employed in perfecting and beautifying, the first in importance surely is man himself” (Mill 1978, 56).

These qualities of the humanistic enterprise may be summarized but not exhausted by Paul Oskar Kristeller’s claim that the humanities and their products “please through the elegance and clarity of their style and their vivid personal and historical flavor as well as through their well-selected and mellowed classical wisdom” (Kristeller 1961, 18). Thus, the Renaissance’s appropriation of *humanitas* consisted of the ideals of *experientia*, *eloquentia*, *scientia*, *sapientia*, *prudentia*, and more importantly, *viventia*,⁴ living, and *persona*, the person. These qualities — the pursuit of wisdom, the appeal to the classics, one’s personal experience of wisdom, the establishment of a canon of great works, transforming wisdom into its practical form — flourished from the thirteenth to the sixteenth century, particularly during the period of the early Italian Renaissance through the establishment of the program of studies called the *studia humanitatis*, the study of humanity.

The *studia humanitatis* of the Renaissance was characterized by its renewed emphasis on the person and his or her dignity, still innocent of the stain of

individualism which was to mark the Enlightenment (Burgos 2022, 22; Maritain 1973, 19). Kristeller points out that the *studia humanitatis* program, which had *humanitas* at its core and whose content was similar to the ancient Roman program of education, was “a clearly defined cycle of scholarly disciplines, namely grammar, rhetoric, history, poetry, and moral philosophy, [and the study of] standard ancient writers in Latin and, to a lesser extent, in Greek” (Kristeller 1961, 10). Interestingly, the (fine) arts and aesthetics were not counted among the *studia humanitatis* until the eighteenth century, when the German Alexander Baumgarten systematized aesthetic theory. Thus, the humanities are often inadequately defined according to the humanistic disciplines as the “content” of the humanities.

Everything said thus far is evidence enough to declare that there is a certain obscurity shrouding the pursuit of the humanities today. To determine the philosophical foundation proper to the situation of the humanities, to vindicate the area of study from the aggression of relativism and scientism, it is expedient to expand a little further what was said. The preceding section discussed *what* the pursuit of the humanities consists of, what the humanities seek, and what they find. It is clear that the study of the humanities is about the pursuit of wisdom in classical sources, the great works of the greatest minds of humanity, in order to find a model for humanness — a *specimen humanitatis*. Now, a few words more must be said about *why* the humanities were and are pursued, practiced, and preserved. In other words, the justifications invoked in previous eras must be reproduced to see how they contrast with the kind of justification, or the precise philosophical foundation, that is sought now.

PAIDEIA, HUMANITAS, AND HUMANITIES

Far from the original conception of the humanities as a unitary field of study consisting of various disciplines, culminating in the Renaissance’s *studia humanitatis*, today’s “humanities” is dispersed in the plural form as a general field of learning in which similar disciplines are clustered (Pino Campos 1998, 300). As early as 1955, Marías predicted a worrisome decline in the study of the humanities. “It is feared, and perhaps with reason, that attention — and money, therefore — will be diverted from the liberal arts, from the humanities, to scientific research and techniques — industrial and socio-political” (Marías 1956a, 114). With increasing pace and number, people are deserting the humanities in search of greener pastures in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) (Fernandez 1983, 1). Nevertheless, the desertion of the humanities is less concerning than a larger problem. More poignant is the struggle to justify why the humanities should be pursued and studied, why humanistic products must be made, and why they must be taught *here and now*. At each era in the history of the humanities, justifications of the humanities were put forward, and thus, so must one be put forward today.

Hence, in the paragraphs that follow, we will abbreviate the history of the various justifications for the humanities. Since it is not the purpose of this paper to explore in fine detail the entire biography of the humanities, which started more than two millennia ago, it is enough to give an outline of what the humanistic ideal was for each major period in the biography of the humanities.

In ancient Greece, the free person (*eleutheros*) studied poetry, music, philosophy, rhetoric, politics, Pythagorean mathematics, and athletics, among others (Lewis 1960, 111). These formed the Greek citizen in *arete*, virtue or excellence, building up *kallos*, “the chivalrous ideal of a complete human personality, harmonious in mind and body, foursquare in battle and speech, song and action” (Jaeger 1946, 62). It was an education they called *paideia*. The Greeks were more concerned about understanding humanity’s place in the *kosmos*, the universe; hence, Western civilization is greatly indebted to the Greeks for laying the foundations of various fields of learning: the natural sciences, the practical sciences, the speculative sciences, and the humanities. “Tragedy, comedy, philosophical treatise, dialogue, scientific manual, critical history, biography, forensic, political, and ceremonial oratory, travel-notes, memoirs, collections of letters, autobiographies, reminiscences, and essays — all these literary types were created and bequeathed to us by the Greeks” (Jaeger 1946, 37). But the “humanities” are applied to the ancient Greeks only “vaguely as a historical parallel to an earlier phenomenon,” for they did not pursue the “humanities” as such, but they had a sense that there was a study in which various arts and sciences — thought to be humanizing because of *arete* and *kallos* — are integrated in “man” as the ideal to strive for, and such was the product of *paideia* (Jaeger 1946, 301). In other words, the “ideal man” was ancient Greece’s philosophical foundation (Jaeger 1946, 301).

In ancient Rome, the free person (*homo liber*) studied geometry, natural philosophy, politics, grammar, music, poetry, and moral philosophy (Cicero 1942, 100-1). The study of these subjects, which was called the *litterae humaniores* (“more humane letters”), shaped in the Roman citizen the ideal of *humanitas*. Cicero was the foremost figure who gave an educational meaning to the term in contrast to its basic Greek equivalent *philanthropos*, “philanthropy,” the love of humanity. More properly, *humanitas* is the Roman adaptation of the Greek *paideia*. “Cicero understands by it the arts and letters of the Greeks, insofar as they represent the Greek ideal of man, which is expressed in them. Cicero ascribes to the Greek spirit a humanizing influence; it helps man to discover his true self and thereby shape his personality” (Jaeger 1967, 21). Although *humanitas* could also refer to general aspects of one’s bearing, “in the sum of its meanings it signified a *modus vivendi* [a way of living] demanding a conscious and rational application of standards of moderation, gentleness, and fairness” (Nybakken 1939, 407). It was the mark of one who was considered *humanior*, “more humane” or even *humanissimus*, “most highly humanized” (Nybakken 1939, 406). In other words, being “more human” was ancient Rome’s philosophical foundation.

In the early Italian Renaissance, the *umanista*, “humanist,” studied and taught, through the cycle of studies called the *studia humanitatis* (“the study of humanity”), geometry, rhetoric, poetry, moral philosophy, and classical Greek and Roman literature (Kristeller 1966, 30-1). The humanism that emerged in this era assumed multiple forms. No one strand of “Renaissance humanism” can be determined because the humanists of that time favored different slants: Christian or secular, Platonic or Aristotelian, and active or contemplative, among others. “What they all have in common is something else: a scholarly, literary, and educational ideal based on the study of classical antiquity” (Kristeller 1962, 22). That is perhaps the most important legacy the Renaissance humanists left for future generations of humanities scholars.

“[T]hey established the humanities, that is, a broad area of secular learning and secular thought based on the classics, independent of (not contrary to) both theology and the sciences” (Kristeller 1962, 22). Inseparable from this attitude was the pursuit of wisdom (*sapientia*) and eloquence (*eloquentia*). Thus, today’s humanists, as “teachers of the humanities, as writers and scholars in the literary and historical disciplines, [...] have every reason to look upon the Renaissance humanists as [their] predecessors and professional ancestors” (Kristeller 1962, 23). Similar to the Greek *paideia* and the Roman *humanitas*, the Renaissance humanists had as their ideal the “education of a desirable human being” (Kristeller 1961, 124). In other words, the study of human *qua* human was the philosophical foundation of the Renaissance humanists.

In the four centuries or so between Renaissance humanism and today, the humanities were studied under different permutations. The Jesuits in 1599 established a standard curriculum they called the *Ratio Studiorum*, integrating the medieval *trivium* and *quadrivium* with the humanities as preparation for specialized learning in a speculative science (O’Malley 2000, 127-144). In the mid-eighteenth century, Baumgarten systematized “aesthetics” as a study encompassing all of the fine arts, thus opening the possibility for canonizing art as a study of the humanities (Abrams 1989, 92, 152). Soon after, from the late eighteenth to mid-nineteenth century, Germany and England saw a revival of classical studies, but, particularly in Germany, this pursuit mutated into pure research, an obsession with discovering new “facts” about antiquity rather than the search for wise living (Proctor 1998, 91-3). North American education, which the Philippine education system took as its model, is not exempt: there was a strong campaign in the early twentieth century to adopt the German model – postgraduate degrees, research centers, and original research projects (in place of the “scholarly” attitude) (Torralba 2022, 48-53). The humanities were inevitably affected by this diminishing pursuit of wisdom. “[The American] curriculum reflects this change. From the Renaissance up through the [nineteenth century], the humanities, with their claim that the study of the Greeks and the Romans formed character and taught wisdom and virtue, provided the basis for the education of leaders in Europe and in America. This kind of education has now been replaced by another” (Proctor 1998, 131).

Having this brief context in mind, we have the requisite knowledge to make a conclusion. The way the humanities have developed reminds us of Marías’s hypothesis that attention will divert from the humanities to scientific investigation. In recent decades, the steadily growing phenomenon of scientism has been absolutizing scientific inquiry and methods, attempting to usurp the place of the humanities. More dangerously, the phenomenon of scientism is laying claim to the humanities’ object of inquiry: the human person. With an accelerating pace over the past three decades, scientism has been invading the domain of the humanities. Especially responsible for this is evolutionary psychology (an absolutization of Darwinian principles of evolution and natural selection) and neuroscience (the reduction of human actions, and therefore morality, to chemical reactions in the brain or involuntary neural movement) (Scruton 2015, 135). The scientific program declares that literature, history, philosophy, and art do not have the authority to make claims about the personal condition and human reality. The scientific thinker would say that, if they have any truth to tell at all, the products of the humanities must have been the results of some evolutionary, biological,

or psychological impulse. Hence, one must turn to scientific explanations to yield any truth about the person. Under the guise of answering the perennial question “What is a human?” the advocates of scientism propose explanations of the human person and human life that, in the final analysis, do not emerge from the reality being investigated, since any form of scientific explanation is not proper to the reality of the human person.

A PHILOSOPHICAL PRECEDENT

This brief sketch of what the humanities face today demands that their apologists — humanists, artists, historians, philosophers, filmmakers, poets, dramatists, sculptors, writers, and even those who simply delight in the humanities — summon a justification. However, it will not suffice to simply retrieve the justifications of previous eras, for the situation of the humanities is no longer the same. The problems that confront the humanities at present would have been unimaginable for the Greeks, Romans, and Renaissance humanists. But even then, it would be a massive error to depart entirely from the legacy that present man has inherited from the ancient and Renaissance traditions. Hence, the humanities today must search for a justification, in keeping with the heritage of pursuing that which “humanizes a person,” that which makes a person “more human,” while understanding that there is an irrevocable historical level in which the humanities find themselves *here and now*. The Greek *paideia*, the Roman *humanitas*, and the Renaissance ideal of studying human *qua* human are distant and largely unknown to the individual of today. This means that a justification of the humanities must be forged from the present situation while being sensitive to its great inheritance.

There were a few attempts to do this in recent decades. There are the likes of Jacques Maritain, Etienne Gilson, M. H. Abrams, and Sir Roger Scruton. To the list, one could add — with some reservation — Mortimer Adler and Robert Hutchins, the progenitors of the Great Books in the 1940s. But there is another figure who, quite surprisingly, is less known to the public despite the decisive importance of his thought to the pursuit and practice of the humanities: Julián Marías.

The great achievement of Marías was the development of a philosophy of human life and the human person, which are the foci of the humanistic enterprise. His entire philosophical project can be seen as a defense of the human person as a reality irreducible to any other. He censured ideological and methodological schemes that “thingify” or “reify” the person, that is, the concepts and ways of thinking that reduce the person to a *thing*, an *object*, a closed, static, passive, inert *entity*. Marías holds that the person is a dynamic task, an ongoing enterprise, a dramatic event, a projective reality; the person is *someone* and not at all “something.” The human person is “given,” but he or she is given as someone incomplete, as a task to be accomplished. Through that temporal stretch of his or her life, he or she must *make himself or herself* by starting projects, moving along certain trajectories, sustaining life with a hopeful anticipation of the future, and being faithful to the person he or she is called to be. Thus, human life is a *drama*. It has a beginning, middle, and an end. Consequently, the only way to access persons and comprehend them is not by *defining* or *describing* them, but by *narrating* their lives.

CONCLUSION

It is apparent that human life was both the starting point and end of the justifications of ancient Greece, ancient Rome, and the Renaissance humanists. Whether it was the study of the humanities or the production of humanistic works, human life — *each one's life* — was, in one way or another, at once the source and purpose of their pursuits. The Greeks studied and produced humanistic works in order to attain the “ideal human”; the Romans, to be “more human”; and then the Renaissance humanists, to study “humans as humans.” But what was the basis for these ideals? It could not have been some theory or interpretation of “human,” for that would erase the concreteness of what they aspired for: the model of humanness, to be more human. Rather, far from abstract or generalized interpretations of humanity, they turned to *human life* (Jaeger 1946, 42). The Greeks principally studied Homer's epics, so much so that he was considered “the first and the greatest creator and shaper of Greek life and the Greek character” (Jaeger 1946, 36). The esteem and reverence that the Romans had for Homer and his works confirm this. The chief reason is that Homer “gives an objective picture of life as a whole, and portrays men at hand-grips with destiny, struggling to win a noble prize” (Jaeger 1946, 43). Homer's works, in other words, are “a deathless memorial of human life” and a “vast picture of all the activities of human life” (Jaeger 1946, 45, 50).

In Homer's epics, the Greeks and Romans saw a model of human life in all its aspects: destiny, suffering, loss, heroism, love, triumph, joy, strife, virtue, beauty, and death. That is to say, the search for a pattern of human life motivated the pursuit of literature, history, and art, which is undeniably present among their humanistic descendants of the past two and a half millennia. If this is taken seriously, the consequences must be reckoned with, for it means that the justification for the humanities must also come from human life. But this does not mean human life *as such*, since human life, as a reality that should be apprehended in all its connections, is systematic in nature (Marías 1956b, 75). Human life is not a monolithic structure that is “there” once and for all; rather, it is a dynamic reality, a *task* taking place in a specific circumstance. This demands, therefore, that one possess a “systematic body of knowledge” that organizes the multiple ingredients of human life as a unitary whole, in order to see it with a unitary vision (Marías 1956b, 16).

This can be no less than *philosophy*, that is, a philosophy of *human life*, in which one can see “that each of its affirmations [about human life] is effectively upheld by all the others” (Marías 1956b, 16). As evidenced by their incredible products, literature, history, or art, can imagine, represent, or give an account of human life in varying degrees. Nevertheless, as disciplines, they are not a *function* of human life; they are not a function of *living*. Rather, they are *products* of a person's function, indeed his or her *need*, to give an account of his or her life, to justify his or her life, his or her actions and choices, his or her dreams and aspirations, his or her projects and trajectories, and most of all, his or her vocation: the person he or she is called to be and the life he or she is called to live. This is to be understood as *paideia* in its maximum expression. This is the reason Marías claims that to live is the very act of

comprehending life, and why philosophy is *responsible vision*, which “requires the seizure or possession of that seen reality [human life]... But seeing is not enough: one must also ‘account for’ what one sees, be aware of its connections” (Marías 1971, 8). This is why Cicero possessed the inchoate form of this insight in his claim, “*ars est enim philosophia vitae*,” philosophy is the art of life (Cicero 1931, 220).

The notion of *paideia*, as we have seen, is not simply education as such, but rather the education of the individual, which promises human refinement in conduct, bearing, speech, morals, and principles. This “art of life” achieved through a philosophy of life, grounded in the study of the humanities, summarizes what *paideia* can and should mean for the student of today. The aim of education deserves to be reoriented in this direction, especially in a world that is becoming increasingly desensitized to human things, a world that is beginning to seem increasingly foreign to itself. Although Julián Marías offers us an antidote against the plague that inhibits the progress of the humanities, we cannot insist that his philosophy is *the* justification for the humanities as *paideia*. If anything, this study should only serve as a stimulus for other endeavors in discovering more and better justifications for the humanistic enterprise. Only in doing so can we arrive at a refined view of human reality, gradually approximating the truths of the human condition, so that the humanities may finally be vindicated from all the ills that dampen their influence on the human and the world.

NOTES

1. Newman uses “science” to refer generally to a body of knowledge, a *scientia*, not in the way science is popularly understood today as the natural, mathematical, and medical sciences.

2. Maritain likewise proposes to dispense undergraduate students from having to learn Latin and Greek until specialized graduate studies.

3. See Peterson (2022, 202): “If you study art (and literature and the humanities), you do it so that you can familiarize yourself with the collected wisdom of our civilization. This is a very good idea — a veritable necessity — because people have been working out how to live for a long time. What they have produced is strange but also rich beyond comparison, so why not use it as a guide?”

4. The fact that the humanities are *lived* — and not merely viewed as something “interesting” to pursue — was already a widespread attitude in the medieval period, especially among the Christian Mystics, and carried over to the Renaissance humanists beginning with Francis Petrarch. See Maritain (1973, 13-28).

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