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HANDBOOK FOR THE
Humanities

Janetta Rebold Benton **Robert DiYanni**
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Preface

Handbook for the Humanities is a compact yet comprehensive account of the humanities from the beginning of human civilization to the present day. Like our earlier much larger two-volume book, *Arts and Culture: An Introduction to the Humanities*, 4th edition, this new humanities handbook includes coverage of painting, sculpture, and architecture; history, philosophy, and religion; literature, music, film—and more.

Our goal in *Handbook for the Humanities* is to provide in a convenient format the essential information students and other readers require for an understanding of how the humanities have revealed and expressed human culture. We have striven throughout to present humankind's major accomplishments and achievements.

A number of special features help to capture the rich panoply of human expression:

- ◆ **Learning Objectives**, which begin each chapter, identify key aspects of the chapter content for readers.
- ◆ **Spotlights** highlight particular individuals and creations, such as Cleopatra, the Leaning Tower of Pisa, the *Magna Carta*, Mont Saint-Michel, Enlightenment Thought and Women Marie Curie, and Robin Hood films—to cite a few of many.
- ◆ **Global Perspectives** extend the book's focus beyond the western humanities to include numerous additional cultures, such as those of Africa, India, China, Japan, Korea, and Mesoamerica.
- ◆ **Materials and Methods** describe the various techniques artists have used throughout the ages and around the world—from mosaic and fresco to egg tempera, oil paint, and modern synthetic media.
- ◆ **Ethical Considerations** focus on aspects of human behavior from the standpoint of good and evil, right and wrong, such as the punishments Dante devises for sinners in his *Inferno*, and considerations of existentialist thought reflected in the philosophy of Jean Paul Sartre and Simone de Beauvoir.

- ◆ **Critical Thinking** questions appear throughout each chapter and also at each chapter's conclusion.
- ◆ **Cultural Legacy** discussions conclude each chapter by considering the ways each civilization or historical period has had an impact on the future.
- ◆ **Key Terms** are presented in list form at the end of each chapter; these terms are defined within the chapter and again in a glossary at the end of the book.
- ◆ **A Timeline**, with images, that highlights major developments in the humanities for each historical period, appears at the end of each chapter.

Throughout, our goal has been to provide the necessary background students need for an engaged and thoughtful study of the humanities. To that end, we have taken a comprehensive approach, seeking to explain the major developments and accomplishments of civilizations across the various humanities. Teachers can readily supplement *Handbook for the Humanities* with their own materials, such as works of art, music, and literature; original texts; historical artifacts; and other items and documents. Yet teachers can be confident that students have in *Handbook for the Humanities* an integrated overview of humanity's cultural heritage, synthesized in a clearly presented and convenient volume.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Handbook for the Humanities represents the cooperative efforts of a number of people. The idea for the book was suggested to us by Sarah Touborg, Editor-in-Chief. We wish to sincerely thank the fine team Sarah assembled for work on this project: Acquisitions Editor, Billy Grieco; Production Manager, Brian Mackey; Production Editor, Tiffany Rupp; Editorial Assistant, Laura Carlson; Project Manager, David Nitti; and Pearson Imaging Center, Corin Skidds.

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Introduction

WHAT ARE THE HUMANITIES?

The humanities represent the most significant and vital of human accomplishments—they reflect our achievements from the beginning of human life in prehistory. Included are the most important developments in the history of civilization: various forms of art—painting, sculpture, and architecture; the emergence of literature, drama, and music; the creation of philosophies and religions that have molded the thoughts and actions of countless people worldwide; and the historical study of these occurrences. Included also are the creation of tools, the invention of language, the development of writing, and the organization of social structures, which made possible the many achievements of human cultures and civilizations.

We must also acknowledge the important role of the natural and social sciences in the evolution of the arts and humanities disciplines. Scientific and technological developments made possible the creation of musical instruments such as the violin and the piano. They made possible the creation of materials and methods that led to the emergence of different techniques in painting and sculpture, as well as different possibilities for the construction of buildings ranging from cathedrals and skyscrapers to theaters and Olympic stadiums. Science, technology, and engineering are also closely linked to recent developments of artistic media such as photography, film, and computer-aided art.

WHY STUDY THE HUMANITIES?

The humanities celebrate and criticize; they identify problems and challenges; they ask questions. The humanities are the subject of dialogue, dialectic, and debate. They foster exploration, provoke thought, and create human solidarity. The questions they raise and consider involve

basic human needs and values, issues of faith and doubt, pain and pleasure, wonder and bewilderment, life and death. The humanities matter to us because they help us understand ourselves and others.

The humanities, thus, are good to think about. The humanities, however, are also “good to think with.” Through our engagement with works of art, literature, music, and film we are provoked to think, to explore, to question, to imagine. Through our encounters with artworks of all kinds and with historical documents and religious and philosophical texts, we strengthen our capacity for analysis and interpretation, and we develop our ability to think logically and cogently. The humanities also stimulate our imagination and foster our creative and critical abilities. They provide opportunities for us to engage with others in shared communal experiences.

The humanities are also good to experience—to have direct experience with art and architecture, literature and history, philosophy and religion, film and photography, theater and music and dance. Some of our experiences with works of art and with humanistic texts are solitary. We can view a work of art, read a novel or a philosophical discourse, a poem, play, or religious scripture, listen to a recording of a song or a symphony, view a film or a set of photographs, alone, on our own. And we can also do any of these things in the company of others—at visits to museums, and at performances of concerts, films, and plays; during attendance at religious ceremonies; through shared discussion of works of art and of literary, philosophical, and religious texts.

The Italian Renaissance political thinker Machiavelli engaged with the Greek and Roman philosophers by dressing up for the occasion and then retreating to his study with his volumes of the classics. As he read Plato and Epictetus, Sophocles and Seneca, and many other authors of Greco-Roman antiquity, he was both alone and in company. He imagined himself conversing with them, engaged in a dialogue that continues today with our participation, as we engage with

those ancient writers, as we dialogue as well with Machiavelli himself in works such as his *Prince* and *Discourses*.

A few centuries after Machiavelli, Henry David Thoreau, in his most celebrated work, *Walden*, describes how he awoke each morning with a reading of ancient works and a walk to Walden Pond. He imagined himself in communion with earlier civilizations as he bathed in the pond, linking himself with those who purified themselves spiritually in the Ganges River in India. He imagined the ancient Greek warriors of Homer's *Iliad* as he watched and then described a ferocious battle between red and black ants, comparing the torn and bloody combatants to the Greek and Trojan warriors of antiquity.

Both Machiavelli and Thoreau illustrate how the humanities can be a solitary pursuit and a social one. Each of these writers and thinkers shared his vision with others, Machiavelli as an advisor to powerful political figures, Thoreau through public lectures. And each wrote books that influenced the future: Machiavelli's *The Prince* is a Renaissance manual about how to acquire and maintain power; Thoreau's *Walden* is a guide to living according to deeply held principles, a guide that strongly influenced Leo Tolstoy, Mahatma Gandhi, and Martin Luther King, Jr. among others.

So what, then, can we say is the value of the humanities? What benefits accrue to those who share in their splendor and riches? The arts give form to what is imagined, express human beliefs and emotions; they create beauty; they move, persuade, and entertain us. The arts exist in context—the context of history and culture, of religious beliefs and philosophical ideas. Considered in these contexts, the arts deepen our understanding and enrich our experience of life.

Let us explain some of the ways the humanities accomplish these lofty goals via a discussion about the nature of the humanities disciplines and the rewards and pleasures they offer.

Art

Art is as varied as the cultures that create it. While the other humanities—such as history, literature, or philosophy—may be defined with a degree of precision, the same is not true of art. Indeed, that fundamental question, “what is

art?”, will never find a single answer that meets with everyone's satisfaction. Such a question is perhaps comparable to asking “what is love?”, which is equally as amorphous, non-specific, and personal. One's personal definition may be exclusive or inclusive—which, in itself, may be seen as one of the many appeals of art.

The basic categories of art are based on media: painting, sculpture, and architecture. At various times in the history of art, one or another will dominate. For example, architecture was the dominant art form during the late Middle Ages, but painting came to the fore in the Renaissance.

Uses of art

Much more than decoration, art has served a wide range of purposes. For example, art and politics have long been allies, visual imagery used to establish political power. The ancient Egyptian pharaoh Narmer (see fig. 1-13 on p. 11) understood this, as did the Roman emperor Augustus (see fig. 3-15 on p. 49). So did the French emperors Louis XIV and Napoleon. However, art has also been used in political and social protests by many artists including Goya in Spain, Hogarth in England, Daumier in France, and Käthe Kollwitz in Germany.

Religious institutions have been especially important patrons of the arts. Buildings where the faithful could meet were needed, from churches, to synagogues, to mosques. The decoration applied to the walls of these buildings, as well as the paintings and books created for religious purposes, may be regarded as didactic decoration. Illustrations of the religious stories proved especially useful for largely illiterate audiences. Medieval manuscript illumination, as in the *Book of Kells* (see fig. 5-1 on p. 96), or the narrative reliefs carved on church facades, as at Sainte-Foi in Conques, France, reveal much about the religious beliefs of the Middle Ages while delighting us with their distorted, expressive forms.

Art, especially so-called Primitive Art, may be functional. A pitcher, pot, bowl, or other vessel may be simultaneously useful and beautiful. Some early works of art functioned in ways unexpected today: Thus a Sumerian statue (see fig. 1-6 on p. 5) was used to offer prayers at the temple on behalf of the owner who could

be otherwise occupied elsewhere. And a work of art could be used to encourage fertility, as the akuaba dolls used by Ashanti (Asanti) women in Ghana.

Many cultures create images of their deceased. The intent may be to honor and revere ancestors, as well as to seek their counsel and protection. Objects placed in tombs to accompany the dead into their anticipated afterlife were likely to be functional as well as beautiful. Consider the sumptuous contents of the tombs of the Egyptian pharaohs, so valuable that various ingenious devices were devised to hide their locations.

Art may be used to record events. Military triumphs, in particular, were lauded, as seen in the reliefs decorating the walls of the ancient Persian palace at Persepolis in Iran. Trajan's triumph over the Dacians (present-day Romania) is carved in a detailed relief that spirals up the Column of Trajan in Rome (see fig. 3-17 on p. 59).

A work of art can be a legal document, as is true of the *Law Code of Hammurabi* (see fig. 1-10 on p. 9). And Jan van Eyck's painting of Giovanni Arnolfini exchanging wedding vows with Jeanne Cenami, with witnesses present, documents a marriage.

Art is also used to record the appearance of people (in portraits and self-portraits), of places (in landscapes and cityscapes), and of objects (in still life paintings).

But a word of caution is needed about art as history. While it is certainly true that, as the old saying goes, "a picture is worth a thousand words," the pictures, sculptures, and buildings that survive today do not provide a complete or even balanced history. This inevitably biased impression is due largely to what may be termed "selective survival" in the arts. Palaces have survived; private homes less so. Religious institutions actively commissioned works of art, secular organizations less so. The art of certain cultures, as that of ancient Egypt, tends to be made of durable materials and was intended to last for eternity; in contrast, the works of art of other cultures, as those of sub-Saharan Africa, are likely to be made of impermanent materials and intended for use in ceremonies and rituals. Not one of their wooden figures or masks was ever meant to be exhibited in a museum.

The works of art discussed and illustrated in the following pages will take you across the millennia and around the globe. Try to look at the art created by unfamiliar cultures, distant in time and location, with an open mind and appreciate, or at least evaluate, each according to its *own aesthetic and purpose*—rather than according to twenty-first-century ideas.

Aspects of the aesthetics of art

In fact, the same basic **elements of art** have been used throughout the world, at all times; these fundamental components are:

1. color
2. line and shape
3. texture
4. light
5. space
6. composition
7. emotion

Although these elements may be neatly listed, there are no rules—art cannot be made into a science. The following are several ideas to keep in mind when looking at art, to appreciate art, to understand art, to create art.

The way in which the elements of art are used to depict the subject gives **form** to the work of art. A work of art that appears cohesive is said to have **unity**—a desirable quality. An artist may create unity by repeating elements. For example, the Rococo painting by Watteau, *Pilgrimage for Cythera* (fig. 9-2), is unified by the repetition of the small curving shapes of the brushstrokes. Color creates unity in Poussin's *Holy Family on the Steps* (see fig. 8-23 on p. 189) in which the primary colors of red, yellow, and blue are used for the most important figures, which are surrounded by the secondary colors of purple, green, and orange. Picasso's *Woman with a Mandolin* (see fig. 12-5 on p. 271) is unified by repetition of shape and color, for Picasso treated figure and background in much the same way.

In sculpture, the repetition of shape to unify is demonstrated by Boccioni's *Unique forms of Continuity in Space* (see fig. 12-11 on p. 265) or Calder's mobile, *Loxter Trap and Fish Tail* (see fig. 12-17 on p. 276), for each work is created from its own type of distinctive curving shapes. Throughout the piece of sculpture, these shapes



9-2 Jean-Antoine Watteau, *Pilgrimage to Cythera*, 1717, oil on canvas, 4' 3" × 6' 4½" (1.30 × 1.90 cm). Musée du Louvre, Paris

are similar rather than identical, thereby achieving unity without monotony.

And the same idea is seen in architecture. The Taj Mahal in Agra, India, is unified by the consistent use of color and the repetition of the shape of the pointed dome in the arches, large and small (fig. 8-11). Built in a very different architectural style, all the buildings in the Forbidden City in Beijing, China, form a unified whole due to use of the same shapes and colors in the various halls and palaces throughout this city (fig. 6-18).

Certain **proportions** have been found to be particularly pleasing. The great pyramids of Egypt, although enormous in size, were built



8-11 Ustad Ahmad Lahuri and others, Taj Mahal, Agra, India, 1632–1648

using a simple proportion—the height to the width at the base is 7:11 (see fig. 1-17 on p. 14). The ancient Greeks used mathematical ratios to determine the dimensions of their buildings, as demonstrated by the Parthenon in Athens (see fig. 2-16 on p. 34). In fact, the Greeks used mathematical proportions to determine the ideal human body, using the height of the head as the unit of measurement.

The elements of art may be used to convey emotions—ranging from subtle to powerful. In Giotto's *Lamentation over the body of Jesus* (see fig. 5-35 on p. 116), the profound sadness of the subject is emphasized by the use of lines—many of which lead downward to the unusually low and off-center focal point. In contrast, line is used to convey happiness in Georges Seurat's *Le Chahut* (*The Can Can*). According to Seurat, happy lines turn upward, while sad lines turn downward—in this painting, lines, shapes, and the action of the figures lead upward. The connection between emotion and position is evidenced when we tell a person who is “feeling *low*” or “feeling *down*,” to “hold your head *high*” or that things are “looking *up*.”

Color also plays a role in establishing mood: Giotto used cool drab colors, whereas Seurat's colors are warm and high value. An extreme example of the use of color for emotion is Picasso's *The Tragedy*, painted entirely in shades of blue. We refer to a “blue mood” or “feeling blue” and even say that someone “has the blues” to indicate their sadness.

The various visual elements are also used by the artist to convey the **content** of a work of art to



6-18 The Forbidden City, Beijing, China, begun 1406

the viewer. **Iconography** is the language of symbols. Used especially in Christian art, among the almost countless examples is the apple—a common symbol of evil in Christian art because it is the fruit Adam and Eve were forbidden to eat in the Garden of Eden, and because in Latin, the language of the Christian church, the same word, *malum*, means both evil and apple. Not only objects, but also animals, colors, and numbers were interpreted as symbols of aspects of religious teachings. The meaning of a work of art is also conveyed by, in fact is clarified by, the way in which all the elements work together.

And the way in which the various visual elements are used in combination results in the **style** of the work. Compare the huge stone head of an *Olmec Ruler* from 900-500 BC (fig. 2-33  **Read the Document** on myartslab.com) View the image on myartslab.com) to the equally enormous head of the Roman emperor *Constantine* from c. 330 AD. The differences in style may be explained by the great distance in time and place that separate the two portraits. However, it is personal artistic style that makes Rodin's portrayal of *The Kiss* (see fig. 11-14 on p. 251) so very different from Brancusi's version of the same subject (see fig. 12-13 on p. 274), in spite of the fact that they were created quite close in time and place. Rodin's depiction is quite realistic, whereas Brancusi's is more abstract.

Questions about art

Following are several fundamental questions that relate to art. These are questions to consider, to keep in mind, to think about, and to discuss. There are no right or wrong answers to these questions.

1. **Art and beauty:** Must art have beauty? Should art be pretty? Consider the painting of *The Boating Party* (see fig. 11-7 on p. 248) by Renoir who said art should be “pretty.” But, also consider Donatello's *Mary Magdalene* (see fig. 6-14 on p.135), among the ladies least likely to be described as “pretty.” This raises another question:
2. **Art and emotion:** Must a work of art convey an emotion, or elicit an emotional response? *Mary Magdalene* produces an almost visceral reaction in the viewer. But, is it, for this reason, superior to, for example, Pollock's *Grayed Rainbow* (see fig. 13-3 on p. 290)?
3. **Art and information:** Must art inform? Must art convey a message? Should it tell the viewer something? And, if so, must it provide all the information itself? Or does the viewer get more out the experience with art by participating in the process? Each viewer sees different things in Pollock's painting—things important to that viewer alone. Leonardo da Vinci said that what you create in your own mind is the most important.
4. **Art and craft:** Should a distinction be made between art and craft? Between fine art and folk art? Does fine art deserve a higher status than craft or folk art or so-called primitive art? If the artist is working on the surface of a functional object, for example, a vessel that was used to contain food, does that make it any less “art”?
5. **Art and technical quality:** Is craftsmanship a legitimate basis of artistic judgment?

Is a work of art that is executed carefully, neatly, and precisely better than one that is not? How important is the level of technical execution of a work of art to its value? Or is only the idea important? Historically, an unfinished work had no value during the Middle Ages and Renaissance; only in relatively recent times has an unfinished work or a preparatory sketch by a master been considered valuable.

6. **Art and rules and theories:** Can art be created according to rules and theories? Connected with this is the question of tradition versus innovation. Is one preferable? Today, we favor innovation, but in the past, adherence to fixed rules was the accepted norm, particularly when repetition served didactic purposes. Thus, the many depictions of Jesus and his mother Mary all have adequate similarities, whether the work of a Byzantine artist in Constantinople or a Renaissance artist in Florence, to make the religious subject immediately intelligible to an illiterate audience.
7. **Art and censorship:** Should there be censorship of the arts? If so, who decides? If not, what are your thoughts on art that offends people—either accidentally or intentionally? What is the role of government support of the arts? And finally . . .
8. **What is *your* definition of art?** Is an aesthetic component necessary? On what do you base your opinion? The Pop artist Andy Warhol said “Art is what you can get away with.”

Universality of art

Certain aspects of art, evidently, appeal to something very fundamental, something genuinely basic, in human nature. Thus artists such as Leonardo da Vinci, Rembrandt, and Picasso are regarded as geniuses and are admired by people the world over, including those from very different cultures and backgrounds. This is indicative of our common bonds, our shared humanity. The same is true of musical geniuses, such as Mozart, and literary geniuses, such as Shakespeare. Indeed, the creative arts strongly suggest we share more commonalities that unite

us than we have differences that divide us. Yet those differences are what keep life so fascinating and propel each of us to constantly learn and experience what is new.

Dance

In her history of ballet, *Apollo's Angels*, Jennifer Homans describes ballet as “a system of movement as rigorous and complex as any language.” She explains further, how in the tradition of Russian ballet that she studied, ballet followed “laws” that were anything but arbitrary; in this world, ballet was every bit a “science” that observed “physical facts.” Ballet is an ephemeral art, one that is also powerfully dependent on the memory of dancers and choreographers. Homans describes ballet as “an art of memory,” rather than history. Memory in ballet is physical as much as mental. It is a memory held in the dancer's body as much as in the dancer's mind. Homans suggests that dancers' bodies function as libraries where the memories of ballet's dances are recorded and preserved.

Additional aspects of ballet worth considering include its classicizing function. Its aesthetic values are rooted in the classical world of ancient Greece. They are represented by the god Apollo, who symbolizes healing and music, grace and beauty and ideal proportion, reason and moderation—the very antithesis of the wild, unruly, and dangerously destructive qualities of Dionysius, the Greek god of wine and revelry. Apollo stands for order. Complementing Apollo are the characteristics of ballet associated with the angelic—the urge to fly, to ascend, to transcend the physical and the material. Ballet can be wonderfully ethereal, purifying, even spiritual in its elegance and grace. Taken together, these complementary Apollonian and angelic qualities of ballet can suggest the erotic and the sensual, but *eros* and sensuousness controlled, refined, and idealized.

Drama

Much of our pleasure in drama arises from the way the language of a play's script comes alive in the speech of living actors. Part involves watching (or imagining) actors dramatically

enacting the “lives” of the characters they portray. We enjoy the way the actors/characters walk and talk, the way they interact with other characters, the way they communicate through facial expressions and bodily gestures. Even the smallest gesture, such as the lowering of a hand, or the slightest facial expression, such as the raising of an eyebrow, can contribute to our sense of a play’s dramatic human experience.

Drama imitates or represents human life and experience. A large part of the pleasure drama brings us, in fact, reflects its ability to show us aspects of human life meaningfully dramatized. Dramatic actors portray characters as doers who make things happen through speech and bodily action. Drama is also *interactive*. The action of a play involves interplay between and among characters. Dramatic characters respond and relate to one another through dialogue and action. Such character interaction is the heart of drama: It is the spring of plot, the source of meaning, and the central reason for our pleasure in theatrical experience. It is, essentially, what makes drama, dramatic.

Film

In viewing films and plays, an audience enters a fictional world, temporarily suspending disbelief that what audience members watch are real events experienced in real time by actual people. We suspend our disbelief in the artifice we are watching until the performance is over and we return to our everyday lives. Filmmakers control the way we see their films through decisions about what images and scenes to film and how to arrange them. In that way, the filmmaker controls what we, the audience, see. An audience of a film sees only what the filmmaker decides to let it see.

In his book, *The Power of Movies*, Colin McGinn claims that movies have captivated us in ways that differ from the captivation other arts exercise over us, and that films enthrall us with greater intensity. Movies have both an individual attraction and mass appeal, perhaps, even more so than that provided by works in other artistic media. Movies also make it possible for people the world over to share similar experiences.

History

History forms a bridge between the humanities and the social sciences, as it uses methodologies of both disciplinary domains. History provides background and context for the study and appreciation of the arts. That is one of its many functions. Another is its investigation into the causes and effects of past events and its inquiry into its own nature in the form of historiography—the theory of history and the making of histories. The value of history inheres in its reports on real events and real people, in its explanations of how and why events occurred with the causes and consequences they had. History is rich with human stories; it is replete with reams of data; it serves to provide a landscape and a map to chart the past, chronicle the present, and predict the future.

The world historian and geographer Felipe Fernando-Armesto lists seven elements that characterize history:

- ◆ *History is stories.* History includes the stories of many different peoples from ancient to contemporary. And history encompasses the story of the universe.
- ◆ *History is global.* It reaches the entire world—the powerless as well as the powerful.
- ◆ *History is universal.* History encompasses every aspect of life, from the sublime to the ridiculous, from the explainable to the mysterious, including all subjects and ideas and events.
- ◆ *History is a problem-posing discipline.* History raises more questions than it can answer. It includes speculations, contested claims, provocations—all of which invite critical and creative thinking.
- ◆ *History is evidence.* The evidence from history comes in many forms—from words and images; documents, inscriptions, and monuments; human, animal, and mineral traces—such as fossils—to study and interpret.
- ◆ *History enhances life.* Learning about history deepens our understanding of life, past and present.
- ◆ *History isn’t over.* Today’s everyday life is tomorrow’s history.

History has been defined simply as a study of the past in an attempt to understand it. Among

the reasons we study history, is to understand where we have come from. We research the past to better discover who we are and what we have become. We look for connections between our past and present, with the hope that our understanding of how and why things happened before will help us better prepare for the future. In doing so, we are reasoning by analogy—thinking about how our understanding of past patterns and causal developments can affect both our understanding and our behavior in the future.

A second reason is to understand other people, their varied cultures, civilizations, beliefs, values, and achievements. The self and the other, us and them, now and then—history helps us negotiate our way through these critical polarities. A third reason for studying history is to prevent being taken in by propaganda. We study the past to avoid its mistakes; we study the past, as George Santayana warned, to avoid being condemned to repeat it.

In *The Landscape of History*, John Gaddis suggests that historians represent history as a landscape, providing us with a view of history that we can experience vicariously. One of the benefits of considering the landscape of history is to realize how insignificant each of us, individually, really is. “We learn our place,” as Gaddis reminds us, realizing that, as we grow up, our place in history is actually quite small. This is especially true when we consider our place not just in human history, but in the history of the universe, the subject of “Big History.” In thinking of the landscape of history, we are inclined to smooth over details and look for connections and for patterns of meaning. The metaphor of the historical “landscape” encourages us to view the past from a number of vantage points, high and low, so we can make some sense of what we see, something impossible to do for the present when living directly in its midst.

Literature

Reading literature can develop our capacities for critical and creative thinking. When we read, analyze, and interpret literature, we do so in relation to our observations and knowledge, our experience and values—things that matter to us. In *The Use and Abuse of Literature*, Marjorie Garber

asks, “What is the use of literature? Does it make us happier, more ethical, more articulate?” Behind these questions lies the assumption that literature might have, perhaps even must have, a practical purpose, a use to which it can be put. Garber asks whether literature might “make us more human”; whether it might make us “better rounded individuals.” So, the fundamental question that Garber asks about literature is whether it is “good” for us?

And, whatever answer we might make to that question is another related aspect of literature: the extent to which it gives us pleasure—the extent to which we simply enjoy reading it. This aspect of literature we might simply call its “feel good” aspect. So, then, we have two distinct and distinctive ways of thinking about literature—as something that is somehow “good for us”; and as something that in some way makes us “feel good.”

Among the pleasures of literature is thinking critically about a work both while we read it and again afterwards as it lingers in memory. When we read literature critically, we think not only about what happens in a play or poem or story, but also about why things happen as they do, and why those events are significant. In reading literature critically, we attend to details, notice patterns and connections, make inferences, and formulate tentative, provisional conclusions about their significance. In thinking about literary works, we ask questions about the meaning of images and symbols, about the writer’s attitude toward his or her subject and characters—questions about the language of a poem, the structure of a story, the dialogue of a play—and much more.

Reading literature offers us the opportunity to raise many other kinds of questions, as well, including questions of purpose and intention—questions about human behavior and motivation, questions about social and cultural values. We can think critically about all of these matters. We can use our thinking capacities to speculate about characters’ futures, in considering alternative outcomes and endings for literary works. We can imagine other choices writers might have made about language and structure, about plot and setting, and about the choices characters make in their fictional worlds.

In *What Good Are the Arts?* John Carey claims the literature is the only art “capable of reasoning.” He suggests that this happens because literature is replete with ideas; it stocks our minds with them. And it helps us think broadly and deeply because diversity, conflicting views, counter-arguments, nuances and qualifications are at its heart. Literature is an effective tool for critical thinking because it provokes questioning, including self-questioning,

Hubert Dreyfus and Sean Dorrance Kelley, in *All Things Shining*, make what we might consider even larger claims for the value of reading literature. The subtitle of their book suggests what is at stake: “Reading the Western Classics to Find Meaning in a Secular Age.” Their argument, essentially, is that in our secular age, we have lost a sense of the wonder of life, what they call its “shining” moments. These we can reclaim by opening ourselves to the deepest meanings of great literary classics, such as Homer’s *Iliad*, Dante’s *Inferno*, Melville’s *Moby-Dick*, and others. The authors argue that “the job of a work of art is to disclose a world, give meaning, and reveal truth.”

Music

Music permeates our lives, on television and radio, in the movies, in elevators and stores. The success of MP3 players, and the phenomenal success of the Apple iPod testify to our interest in having music accompany us wherever we go.

Music is a temporal art, one that exists in time. It is the least material of the arts, its basic elements being sound and silence. Silence in music is analogous to an artist’s use of negative space, or unoccupied space. In his book, *How to Listen to Great Music*, Robert Greenberg suggests, “we are hardwired to hear and make music.” We are primed to enjoy music, to experience it deeply, to respond to it in ways that are not always easy to characterize, but that are powerful nonetheless. In the same way that we respond to works of visual art and of dance, we also respond personally, subjectively, impressionistically, emotionally, to works of music.

In an essay from his book, *Young People’s Concerts*, Leonard Bernstein describes the meaning of music as “the way it makes you feel when you hear it.” What is essential to music in

and of itself are the feelings it expresses and the feelings it evokes in us as we listen to it. Rather than considering music in itself, Nicholas Cook, in *Music: A Very Short Introduction*, emphasizes music’s connection with society. Cook reminds us that music is deeply embedded in human culture, and that there are many kinds of music used for many different purposes. He notes, too, that even though “every music is different,” it is also the case that “every music is music.” We might find this intellectually convincing—“sure,” we might say, “there are many kinds of music sung and performed all over the world.” And yet we might also find it strange in that we are probably comfortable with very few kinds of music, and perhaps even with only one primary kind that we think of as “our” music.

Philosophy

Philosophy is the study of fundamental or essential questions. These questions refer to the nature of existence, knowledge, values, reasoning, mind, and language. Philosophy, which means, “love of wisdom” in Greek, differs from other approaches to fundamental questions in its reliance on rational argument. Among the questions philosophers explore is “What is the meaning of life?” a question also at the heart of religion. This major philosophical question appears in a number of variations, such as “How should I live my life?” Philosophical questions, such as this one, intersect not only with the concerns of religion, but also with the domain of psychology.

Yet there are other reasons for thinking about philosophy and thinking philosophically. One is that it develops our thinking skills, whether we are using logic to identify fallacies in thinking, sorting through ethical dilemmas, or cutting to the essence of a problem or challenging question. As with thinking skills useful for other academic disciplines, such as history and science, the thinking skills developed through philosophical thinking can help us see through political rhetoric, medical quackery, advertising claims, and other forms of deception and dishonesty. A further benefit comes in learning the limits of reason and reasoning, and how different approaches to philosophical analysis can yield different kinds of answers to complex questions.

Philosophers think about thinking; they consider a wide range of questions, some strictly theoretical, such as what is the nature of “being,” and others more practical and timely, such as whether government funding should be provided for stem cell research. In his book, *Thinking*, Simon Blackburn suggests that philosophical questions be divided into three major categories: questions about the self, questions about the world, and questions about the relationship between the self and the world.

Questions in Blackburn’s first category include:

- ◆ “What am I?”
- ◆ “Is it possible for me to survive the death of my body?”
- ◆ “Where will I go, what will I be after the death of my body?”
- ◆ “Do I always (or mostly) act out of self-interest?”
- ◆ “How do I understand and communicate with other people—who are themselves their own distinct individual entities and different from me?”

Questions in Blackburn’s second category—the world—include:

- ◆ “Why does the world exist?”
- ◆ “How was the world created?”
- ◆ “What is it made of, and why does nature continue to exist and change in the ways it does?”
- ◆ “Can we ever get to the bottom of what the world is, where it came from, and what will become of it?”

And his third category—questions about our relationship to the world include such things as:

- ◆ whether we can be sure that we perceive the world as it “really” is
- ◆ how much knowledge and what kinds of knowledge we actually have of the world—and of other people who inhabit it
- ◆ whether we can ever get beyond our personal, idiosyncratic, “subjective” experience of the world.

All these questions, are fundamentally unanswerable—unanswerable, that is, with certainty.

Blackburn raises an additional important (and interesting) question: “What is the point?”—that is, why should we care about such broad and somewhat abstract philosophical questions? Does it really matter whether such questions can be answered and how they are answered? Is there any practical reason for us to be interested in philosophical questions? Blackburn answers in two different ways. First, he suggests that we might be interested in such questions in and of themselves—for their intrinsic interest. This approach does not bother with whether philosophical questions are useful or practical, whether we can “do” anything with them. Instead, we can be engaged by philosophical questions simply because they are interesting, they are fun to think about, because they engage the mind and simulate our thoughts.

A second kind of answer is that even though philosophical inquiry might not be of immediate practical utility, it has value because reflection is linked with practice. The ways we think about what we do affect how we do them—or whether we, in fact, continue to do them at all. If we accept Blackburn’s idea that “a system of thought is something [we] live in” and that it influences how we live in the world, then we might be inclined to agree further with his notion that the way we live and think can get better or worse, “according to the value of our reflections”—our thinking.

Religion

Religion involves a set of beliefs concerning the origins, purpose, and nature of the universe and the place of human beings within it. In religious terms, the universe is seen as the creation of a supernatural being or agency, identified mostly as God, or one of a series of gods. Religion also involves a set of beliefs about and attitudes toward divinity. It includes practices, such as worship and obedience to religious teachings. Linked with religion, also, are social and political beliefs, philosophical claims, laws, customs, ceremonies, and behaviors encoded in sacred scriptures or other religious texts.

Religions are associated with myths, or traditional stories that convey the worldview of the people who wrote and inherited them. “Myth” has

both pejorative, or negative, and non-pejorative, or neutral, meanings. The term is used here to suggest that the myths associated with the religion of any people or civilization express its ideals, beliefs, and values, whether or not the mythic stories are based on actual historical characters and events.

Religion typically involves a sense of commitment to doctrines and traditions. It involves a set of devotional observances and practices designed to honor and placate the divine. And it may bring to its devotees emotional experiences including awe and fear, reverence and love, both individually and collectively. As a result, religion impacts people's behavior, especially in their relationships with others—how they live their lives.

According to Timothy Beale, in *The Rise and Fall of the Bible*, the Latin origin of the word “religion” is ascribed to both *religare* (to “re-bind”) and *relegere* (to “re-read”). Consideration of the first derivation suggests that religion involves an attachment to a set of beliefs, traditions, values, practices, and scriptures. The binding includes others who are similarly connected to a particular religious tradition. In thinking about the second derivation from “relegere,” we are directed toward a reading and re-reading of both the sacred texts of a religion and its traditions and practices. The first derivation emphasizes the community dimension of religious experience; the second directs us toward the ways in which reading its scriptures and traditions involve interpretation and re-interpretation.

Religion is more than a set of beliefs or a set of traditions and rituals. Religion as a way of life is captured in a people's arts, music, and

cultural practices. Religion has played a crucial role in the development of the arts, which provide images, sounds, and words for use in worship, prayers, and religious devotions. Theology, the study of the nature of the divine, prescribes religious practices, moral beliefs, and rules for social behavior. The medieval Catholic belief in the efficacy of relics to heal, for example, led to the practice of pilgrimage, and from that to the creation of churches and cathedrals, where those relics could be worshipped, as pilgrims sought aid from the saints, or holy people, associated with them.

Different religions hold very different aesthetic ideas and celebrate varying images of beauty, such that nudity was acceptable in the temple statues of Classical Greece and Hindu India, but not in Christian churches or Islamic mosques. Islam, in fact, prohibits any figurative images in places of worship, and thus Islamic mosques are decorated with geometric designs and with words from its holy scripture, the *Koran* (*Quran*). Some Native American peoples believe that a permanent house of worship is inappropriate in and of itself, preferring, instead, to worship and communicate with the divine in nature.

FINAL THOUGHTS

The humanities extend our experiences. They broaden our perspective, deepen our understanding, stimulate our imagination, reward our study, and satisfy our longings. They amaze and astonish. They counsel and console. They enlarge and enrich our lives through making us, finally, more fully and more deeply human.