

# Example of essay on renaissance and modern science

[Art & Culture](#), [Renaissance](#)



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The term renaissance was coined in the 14th and the 15th century by Italian intellectuals and was used by these intellectuals in describing their age or era the one which saw the rebirth of learning, literature and arts. This was after a long, vast and dark period through the middle ages. This period is the most disputed in European history. Ironically, though, it is the most interesting periods in the European history. Many intellects view this period as being unique and as having characteristics of its own variant with other periods in history. Another group of scholars are of the view that the renaissance period began in the last half of the 15th century and extended to the very nascent stages of the French Revolution in 1789 or more still, extended to the very end of the era of Napoleon in 1815. There is a bunch of social historians who reject the renaissance concept altogether. Generally, there are heated and varying arguments from historians over the marked differences between the middle age and the renaissance periods and whether the beginning of the modern day world can be attributed to the renaissance period. Despite the heated arguments and conflicting understanding, the scholars and historians agree that the renaissance period was a unique historical era marked with very distinct themes in literature,

politics, learning art, religion, music and social life. The radical changes marking the shift or transition from the middle age to the renaissance era influenced the subsequent centuries.

The Italian intellectuals viewed the ancient world depicted in Greece and Rome whose learning, politics and literature they highly admired as an important and significant age marked with great achievements. It is also their view that a lot of the literature and the learning developed in the ancient worlds of Greece and Rome got lost during the more than a hundred years of cultural darkness which followed. This period of cultural darkness is what the Italian scholars have referred to as the middle age. Italian humanists have held the view that this middle age era paved way for a new dawn which was the rebirth of the renaissance period.

Petrarch, a vernacular writer and a humanist, has been viewed by many scholars as the most important figure marking the beginning of the renaissance era. The vernacular writer and scholar highly criticized the medieval habits and practices as being inadequate. He elevated literature and ancient ideals as models worth emulating. Between 1400 and 1450, a majority of Italian scholars agreed with this criticism. They supported a classical revival or a radical shift from the thoughts and habits of the middle age period. As a result of this criticism, a new intellectual movement referred to as humanism was born. This movement dominated the Italian ethical ideas, scholarship, public discourse and schooling. It spread to the larger Europe in the last half of the 15th century up to the first half of the 16th century. Both modern day historians and contemporaries also view the Great Plague which occurred between 1348 and 1350 as a dividing point between

the two ages, that is, the middle age and the renaissance. The Plague had huge, devastating and tragic demographic losses as well as negative psychological impacts in the human history. Radical political changes in the period of 1400 to 1500 also marked a new dawn in the political arena. This radical political change was renaissance. England, France and Spain turned out to be powerful monarchies in the late 15th century. Quarrels among them and their continued interventions in other smaller states affairs dominated the politics of Europe. Efficiency in the distribution of printed books and other materials to all parts of Europe also ushered in a new period distinct from the past. This followed Johannes Gutenberg's invention of the movable type in 1450 which was a clear indication of a major break from the medieval age. This enhanced a greater production and efficient distribution or dissemination of great and many volumes of books to all parts of Europe. Printing presses could be found in many towns as early as 1470. The 16th century was marked with a greater spread of printed materials and an efficient system of their distribution. This had a major impact in the way of life especially the religious and intellectual life.

## **Renaissance and Background to a New Science**

Scholars and intellects of the renaissance era inherited greatly the intellectual views of the middle ages and their philosophical approaches, science and medicine. However, a majority of the inherited conceptions and ideas of the middle ages were highly criticized by the renaissance scholars. In the field of astronomy, the renaissance scholars and intellects inherited the Ptolemy's concept of the sun revolving around the world. This was a

highly valued conception in the ancient worlds. Nicolaus Copernicus criticized and differed with this medieval conception. He argued that all planets revolved around the sun. The Earth was no exception. This view prevailed and was supported by a majority of the early 17th century astronomers. The protestant and Catholic religious authorities, however, highly opposed Copernicus' proposition. Galileo Galilei supported the Aristotelian science but later rejected it. He favored the mathematical analysis of a physical reality which he termed as the modern mechanics science over the Aristotelian science. The calendar reform was another major mathematical achievement that affected the whole of the European continent and the world at large. The Julian calendar was adopted by Renaissance Europe from the ancient Rome. One major and outstanding characteristic of the Julian calendar was that it was in arrears of ten days by the 16th century. A team of intellectuals was appointed in 1582 by Pope Gregory XII to assist in the preparation of a new calendar. This team deliberated on the issue and eventually came up with the modern day Gregorian calendar which is used globally.

Medical scholars during the renaissance era also inherited a deeper human body understanding from the medieval scholars. Their medical healing and practice approach was based on Galen, Aristotle and Arab medical scholars of the medieval ages. The conceptions inherited from the medieval scholars did not escape criticism from the renaissance medical scholars. These scholars challenged the inherited medical conceptions and altered it. These medical scholars were referred to as medical humanists and their leader was Niccolò Leonceno. They criticized the ancient medical conceptions and they

conducted fresh investigations of the human body and its anatomy. As a result of their continued efforts to analyze and understand the human anatomy, they brought about a medical research revolution. Major parts of the human body were named after these renaissance medical intellects and scholars. For instance, the Eustachian tube was named after Bartolomeo Eustachi while the uterine or the Fallopian tube was named after Gabriele Falloppia.

The larger part of research in medicine, science, law and philosophy was conducted by universities. The quality and number of universities expanded tremendously during this era of renaissance. In 1400, twenty-nine universities were inherited from the medieval age. All these universities were functional during their inheritance. Forty six new universities had been created by 1601. Only two universities were lost by closure between 1400 and 1601. The total number of universities in Europe was therefore more than twice that of the medieval period. There was an increase in the demand for universities from all directions. The most important factor contributing to the increase in the number of universities in the renaissance period was the fact that a lot of people wanted and had a great desire to learn. There was also an increased high demand for trained professionals in the society. Cities, princes and monarchs needed educated civil servants and other personnel especially those who had law degrees. A degree in medicine enabled its holder to practice as a court physician, private physician or to be employed by the town authorities. There was also an increased demand for theological degrees stimulated by the Catholic and Protestants reformations. There was an increased demand for court judges and lawyers after the

adoption of the Roman law in Europe. Protestants and Catholic Germans therefore continued studying in the Italian based universities which were the main centers for studying the Roman law.

## **Disintegration of the Social, Political and Theological Order**

The renaissance period led to the evolution of a variegated society characterized by the emergence of various classes or categories of people ranging from nobles to peasants and slaves. This age was marked by a conspicuous consumption of means using both ethical and unethical means. There were huge imbalances in the distribution of resources and wealth. The renaissance period saw strong intellectual and cultural unity during its nascent stages. The prolonged Italian wars and the period of Protestant reformation cracked this unity. The disintegration of the strong cultural and intellectual has been viewed by many scholars as an attempted reversion to the old social order which existed during the medieval times. These heightened cultural and intellectual disintegrations led the Thirty years of war in Europe.

Renaissance states were characterized by existence of three government forms; oligarchies, monarchies and princedoms. The oligarchies were also referred to as the republics by the renaissance. The republics were ruled by the consent of the people who inhabited them. This consent was expressed through a voting process. However, only a small percentage of adult males could participate in the voting process. The government comprised of those members of the society who were influential, for instance, lawyers, leading merchants and banks. Workers, clergymen and those who were lowly ranked

in the society were not included in the government. Those in government wielded arbitrary powers and could at times exercise these powers arbitrarily. Monarchies ruled subjects who spoke multiple languages. Their laws of succession were developed such that whoever was to take on the reign of power was known in advance. During the renaissance period, the monarchies grew and increased in size. The powers of monarchs also became clearly defined. Territorial conflicts between monarchies dominated the international politics during the renaissance period. Princedoms were characterized by the existence of a prince who ruled a particular state with support from his family members. The prince had absolute authority of making decisions which concerned all the inhabitants of that particular state. There existed no means of checking the exercise of powers of the prince and he could therefore abuse his powers regularly. There was a great variance in the source and nature of the prince's powers. The prince status was obtained by displacing a ruler by war, force, assassination, bribery, purchase or diplomacy. Most often, princes used a combination of these means to come to power. The prince would then promulgate laws which made him the legitimate ruler of the inhabitants. He also came up with laws of succession which ensured that he would be succeeded by his son or one of his family members. Development of diplomacy gained roots during the renaissance period. This was necessitated by the shifting and changing political realities at the time. The constant political instabilities in the republics, the frequent wars between these states and the ever increasing fights over supremacy called for mechanisms of quenching. This resulted to diplomatic means of dispute resolution.

The prince wielded a lot of powers especially powers to enforce laws, collect taxes and quell rebellions. During the period of renaissance, the middle age theology suffered fragmentation. Renaissance theologians had opposed the medieval theologians' conceptions and had adopted new religious conceptions. Protestantism and Catholicism were the major conceptions of the medieval periods. With renaissance, other religions gained popularity. Islam, for instance, gained popularity and started spreading to the Asiatic countries. The medieval conception of the existence of only two religious factions stopped holding ground in the renaissance period.

## **Humanistic Thought, Art and Court Culture**

During the renaissance era, humanism was based on humanistic studies of grammar, poetry, rhetoric, moral and historical philosophy founded on ancient authors' studies; and, good qualities which made men and women to be human. Humanism taught principles of leading a morally upright, successful and responsible life on earth. Humanism highly criticized those conceptions and principles that were inherited from the medieval period especially when the inherited conceptions conflicted with the renaissance beliefs. Humanists challenged and criticized medieval art, philosophy and government. They focused their critical minds to learning new conceptions of humanism. This brought about a new form of intellectual unity in the larger Europe. The renaissance period also saw the development of courts and the court culture especially in Italy. The fragmentation of the city states also contributed to the development of courts and the court culture. Customary court activities orbited around castles, villas and hunting lodges of the rulers.

Court artists during the renaissance period were used as communication vehicles and they articulated status on the ruling family's behalf.