

Pico della mirandola oration on the dignity of man



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Oration on the Dignity of Man: Analysis Pico della Mirandola in his work, "Oration on the Dignity of Man", re-evaluates humanism and humans in general. His work talks about the dignity of man in particular and how man differs from other creatures as man is a creation with a unique and important trait, free will. He uses several arguments to support his claim that humans can choose their destiny and in doing so can achieve perfection. He presents a piece of work that challenges the medieval view of human nature.

There was a great deal of emphasis on human creative power during the renaissance period. Humanists of the time like Pico, sought to show how man is great and can reach excellence through his own effort, which was a radical change in belief compared to the Augustinian view of humanity where Human beings were thought to be "completely subject to divine will, not only were they incapable of attaining excellence through their own efforts and talents, but it was also wrong and sinful for them even to try" (Perry, 300).

Pico, in particular, attempted to make people focus on human capacity to reach excellence. Free will, being the center of this specific work, is the most important trait given to only one creation of God, man. Pico brings up man's special position in God's creation. He claims that unlike animals and even angels who came to existence with everything they have or will have, man is born "with all possibility. He shows how God told Adam that he made him "neither of heavenly nor of earthly stuff, neither mortal nor immortal, so that with free choice and dignity, you may fashion yourself into whatever form you choose" (Paragraph 3). He states that humans should use the free will given to them to strive for perfection and reach higher. The fact that man

can choose his own destiny is what makes man stand out from the rest of creations of God, according to Pico. In the Oration, Pico justified the importance of the human quest for knowledge.

He states that “[m]an, when he entered life, the Father gave the seeds of every kind and every way of life possible” and “ if these seeds are intellectual, he will be an angel and the son of God” (Paragraph 4). He argues that it is man’s responsibility to use this freedom to search for knowledge and enlightenment in order to get higher. It sounds as if he was saying God would be happier to see man reach perfection and would even admire man for being the creature who works on the creation of God the architect, and bring about changes.

Mankind ability to adapt and change the natural environment, made by God and supposedly unchanging, to suit himself makes him magical. Pico’s great admiration for man is shown in great depth when he stated how difficult it is for anyone not to admire man: And if, satisfied with no created thing, he removes himself to the center of his own unity, his spiritual soul, united with God, alone in the darkness of God, who is above all things, he will surpass every created thing. Who could not help but admire this great shape-shifter?

In fact, how could one admire anything else (Paragraph 4)? A philosopher himself, Pico uses the word “ from heaven” to refer to those philosophers who use their reasoning to see things differently. He uses religious sayings like “ You are all angles of the Most High” by Asaph the prophet, for his argument that man can become divine. The overall emphasis of this work is on humans and human free will. Pico demonstrates the importance of free

will. It is because of free will, according to him, that humans can choose their destiny and in doing so, reach perfection.

He points out that free will is a gift from God to man, the only creation of God to have it, and we should not waste such a wonderful gift. Individuals can and should shape their own destiny, should be able to strive for perfection by looking at the world differently. His idea of changing the natural environment contributed to the scientific revolution at latter period in history. ? Works Cited Perry, Jacob, Chase, and Von Laue. *Western Civilization: Ideas, Politics, and Society, Comprehensive*. Wadsworth. Print.