

Scholasticism- Philosophy Reenters Europe.

During the Dark Ages, the light of humanism was extinguished from Europe for about 800 years. Most ancient literature was lost, with only a remnant surviving in forgotten private libraries. Scholarship fared a little better in the Byzantine Empire and in the Islamic world, where science was regarded with more favor, and where Aristotle was popular.

The history of Europe's climb out of the Dark Ages towards humanism begins in the Islamic universities of Spain, where Christian scholars were reintroduced to Aristotle. The sources were translations and commentaries by the Moslem scholar Ibn Roshd (1126-1198), known as Averroes, and the Jewish scholar Maimonides (1135-1204).

For the next 200 years, European education consisted of studies of Aristotle and attempts to reconcile the contradictions between his books and Christian orthodoxy. In this "Scholastic" movement, the only acceptable form of logic was the syllogism, which uses two assumptions to prove a conclusion, in the form "a is true, and b is a, therefore b is true." Assumptions could be anything Aristotle said or anything held true by the Church. Many Scholastics also took an interest in nature, and recognized direct observations as true as long as they did not conflict with Aristotle or Church doctrine.

Albertus Magnus (1206?-1280) brought Scholasticism to the University of Paris, where his student, Thomas Aquinas (1225?-1274) wrote many proofs of the existence of God and developed the basis of modern Catholic philosophy, called "Thomism".

At the University of Oxford, Robert Grosseteste (1168?-1253), gathered a group of scholars who performed scientific experiments on light and astronomy and introduced such novelties as gunpowder and corrective eyeglasses.

The most famous of the Oxford scientists was Roger Bacon (1214?-1292?), often called the "founder of experimental science". Bacon wrote several books criticizing the prevailing scholarly reliance on authority, custom, and opinion, and advocating the empirical method of science. Although ignored during his lifetime, Bacon's books were widely read during the next two centuries leading up to the scientific revolution. Bacon's works were condemned by his Franciscan superiors and he ended his life in prison.

Also at Oxford, John Duns Scotus (1265?-1308), who in contention with Aquinas decided that reason could not prove God's existence, concluded that reason is unreliable and only faith in revelation can be trusted.

William of Ockham (1284?-1347?) agreed that the Christian religion can only be accepted on faith. By separating the study of worldly knowledge from theology, Ockham encouraged scholars to investigate nature directly. He stressed Aristotle's principle that the best scientific theory is the simplest one that fits the known facts. This maxim is called "Ockham's Razor". Ockham stated that human knowledge comes primarily from experience through the senses. His followers, called "nominalists", rejected the speculative metaphysics of "idealists" such as Plato and Aquinas. Ockham and his friend Marsiglio of Padua (1270-1342) wrote treatises advocating more democracy in church and civil government. Ockham's career bridged the late Scholastic period with the beginning of the Renaissance.