

THE RENAISSANCE REDISCOVERY
OF THE CLASSICAL APPROACHES TO THE WORLD:
REFLECTIONS ON HISTORY AND SCIENCE, THEN AND NOW

CYNTHIA M. PYLE
(New York)

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Our approach to studying the world around us is determined both by that world, our context, and by our own personal makeup. The context changes across the historical ages; our human species changes far more slowly through evolution, but in an analogous way. Attempts have been made to consider history as a science; however most have looked at history in relation to the physical sciences. It is more productive to consider the history of our species as analogous to the life sciences, and specifically to natural history. The intellectual tools applied by humans to natural history can be applied to political, cultural and intellectual history.

This sort of analysis reveals an analogy between the work of Italian Renaissance humanists in their resuscitation of ancient Greek and Roman historical texts and artifacts—including both archeological and philological methods—and the doing of natural history. The historical and scholarly work of Renaissance humanists is thus seen as a scientific undertaking (in the modern sense, and as performed in the life sciences). It displays an approach analogous to that of the classical authors they studied and imitated—imitated in a more profound sense than is usually credited them.

C. M. Pyle, Ph.D. (Columbia University)
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<http://sites.google.com/site/cynthiampyle/>