HUMANISM and the CLASSICAL TRADITION:
CLASSICAL GREEK ART:
(The Charioteer from Delphi and the Doryphoros by Polykleitos)
Humanism is a perspective common to a wide range of ethical stances that attaches importance to human dignity, concerns, and capabilities, particularly rationality.

Although the word has many senses, its meaning comes into focus when contrasted to the supernatural or to appeals to authority.

Since the nineteenth century, humanism has been associated with an anti-clericalism inherited from the eighteenth-century Enlightenment philosophies.

Twenty-first century Humanism tends to strongly endorse human rights, including reproductive rights, gender equality, social justice, and the separation of church and state.

The term covers organized non-theistic religions, secular humanism, and a humanistic life stance.
Classicism, in the arts, refers generally to a high regard for classical antiquity, as setting standards for taste which the classicists seek to emulate.

Classicism implies a canon of widely accepted ideal forms, whether in the Western canon or the Chinese classics.

The art of classicism typically seeks to be formal and restrained. Classicism is a force which is often present in post-medieval European and European influenced traditions; however, some periods felt themselves more connected to the classical ideals than others, particularly the Age of Reason, the Age of Enlightenment, and some classicizing movements in Modernism.
The **Archaic Period** of ancient Greece, from about 600 to 480 BCE, was one of cultural energy and achievement during which the Greek city-states on the mainland, on the Aegean islands, and in far-flung colonies grew and flourished. As Greek temples grew steadily in size and complexity over the centuries, stone and marble replaced the earlier mud-brick and wood construction. Two standardized elevation designs, the **Doric order** and the **Ionic order**, emerged during the Archaic period.
Temple of Hera I, (Paestum, Italy), c. 550 BCE

The site of Paestum, a Greek colony established in the seventh century BCE about fifty miles south of the modern city of Naples, Italy, contains some rare examples of early Greek temples. Hera I is a large, rectangular, stone post-and-lintel structure with a stepped foundation supporting a peristyle, a row of columns that surrounds on all four sides. This single peristyle defines Hera I as a peripteral temple.
The design of a second temple at Paestum also creates an impression of great stability and permanence. As the column shafts rise, they swell in the middle and contract again toward the top, a common attribute of Greek columns known as *entasis*. This subtle adjustment gives a sense of energy and upward lift.
Foremost among Greek philosophers of the sixth century BCE was Pythagoras of Samos. Basic to the tenets of Pythagoras and his followers was the belief in the reincarnation of the soul and in the possibility of its purification and its union with the divine through abstinence and intellectual reflection. The Pythagorean belief in the relationship between cosmic harmony, on the one hand, and mathematical number, ratio, and form, on the other hand, was of paramount importance to Classical Greek culture in the areas of philosophy, science and art. The magical qualities of the Golden Mean proportion, $\phi$, were central to the numerological philosophy of Plato and Pythagoras. It was used for the proportions of Egyptian and Greek temples, particularly the Parthenon.
More than any other figure of its time, the *Kritios Boy* encapsulates that peculiarly Greek virtue of *sophrosyne*, or self-knowledge, espoused by late sixth-century dramatists and philosophers and characterized by a belief in inner restraint and a denial of excess. Only *sophrosyne*, it was believed, could provide a path to enlightenment and so prevent the forces of chaos and disorder from upsetting the balance of human happiness. It was arguably the impact of this maxim within contemporary Greek culture which helped nurture the new naturalism heralded by statues such as the *Kritios Boy*. 
The damaged figure, excavated from the debris on the Athenian Acropolis, was thought by its finders to be by the Greek sculptor Kritios, whose work was known only from Roman copies.

The development of the male nude in fifth-century Greek art is related to several social factors, in addition to whatever aesthetic considerations were in force. In Athens and certain other city-states, for example, we have evidence of male beauty competitions, in which the dominant criterion for assessing “fine manliness,” or euandria, was bodily tone and shape. It was not extraordinary for men to take exercise naked, in more or less public places. The Greek word “gymnasion” means simply “a place where people go gymnos (naked)”; and the presence of a gymnasion was one of the defining characteristics of what made a city in Greek terms.
The antithesis of “sophrosyne” was “hubris.” The extraordinary power of the Greek hero (called *arête* by the Greeks) could, in excess, lead to overweening pride (hubris) and to moral error (*hamartia*). The tragic results of *hamartia* were the subject of many Greek plays, especially those by *Sophocles*. The Greek ideal became moderation in all things, personified by Apollo, the god of art and civilization. *Arête* came to be identified over time with personal and civic virtues, such as modesty and piety.

Two phrases associated with Apollo was inscribed on the god’s temple at Delphi: “Know thyself,” and “Nothing to excess.” This sense of balance and control is evident in this figure by his calm countenance and slight weight-shift in the hips, known as *contrapposto*.
The artist’s view of the human figure remained in its way a mathematical exercise, just as did his view of the composition of figures in groups, and just as did the architect’s in the laying out of a temple building, observing rules of proportion throughout, from details of moldings to the whole ground-plan. The Classical artist sought to achieve an equilibrium between the almost opposed interests of absolute proportion and anatomical realism.
Warriors (Riace) c. 460-450 BCE, bronze

The innovations of the Kritios Boy were carried even further in these statues known as the “Riace Bronzes.” Their weight-shift is more pronounced and their arms have been freed from the body. Natural motion in space has replaced Archaic frontality and rigidity.
A spectacular lifesize bronze, created by a so-called lost-wax method (also known by the French term cire-perdue), the Charioteer, was saved from the metal scavengers only because it was buried during a major earthquake in 373 BCE. Archeologists found it in its original location in the Sanctuary of Apollo, along with fragments of a bronze chariot and horses. According to its inscription, it commemorates a victory by a driver sponsored by King Polyzalos of Gela (Sicily) in the Pythian Games of 478 or 474 BCE. The erect, flat-footed pose of the Charioteer and the long, columnar fluting of the robe are reminiscent of the Archaic Style, but other characteristics place this work closer to the more lifelike Kritios Boy, recalling Pliny the Elder’s claim that three-time winners in Greek competitions had their features memorialized in statues.
The image of the charioteer appears both in fifth-century sculpture and in contemporaneous philosophical writings.

For example, Parmenides’ ideas are expressed in a didactic poem, *The Way of Truth*, written in hexameters. The poem opens with an allegory describing a chariot journey in which the nature of reality is revealed to Parmenides. Guided by the daughters of the Sun, who are described as ‘immortal charioteers,’ the poet is led from darkness into light. He arrives at a temple sacred to the goddess Wisdom, who welcomes him and advises him that he must be prepared to reject illusion and learn the truth.

Sensory experience suggests that the universe is in constant flux, and popular opinion describes the world in terms of pairs of opposites such as light and dark, hot and cold, male and female. But reason rejects the illusions of the senses and apprehends reality. The universe, for Parmenides, is whole, motionless, timeless, indivisible, and imperishable.
In *Phaedrus*, Plato explained his doctrine of the tripartite nature of the soul. The soul, according to Plato, consists of three elements – reason, spirit, and appetite.

Plato compares the rational element of the soul to a charioteer and the spirit and appetite elements to two horses. The one horse, the spirit element, is allied to reason, honor, temperance, and modesty, and is good; the other horse, the appetite element, is allied to passion, chaos, arrogance, and insolence, and is bad. While the good horse is easily driven according to the directions of the charioteer, the bad horse is unruly and tends to obey the voice of sensual passion and therefore must be restrained with a whip. Plato thus explains the conflict that individuals feel within themselves. At the same time he unequivocally insists on the right of the rational element to rule and to act as the charioteer.
Myron. Diskobolos (Discus Thrower), Roman copy of a bronze original of c. 450 BCE, marble

This athlete-in-action inspired dozens of neo-classical versions and has served as a symbol of the Greek athletic ideal. In 1938 Hitler requested the “gift” of this copy to Germany. It was sent, and displayed in Munich, then returned to Rome after the war.

The original bronze dates perhaps to about 450 BCE. Seemingly free and full of movement, the figure is, however, firmly held in two or three receding planes, allowing only one convincing viewpoint. This sculpture captures the moment before the action, the ideal moment when intellect guides the physical effort to follow.
The most important events of the Greek Olympics (held in Olympia every four years) were grouped together as the pentathlon, or five contests. The first was a broad jump; the second event was throwing the discus, a circular plate of metal or stone weighing about twelve pounds.

To explain their practice of disporting themselves naked in the games - which has always seemed odd to members of other civilizations - the Greeks told the story of a runner at Olympia who dropped his loincloth and won the race. Its true origin probably lies deeper, somewhere between the earlier association of nudity with the act of worship (as in Sumer) and later symbolism of the naked soul as a body divested of its earthly trappings. The athletes were also soldiers, it should be remembered, and belonged to a superior caste on whom the safety of this polis or state depended.
Polykleitos. *Doryphoros (Spear Bearer)*, Roman copy from a bronze original of c. 450-440 BCE, marble

*Polykleitos of Argos* was esteemed by his contemporaries, and his work is still thought of as the embodiment of Classical style. He is known to have created a canon, which is no longer extant. Most of his sculpture was cast in bronze and is known today only through later Roman copies in marble. Ancient records document the fact that the *Doryphoros (Spear Bearer)* was originally bronze.

The two central principles of the Canon of Polykleitos were *rhythmos* (composition) and *symmetria* (commensurability), both of which were grounded in mathematical proportion. This quest for the ideal can be seen also in the philosophy of *Socrates* (c. 470-399 BCE) and his disciple *Plato* (c. 429-347 BCE), both of whom argued that all objects in the physical world were reflections of ideal forms that could be discovered through reason.
Throughout the body, tensed forms balance relaxed ones. Reading the statue vertically, relaxed right arm with weight leg balances tensed left arm (originally holding the spear) with free leg; reading horizontally, weight leg and free leg balance free arm and tensed arm.

The term contrapposto is often used to describe this pose. Realism of bone and muscle, sinew and vein, and hair and flesh of this athletic figure is integrated into a concept of the ideal, which is dependent somehow on a system of mathematical proportions.

This a figure that represents the ideal is also the most visually accurate, the most real.
When boys reach the age of sixteen they are expected to pay special attention to physical exercises, as fitting them in some measure for the tasks of war. Even their sports give them indirectly a military preparation: they run, leap, wrestle, hunt, drive chariots, and hurl the javelin. At eighteen they enter upon the second of the four stages of Athenian life (pais, ephebos, aner, geron—child, youth, man, elder), and are enrolled into the ranks of Athens’ soldier youth, the epheboi. Under moderators chosen by the leaders of their tribes they are trained for two years in the duties of citizenship and war. They live and eat together, wear an impressive uniform, and submit to moral supervision night and day. They organize themselves democratically on the model of the city, meet in assembly, pass resolutions, and erect laws for their own governance; they have archons, strategoi, and judges. For the first year they are schooled with strenuous drill, and hear lectures on literature, music, geometry and rhetoric. At nineteen they are assigned to garrison the frontier and are entrusted for two years with the protection of the city against attack from without and disorder within.
The development of the male nude in fifth-century Greek art is related to several social factors, in addition to whatever aesthetic considerations were in force. In Athens and certain other city-states, for example, we have evidence of male beauty competitions, in which the dominant criterion for assessing “fine manliness,” or euandria, was bodily tone and shape. It was not extraordinary for men to take exercise naked, in more or less public places. The Greek word “gymnasion” means simply “a place where people go gymnos (naked)”; and the presence of a gymnasium was one of the defining characteristics of what made a city in Greek terms.
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ACTIVITIES and REVIEW
STUDENT PRESENTATION #1:

Where was this statue originally located and what was its function? Analyze ways in which the early Classical work reflects philosophical ideas of the ancient Greeks.
STUDENT PRESENTATION #2:

How did the original *Doryphoros* (upon which this copy is based) reflect the Greek concept of humanism? How was it influential in establishing what has become known as the classical tradition?
1. On a scale of 1-10, evaluate the degree of idealization vs. realism.

2. Also, on a scale of 1-10, evaluate the degree of naturalism vs. stylization.

3. Place the works shown in chronological order.

A  B  C  D
How are heroic personas created in film today?

Write a list of 10 people you admire. Then write down physical characteristics or actions that associate with each “hero” and that contribute to your opinion of them.
**Keep Calm and Carry On** was a motivational poster produced by the British government in 1939 in preparation for the Second World War.

The poster was intended to raise the morale of the British public in the aftermath of widely predicted mass air attacks on major cities.

Although 2.45 million copies were printed, and although the Blitz happened, the poster was never publicly displayed and was little known about until a copy was rediscovered in 2000. It has since been re-issued by a number of private companies, and has been used as the decorative theme for a range of products.
Why do you think that the rediscovered poster has become so popular in the mass media marketplace of today? Does it serve a purpose similar to that of the Charioteer and the Doryphoros?
When a sculpture, *Alison Lapper Pregnant*, contemporary British sculptor Marc Quinn was shown on the Fourth Plinth in Trafalgar Square in 2005 it inhabited the space in a way that seemed both highly appropriate, given the neoclassical architecture that surrounded it, and oddly uncomfortable. The plinth was made for a figurative sculpture of course but this is the domain of famous men (and in the case of this plinth, of famous men on horses).

More challenging though was the questions the sculpture – along with other works made by Quinn at that time (the artist showed a number of marble statues of people with missing limbs, either by birth or amputation, in the sculpture galleries of the V&A as part of the exhibition *Give and Take* in 2004) – raised about how we define beauty, how our ideas about it change over time and about the way the ravages of time are in evidence on classical statuary rendered limbless by the passage of time.

Why do you think Marc Quinn was interested in challenging classical notions of beauty rooted in the antique Greco-Roman world?
Breath – the giant inflatable reworking of Alison Lapper Pregnant – positioned itself instead as a challenge to its location. There is a showiness to its form that speaks not of classical sculpture and notions of beauty but of public spectacle so that the moment it creates is less “wow, look at that!” and more “what the (BLANK)?”

Breath made its first appearance as a centerpiece of the opening ceremony of the Paralympic Games during London 2012. In that context, its form worked as spectacular rather than spectacle.

In another type of public setting or context, apart from the Paralympic Games, how do you think the sculpture would be received?
In what way is Marc Quinn’s work similar to that of the Charioteer or the Doryphoros? In what ways are the works different? Address each of the following: form, function, content, and context.