

FROM PERICLEAN ATHENS TO CICERONIAN ELOQUENCE, FROM RENAISSANCE HUMANISM TO US

PRINCIPLE 1:

The first of these “principles” posits the perspective of particular people as the “precondition” of any claim we make about the world; or, to reverse the terms, the claims we make about matters large and small follow from and are structured by the special mix of the nature, feelings, experience, and culture that distinguishes each of us as individuals.

There are three principles to keep in mind:

- 1. Human knowledge is relative to knowing subjects and their place in culture and history;**
- 2. because human subjects are all “located” somewhat differently, questions of knowledge arise within a field of competing options, none of which can assume absolute authority;**
- 3. nonetheless, competing claims can be negotiated and agreements achieved by appeal to mutual patterns of understanding and practical standards negotiated through rhetoric and dialogue.**

PRINCIPLE 2:

The second principle of Humanism argues that human knowledge will manifest itself as an expansive spectrum of historical, cultural, and individual differences. As a result, rhetoric occupies a special role in adjudicating differences of opinion, generating social agreements, and structuring the commitments and values of civilization.

PRINCIPLE 3:

In sum, Humanism contends that rhetoric and the search for knowledge are inseparable as individuals negotiate and transform unavoidable differences into the agreements from which civil bonds are formed.

But while Humanism assumes that all claims regarding human conduct are only probable, it does not regard all such claims as equal. Rather, the consideration of diverse positions and the authority generated through rhetorical exchange provide a check on unreasonable arguments, a standard for rational judgment, a practical framework for collective agreement, and ample authority for justified action. So, even amidst the constant flow of conflicting opinions that characterizes both human history and personal experience, it is possible with effort to work towards understanding, achievement, and goodness.