

# THE MISANTHROPE

by Moliere



## THE AUTHOR

Moliere was the pen name of Jean-Baptiste Poquelin (1622-1673), generally considered the greatest French comic playwright of all time. His father was one of eight court upholsterers to Louis XIV, and thus the young man had access to the best education of the day, studying under the Jesuits at the College of Claremont. His mother died when he was twelve, his stepmother three years later. In early life, he enjoyed ridiculing the courtiers among whom he often spent his time; his skill at mimicry bore fruit in later years when he took to the stage.

Despite inheriting his father's position at court, he chose at the age of 21 to pursue a life in the theater. He had fallen in love with a young actress named Madeleine Bejart who became his mistress (he later married her daughter, and scandal-mongers spread the false rumor that she was his own child), and the two of them, along with a few other aspiring thespians, formed a theatrical troupe in 1643. At this point Poquelin adopted the stage name of Moliere in order to spare his family the embarrassment of having an actor in the clan. The troupe gained some attention for its early work, but failed miserably when they tried to charge admission for their shows; the company folded in 1645. Shortly thereafter he and Madeleine and their friends decided to tour the countryside. For the next fourteen years, they toured rural France, sharpening their skills and gaining a solid reputation. It was during this time that Moliere began to write for the troupe. The most successful of his works were his farces. In 1658, Moliere and his troupe returned to Paris to try their luck in the capital again. They gained an invitation to perform before the king, but chose to perform a tragedy and were not well received. Moliere recognized his mistake and asked the king if they could perform one of their comedies as well; he agreed, and their fortunes were made.

For the rest of his career, Moliere and his company performed in the leading theaters of Paris under the patronage of leading nobles, and finally of the king himself. Moliere frequently found himself embroiled in controversy. Nobles opposed the frivolity of his themes and the pungency of his satire, the church opposed his irreverence, and the Jansenists, a powerful movement in seventeenth-century France, opposed the theater altogether. During his years in Paris, Moliere wrote his most famous works, including *The School for Husbands* (1661), *The School for Wives* (1662), *Tartuffe* (1664), *The Misanthrope* (1666), *The Doctor in Spite of Himself* (1666), *The Miser* (1668), *The Would-Be Gentleman* (1669) and *The Imaginary Invalid* (1673). On February 17, 1673, he

collapsed on stage while playing the lead in *The Imaginary Invalid*, and died later that same day. Priests refused to hear his confession or administer the last rites (all actors had been excommunicated by the Church), and he was refused burial in consecrated ground (though, with the king's approval, he was finally buried in a churchyard in the middle of the night).

*The Misanthrope* (1666), is considered by many literary scholars Moliere's best work, and is in part autobiographical (Moliere actually played the role of Alceste when the play made its debut on the Paris stage). Moliere, like Alceste, was embroiled in a lawsuit at the time when he wrote the play, and his discouragement over the banning of *Tartuffe* in the same year could have contributed to his negative view of humanity, though of course Alceste is drawn as an extreme for comic purposes. Unlike other of Moliere's comedies, *The Misanthrope* focuses neither on individual foibles nor class stereotypes, but on character traits that afflict all of society in common. It thus serves as a broader critique than much of his other work.

This study guide is based on the English verse translation by Richard Wilbur (1954).

## MAJOR CHARACTERS

- Alceste - The title character who believes that all people are vile and dishonest. He is in love with Celimene.
- Philinte - Alceste's friend, who believes that accommodating human weakness is the best policy. He is in love with Eliante, and by the end of the play the two appear destined to marry.
- Oronte - Also in love with Celimene, he asks Alceste to give his opinion about a sonnet he has written and receives an unfavorable response. He then takes Alceste to court for slander.
- Celimene - A shallow and coquettish young widow, besieged with many suitors, with whom Alceste is in love. She is an enthusiastic gossip.
- Eliante - Celimene's cousin, a simple, honest girl who is in love with Alceste but later diverts her affections to Philinte.
- Arsinoé - A friend of Celimene who espouses high moral values as a cover for her inability to attract suitors. She is also in love with Alceste.
- Acaste and Clitandre - Noble suitors for the hand of Celimene.

## NOTABLE QUOTATIONS

"Esteem is founded in comparison:  
To honor all men is to honor none." (Alceste, Act I, scene 1)

"Ah, it's too much; mankind has grown so base,  
I mean to break with the whole human race." (Alceste, Act I, scene 1)

“And there’s no greater folly, if you ask me,  
Than trying to reform society.” (Philinte, Act I, scene 1)

“Sir, it’s a very great honor you extend:  
But friendship is a sacred thing, my friend;  
It would be profanation to bestow  
The name of friend on one you hardly know.” (Alceste, Act I, scene 2)

“What other people think, he can’t abide;  
Whatever they say, he’s on the other side;  
He lives in deadly terror of agreeing;  
‘Twould make him seem an ordinary being.  
Indeed, he’s so in love with contradiction,  
He’ll turn against his most profound conviction  
And with a furious eloquence deplore it,  
If only someone else is speaking for it.” (Celimene, Act II, scene 5)

“Men, Sir, are always wrong, and that’s the reason  
That righteous anger’s never out of season.” (Alceste, Act II, scene 5)

“They think that one’s self-knowledge should be great  
Before one thinks of setting others straight.” (Celimene, Act III, scene 5)

“His conduct has been very singular lately;  
Still, I confess that I respect him greatly.  
The honesty in which he takes such pride  
Has - to my mind - its noble, heroic side.  
In this false age, such candor seems outrageous;  
But I could wish that it were more contagious.” (Eliante, Act IV, scene 1)

“This age is vile, and I’ve made up my mind  
To have no further commerce with mankind.” (Alceste, Act V, scene 1)

“No, all you say I’ll readily concede:  
This is a low, dishonest age indeed;  
Nothing but trickery prospers nowadays,  
And people ought to mend their shabby ways.  
Yes, man’s a beastly creature; but must we then  
Abandon the society of men?” (Philinte, Act V, scene 1)

“May you be true to all you now profess,  
And so deserve unending happiness.  
Meanwhile, betrayed and wronged in everything,  
I’ll flee this bitter world where vice is king,  
And seek some spot unpeopled and apart  
Where I’ll be free to have an honest heart.” (Alceste, Act V, scene 8)

## NOTES

**Act I, scene 1** - The play begins with a conversation between Alceste and his friend Philinte. Alceste is angry with Philinte because he just saw him embracing a man in the friendliest possible way whose name he cannot even remember. He finds such hypocrisy disgusting, believing that meaningless embraces are insincere and that someone who treats everyone as a friend cannot be a true friend to any. As far as he is concerned, everyone should be completely honest and say exactly what he thinks at all times. Philinte responds that such candor would destroy the entire fabric of society and has given Alceste a reputation as a crackpot. Alceste is being sued, but insists that he will not hire a lawyer because his cause is so obviously just that none is needed; in fact, he secretly hopes he will lose because that will prove his point that the entire human race is dishonest and vile. Philinte reminds Alceste that he is not holding his view of humanity consistently because he is in love with Celimene. Is she not as vile as others? Alceste agrees that she is, but loves her nonetheless and intends to reform her by purging her of her vices, while Philinte argues that her kind and honest cousin Eliante would be a far better choice.

**Act I, scene 2** - At this point Oronte enters, professing his desire to be Alceste's friend and flattering him outrageously. Alceste rejects his offer of friendship until they get to know one another better, and Oronte praises the sagacity of such a wise decision. Oronte claims to have the ear of the king and offers to give Alceste any assistance he might require. He then asks Alceste to comment on a sonnet he has written. Alceste demurs, insisting that he is likely to be unfashionably honest, but Oronte tells him that honesty is what he wants. He then reads a truly bad sonnet, unfortunately addressed to Celimene, which Philinte praises while Alceste insists under his breath that it is trash. When he tells Oronte what he really thinks about his poem, the two nearly come to blows and Philinte needs to step between them.

**Act I, scene 3** - After Oronte leaves, Alceste is so furious with Philinte for praising the poem that he refuses to speak to him.

**Act II, scene 1** - Alceste has walked Celimene home while criticizing her refusal to dismiss her many other suitors, threatening to break off their relationship if she fails to do so. He is particularly upset with her flirtation with Clitandre, but she insists that she needs to stay on his good side because he can help her in a lawsuit in which she is engaged. She assures Alceste of her love for him, but he wonders whether she says the same thing to all her suitors. She is understandably insulted by this.

**Act II, scene 2** - Celimene's servant Basque interrupts to tell her that Acaste has come calling.

**Act II, scene 3** - Alceste is furious that the two of them can never be alone together because she insists on receiving pests like Acaste, but she replies that, if she refuses to do so, he will spread malicious gossip about her at court.

**Act II, scene 4** - Basque reenters and announces that Clitandre has arrived as well. Alceste, disgusted by the whole situation, prepares to leave.

**Act II, scene 5** - Celimene's cousin Eliante joins them as the two men enter. Alceste decides he will stay and force Celimene to declare herself publicly before all of them. Celimene tells him he is a

fool, and she and the two other suitors immediately begin to gossip about their friends in Paris society. Alceste interrupts them to point out that, should the people about whom they are gossiping be present, they would fawn over them with the highest praise. They ask him why he doesn't direct his criticism toward Celimene, who has been doing most of the talking, but he insists that the fault is theirs for egging her on. Philinte then wonders why Alceste criticizes the suitors for speaking ill of people he himself has called knaves and fools. As far as Celimene is concerned, Alceste simply enjoys being contrary, disagreeing with whatever anyone else has to say, and Philinte agrees with her. Both Clitandre and Acaste affirm that Celimene is without fault, but Alceste says that, despite her many obvious charms, she has many faults that need to be corrected, and that anyone who really loves her would recognize this and undertake the task of reformation. He continues to insist that he will not leave until she makes her choice.

**Act II, scene 6** - Basque enters and announces that a man in uniform has arrived to see Alceste.

**Act II, scene 7** - The man turns out to be a guard who summons Alceste before the Marshals to answer a charge of slander for speaking ill of a sonnet written by Oronte.

**Act III, scene 1** - After Alceste is led away, Acaste and Clitandre, now alone, debate their chances with Celimene. Acaste boasts of his advantages so much that Clitandre proposes a deal: if Celimene shows clear preference for one of them, the other will retreat from the field of battle.

**Act III, scene 2** - Celimene reenters and tells the two suitors that she hears a carriage in the street.

**Act III, scene 3** - Basque announces the arrival of Celimene's prudish friend Arsinoé. The men are not looking forward to meeting her, but Celimene assures them that her prudishness is a mere front to hide her lack of success with men.

**Act III, scene 4** - Arsinoé arrives, and Celimene, who has been running her down viciously to the two men, greets her warmly, at which point Acaste and Clitandre leave laughing.

**Act III, scene 5** - Arsinoé tells Celimene that she has been the object of considerable gossip harmful to her reputation. Her friend advises her to make more of an effort to put on a virtuous appearance. Celimene thanks her for sharing, but in turn tells her that her reputation is none too good either, largely because her prudish piety is very annoying to many people and that they considered her a hypocrite. Arsinoé implies that Celimene collects so many suitors by granting them favors that no lady should, and Celimene invites her to try to take some of them away using the same strategy if she chooses.

**Act III, scene 6** - At this point Alceste returns, and Celimene leaves him alone with Arsinoé, commenting that they are suited for one another.

**Act III, scene 7** - Arsinoé immediately begins to praise Alceste, expressing sorrow that those at court fail to recognize his merit, but he argues that one should expect nothing else in a society that is so vain and shallow. She hints that she could help him to advancement at court through her highly-placed friends, but he denies any such ambition. She also warns him that Celimene has

betrayed him, which he refuses to believe. She offers him proof if he will accompany her to her home, after which she hopes to be able to console him in his sorrow.

**Act IV, scene 1** - Philinte and Eliante are discussing Alceste's court case. Their friend has steadfastly refused to recant, saying that he is willing to praise Oronte's character and dress, but not his poetry, and that no one should be offended by this. He finally gave Oronte a grudging and backhanded compliment, at which point the hearing was adjourned. Neither one can understand Alceste's infatuation with Celimene, and Eliante supposes that her cousin doesn't even know her own mind. Philinte tells her that Alceste would be better off directing his attentions to her rather than her cousin. Eliante wishes him the best in his pursuit, but if Celimene rejects him, she is quite willing to catch him on the rebound. Philinte, in turn, tells her that he would gladly pursue her hand if Alceste wins the love of Celimene.

**Act IV, scene 2** - At this point Alceste comes storming in, bemoaning the fact that he has been betrayed. Arsinoé has given him a love letter written by Celimene to Oronte, of all people. He begs Eliante to help him avenge himself on Celimene by accepting his offer of love. This, of course, is what she has always desired, but she is reluctant to accept an offer so likely to be subject to change in the near future.

**Act IV, scene 3** - Celimene then enters and Philinte and Eliante leave the two alone. Alceste immediately begins to excoriate her for her perfidy, but she is shocked, having no idea what he is talking about. He shows her the letter, which she admits writing, but insists it was written, not to Oronte, but to a woman, expressing sisterly affection. He demands that she explain how certain phrases could be meant for a woman, but she, by now thoroughly insulted by his lack of faith in her, refuses to do so and tells him that it was indeed intended for Oronte. He begs her to justify the wording, promising to believe her no matter what she says because he cannot give up his love for her. She calls him a silly fool for not trusting her and plainly states that he is the object of her affection.

**Act IV, scene 4** - Dubois, Alceste's valet, arrives in disguise and tells his master that they must leave town immediately. Apparently a man in a black suit left an unintelligible document, presumably relating to the lawsuit. A friend of Alceste, whose name the valet cannot remember, then arrived, warning that he must flee in order to avoid arrest. He left an explanatory note, which Dubois has left back at the house. Alceste throws his hands up in confusion and promises to continue the conversation with Celimene at the later time.

**Act V, scene 1** - Alceste and Philinte are commiserating over the fact that Alceste lost his case in the courts. Not only that, but Oronte is spreading a rumor that Alceste has written a seditious book currently in circulation. Philinte reasonably points out that, because Alceste has not been arrested, no one believes the ridiculous charge of sedition lodged against him. He also advises Alceste to appeal the court's decision, but the latter would prefer to pay the steep fine, which would justify his opinion that all men are villains. Before leaving human society forever, he decides to wait for Celimene's return so he can hear her answer.

**Act V, scene 2** - Alceste is hidden in a corner of the room when Celimene enters with Oronte. He is demanding of her that she choose between himself and Alceste, at which point the latter emerges

from hiding and makes the same demand. She is reluctant to speak bluntly with both men present, but they insist that she do so. She continues to stall until Eliante enters the room.

**Act V, scene 3** - Eliante, accompanied by Philinte, gives her cousin no help, but agrees with the men that she ought to be straightforward with them.

**Act V, scene 4** - At this point Arsinoé enters with the other two lovers, Clitandre and Acaste. They are angry with Celimene. Both have received letters professing her love for them and ridiculing all her other suitors. The two men storm out of the room, swearing never to speak to Celimene again.

**Act V, scene 5** - Oronte, having been the target of Celimene's sharp pen in the letters, turns from her as well and informs Alceste that she is all his.

**Act V, scene 6** - Arsinoé begins to attack Celimene as well, but Alceste interrupts her, telling her that, even if he were to reject Celimene, she would not be the woman he would choose. She reproves him for his presumption and leaves the room as well.

**Act V, scene 7** - Celimene now turns to Alceste and humbly tells him that she deserves whatever reproach he wishes to heap upon her, but he insists that even now he cannot give up his love for her. He promises to forgive her if she will agree to marry him and flee forever human society. She can't stand the thought of solitude, but does agree to marry him if he will give up that requirement. He refuses, however, and casts her aside.

**Act V, scene 8** - After Celimene leaves, Alceste turns to Eliante and offers his love, though he is not prepared to propose to her because he thinks that he is unsuited to the married state. She tells him not to trouble himself because she is sure that Philinte will not hesitate to make an offer for her hand - a sentiment to which he promptly agrees. Alceste then reaffirms his desire to isolate himself from the world, and the two lovers determine to do everything they can to change his mind.

## ESSAY QUESTIONS

Discuss the following in a five-paragraph essay:

1. Moliere's *The Misanthrope* is a critique, not of individual foibles, but of society at large. The artificiality of French court life in the seventeenth century is clearly in view here, but to what extent do the playwright's criticisms provide an accurate picture of society in the United States in the twenty-first century? Choose three characteristics of society that Moliere targets and relate them to conditions in the modern world.
2. Moliere's *The Misanthrope* is a critique, not only of society, but of human nature in its essence, though the main characters disagree as to the appropriate response. While Alceste believes that the attitudes and behaviors he deplors ought to be openly revealed and discredited, Philinte thinks they should be tolerated as the inescapable consequences of being human. With whom do you agree, are they both partially right and partially wrong, or are both in error? Be sure to incorporate biblical teachings in your assessment of the play's view of human nature and how to deal with it.

3. In many works of literature, one character serves as the mouthpiece of the author. In Moliere's *The Misanthrope*, which character do you believe fills this role, and why? Be sure to cite specific quotations from the play to support your arguments.
4. In the plays of Moliere, he often creates one character who serves as his mouthpiece. In *The Misanthrope*, it is Philinte, and in *Tartuffe*, it is Cleante. Compare and contrast the two characters. Do both, as the "voice of reason," share the same basic worldview and philosophy of life? Why or why not? Be sure to cite specifics from both plays in your analysis.
5. In William Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, the mischievous fairy Puck, after observing the antics of the young lovers, opines, "Lord, what fools these mortals be!" The irrationality of love is a subject frequently addressed in comedies. Compare and contrast the treatment of this subject in Shakespeare's classic farce and Moliere's *The Misanthrope*. Give special attention both to how the irrationality of love is portrayed and how the stories end.
6. Running someone else down under a veneer of mannerly speech is often a technique used by playwrights in comedies of manners. Compare and contrast Act III, scene 5 in Moliere's *The Misanthrope* with the initial meeting of Gwendolyn and Cecily in Act II of Oscar Wilde's *The Importance of Being Earnest*. How do both scenes satirize the manners of the day by allowing the girls involved to say horrible things about one another while maintaining a polite exterior?
7. The protagonists of Moliere's *The Misanthrope* and Cervantes' *Don Quixote* are both idealists who insist on viewing society according to their own peculiar perceptions of it. Both Alceste and Don Quixote are comic figures, but do we laugh at them for the same reasons? Do we consider these men who long for an ideal world admirable, or in the end do we reject their visions as absurd, "impossible dreams"?
8. Moliere's *The Misanthrope* may be a light comedy, but it considers seriously the motivations of the various characters. Those who are sincere are sincere for different reasons and those who are shallow are shallow for different reasons. Choose three characters from the play and examine their prevailing motivations for what they do. Do those motives justify their actions? Why or why not?
9. Many of the actions of the characters in Moliere's *The Misanthrope* are driven by pride. Scripture has much to say on the subject and indicates that it leads to the downfall of the prideful. Choose three characters in the play and show how the Bible's teaching on the subject is shown to be true in their lives.
10. Whom do you consider the most admirable character in Moliere's *The Misanthrope*? Explain why and support your conclusion with specifics from the play.
11. In Moliere's *The Misanthrope*, Alceste is a man of high ideals. Does he live up to his own standards? Why or why not? What does this tell us about his understanding of himself and others?

12. Foils are characters who bring out one another's qualities by contrast. Several sets of foils may be seen in Moliere's *The Misanthrope*, including Alceste and Philinte on the one hand and Celimene and Eliante on the other. Choose one pair and show how the contrast between the two characters helps to bring their qualities into bolder relief. Be sure to cite specific incidents and quotations in your analysis.
13. Sir Edwin Sandys, one of the leaders of the Virginia company that founded the Jamestown colony, once wrote, "Honesty is the best policy." This is clearly the philosophy of Alceste, the title character in Moliere's *The Misanthrope*. Do you agree with this statement? Why or why not? Be sure to incorporate biblical teaching on the subject into your analysis.
14. In Ephesians 4:15, Paul emphasizes the importance of "speaking the truth in love." Commentators have often noted that truth spoken without love is not really truth, nor is love expressed less than truthfully really love. How could this balance have assisted Alceste, the central figure in Moliere's *The Misanthrope*, in dealing with the conflict between his own values and the practices of society?
15. Some have suggested that in romance, opposites attract. Alceste and Celimene in Moliere's *The Misanthrope* seem to be total opposites, yet they clearly are attracted to one another. Does their relationship substantiate or refute the romantic cliché? Support your argument with specifics from the play.
16. In Moliere's *The Misanthrope*, only one romantic relationship is successful, that between Philinte and Eliante. What does this tell you about the playwright's assessment of his own characters? Do these two represent Moliere's ideal as people, or even as a couple? Support your conclusions with evidence from the play.
17. Discuss the themes of selfishness and selflessness as they are played out in Moliere's *The Misanthrope*. Which characters are the most self-centered and which are the most selfless? What are the consequences of their different approaches to life?
18. In Moliere's *The Misanthrope*, to what extent is Alceste's criticism of society valid? Is the fact that no one takes him seriously due more to what he believes or the way he communicates his convictions? What might he have done to make his criticisms more palatable, and thus able to bring about genuine change in others?
19. Critics have often noted that Moliere's *The Misanthrope* is more a play of character than of action. In fact, the action is minimal and the plot virtually nonexistent beyond figuring out how who will marry whom, though in fact only one marriage appears to result at the end. If character, then is intended to be the focus, what aspects of character does the playwright consider to be most important, and how does he communicate this to his audience? Be sure to cite specifics in your analysis.

20. Consider the gossip session in Act II, scene 5 of Moliere's *The Misanthrope*. Might one argue on the basis of this scene that Celimene is really as much of a misanthrope as Alceste? Why or why not? Why is her misanthropy more socially acceptable than his? What does this fact indicate about the nature of society, and how does it fit into the playwright's critique?
21. Consider the gossip session in Act II, scene 5 of Moliere's *The Misanthrope*. If Celimene's comments were reported to the objects of her ridicule, she could cover herself by saying that she was "only joking." How often do people engage in cutting criticism of others under the guise of humor? Why is this a bad policy? Answer the question, both from the play and from the teachings of Scripture.
22. One of the things that saves Moliere's *The Misanthrope* from being a straightforward farce is the fact that the playwright gives occasional glimpses into the interior lives of his characters. Alceste and Celimene very easily could have been portrayed as mere stereotypes, but Moliere gives them a human face by letting the audience see into their inner feelings, particularly their self-doubts. Choose one of the two and discuss how insights into the inner life of the character make that character more real, and thus enable the audience to identify with him or her more fully.
23. Comedies typically end with marriages, which normally involve the protagonists. This is not the case in Moliere's *The Misanthrope*. What would have happened had Alceste and Celimene actually agreed to marry one another? Would their marriage have been happy? Why or why not?
24. In Moliere's *The Misanthrope*, Alceste respects honesty and hates hypocrisy. These are good traits. Furthermore, he is not as isolated as he thinks - he enjoys the friendship of the honorable Philinte and is the object of the affections of Celimene, Eliante, and Arsinoé. Why, then, is he not happy, and why does he have such a hard time getting along in society?
25. Philinte, the most reasonable character in Moliere's *The Misanthrope*, argues that minor prevarications are an essential grease for the wheels of society - that without them, social relations would become impossible. Do you agree or disagree? Why? Does the bible leave room for "white lies" or polite deceptions?
26. Alceste, the central character in Moliere's *The Misanthrope*, is beloved by three women - Celimene, Eliante, and Arsinoé. He probably has more in common with the last than he does with the other two. What do Alceste and Arsinoé have in common? Should they have gotten together, would their marriage have been a happy one? Why or why not? How would their common traits have driven them farther apart rather than bringing them together in a loving relationship?
27. In Moliere's *The Misanthrope*, Alceste is angry with Celimene for spreading her affections too broadly. Is his complaint against her legitimate? Why or why not? If his complaint is legitimate, evaluate the way he goes about dealing with it.

28. What's the correct answer to "Does this dress make me look fat?" In Moliere's *The Misanthrope*, Alceste refuses to distinguish between lying and polite tactfulness. Is he right in failing to make the distinction on which his friend Philinte insists? Is it possible to be totally truthful and survive in polite society?
29. In Moliere's *The Misanthrope*, the playwright mocks the pretensions and social conventions of seventeenth-century French aristocracy. Discuss the relevance of his critique to the contemporary world. Are the characteristics of his age still present in our own? To what extent is his sendup of his own society an appropriate criticism of the society in which we live? Use specific examples, both from the play and from today's culture.
30. Discuss the views of human nature held by Alceste and Philinte in Moliere's *The Misanthrope*. Which of the two friends has a higher view of human nature, and what are the consequences of their thinking? According to the playwright, does idealism or realism better equip one to function in the world as it is?
31. Aristotle argued that all virtues exist as means between two extremes, and thus that moderation in all things was the path of wisdom. Apply the great philosopher's concept of the Golden Mean to Moliere's *The Misanthrope*. Would the French playwright agree with Aristotle's definition of virtue? Why or why not? Support your conclusion with specifics from the play.
32. Often in literature, rebels against society are lionized for bringing about real change in the cultures against which they take a stand. In Moliere's *The Misanthrope*, is the protagonist fighting a battle he can never win? How does this make the reader feel about the character? Do you admire him, or think him ridiculous? Is this the reaction Moliere intends us to have?
33. In Moliere's *The Misanthrope*, is Alceste's alienation from the society around him largely his fault, or that of the corrupt culture? Would he be accepted in society if he moderated his views? Would he be happy with the world around him if people were more honest and forthright?
34. In Moliere's *The Misanthrope*, the protagonist rails against the shallow ideas of love and friendship prevalent in his society. Alceste, according to him, is not one who honors someone with love or friendship lightly. Instead, the person in question must be deserving of his love. Leaving aside the fact that Alceste is not consistent with his own beliefs, particularly in regard to his attitude toward Celimene, what do you think of his notion that love must be deserved? Be sure to incorporate into your assessment what the Bible teaches about the nature of true love and the necessity of grace.
35. In Alceste's conversation with Philinte in Act I, scene 1 of Moliere's *The Misanthrope*, he says, "Esteem is founded in comparison: / To honor all men is to honor none." What would Alceste have thought of the contemporary practice of giving everyone trophies for participation or the politically-correct insistence that self-esteem should be cultivated apart from merit? Do you agree with Alceste in this matter or not? Is comparison an appropriate basis for bestowing esteem?

36. How many friends do you have on Facebook? One of the aspects of his society that Moliere ridicules in *The Misanthrope* is the shallow concept of friendship promoted by the aristocracy of his day. In Act I, scene 2, when Oronte asks Alceste for his friendship prior to demanding his evaluation of his execrable poem, Alceste responds:

“Sir, it’s a very great honor you extend:  
But friendship is a sacred thing, my friend;  
It would be profanation to bestow  
The name of friend on one you hardly know.”

Does social media in our day contribute to the same shallow definition of friendship that Moliere ridiculed? Why or why not? Incorporate Moliere’s satire of the foibles of his own day into your analysis.

37. In Act II, scene 5 of Moliere’s *The Misanthrope*, Celimene describes Alceste in these words: “What other people think, he can’t abide; / Whatever they say, he’s on the other side.” Do you agree with her? Is Alceste’s misanthropy due to a fundamentally contrary nature, or is it motivated by other factors? Support your conclusion with specifics from the play.
38. According to Ephesians 4:26, righteous anger does exist. In Act II, scene 5 of Moliere’s *The Misanthrope*, Alceste says, “Men, Sir, are always wrong, and that’s the reason / That righteous anger’s never out of season.” Is Alceste’s “righteous anger” biblically justifiable? Why or why not? Be sure to cite details from the play as well as relevant passages of Scripture as you answer the question.
39. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus warned His followers to take the logs out of their own eyes before trying to remove the speck from the eye of their neighbor (Matthew 7:1-5). In Act III, scene 5 of Moliere’s *The Misanthrope*, Celimene, in her indirect criticism of Arsinoé, says, “They think that one’s self-knowledge should be great / Before one thinks of setting others straight.” While Celimene’s words are directed against her bitter friend, Arsinoé is not the only character in the play who falls into the trap described by Jesus. Choose three characters in the play who demonstrate the form of hypocrisy Jesus condemns and show how Moliere brings out and criticizes their peculiar forms of dissimulation.
40. At the end of Moliere’s *The Misanthrope*, Alceste bemoans his fate by saying, “I’ll flee this bitter world where vice is king, / And seek some spot unpeopled and apart / Where I’ll be free to have an honest heart.” The attitude he communicates is very much like that of the medieval monks who sought to escape sinful society in order to cultivate spiritual purity. Is such a thing possible? Why or why not? Answer the question, using both what you know about Alceste and your knowledge of the experiences of the monks who sought to carry out what he threatened to do.