

Defining the Renaissance by its Values

Individualism, Secularism, Materialism

Individualism

Individualism has the following components

- self-awareness; the acknowledgement, acceptance and pride in being different from others, even unique
- the desire and ability to stand out from the norm, to call attention to oneself and be perceived as different by others

- Humanism and individualism are intertwined and are in some cases almost indiscernible from one another.
- In the Middle Ages, identity was “corporate,” that is, it was defined by the group to which one belonged: monk, priest, noble, serf, merchant, Florentine, Roman, etc.
- During the Renaissance, individual thought and expression —separating oneself from the crowd in terms of ideas and creations—were encouraged and highly prized.

Individualism is seen in the literature of the Renaissance through

- the writing of biographies of contemporaries or near-contemporaries
 - Vespasiano da Bisticci's *Lives*, a collection of short biographies of major figures, many Florentines
- the writing of histories that focus on the persona, exploits, and achievements or failures of outstanding characters

Niccolo Machiavelli, *The History of Florence*

- The writing of letters expressing one's opinion on a topic, addressed to an individual, but meant to be read by a larger public

Petrarch, Letter to a friend criticizing the Avignon Papacy

- the writing of letters to or about an individual in praise of him/her or the lengthy dedication of a work to an individual whose fine qualities are enumerated in the dedication

Marsilio Ficino, letter to Niccolò Michelozzo, "The astonishing glories of Lorenzo de' Medici"

Individualism is seen in the art of the Renaissance through

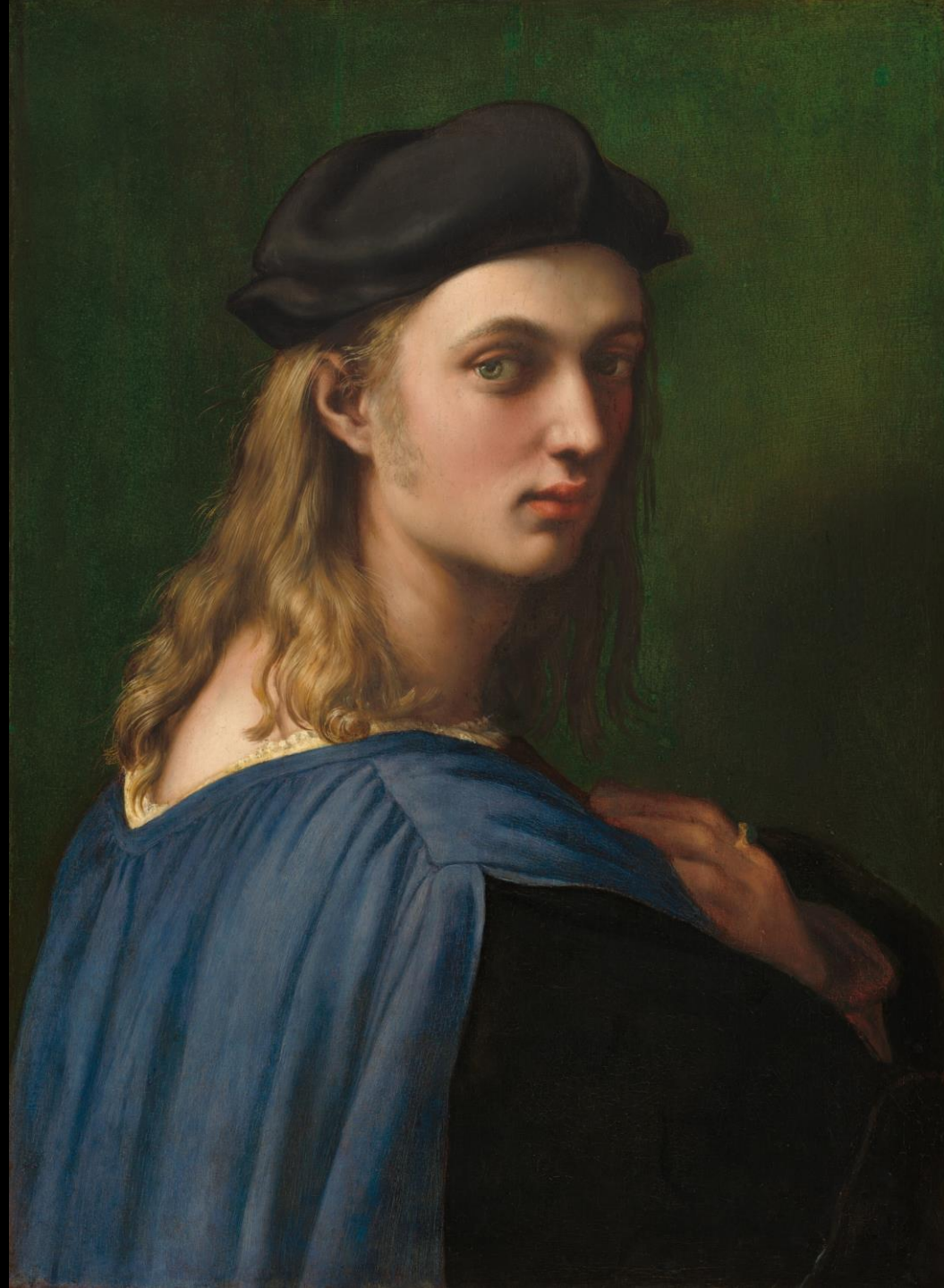
- portraits of anonymous sitters who were in some way remarkable.



- Portraits commissioned by the subject or someone close to them









Not infrequently, subjects commissioned family portraits to be created with conscious attention to the individual character and position of the various persons

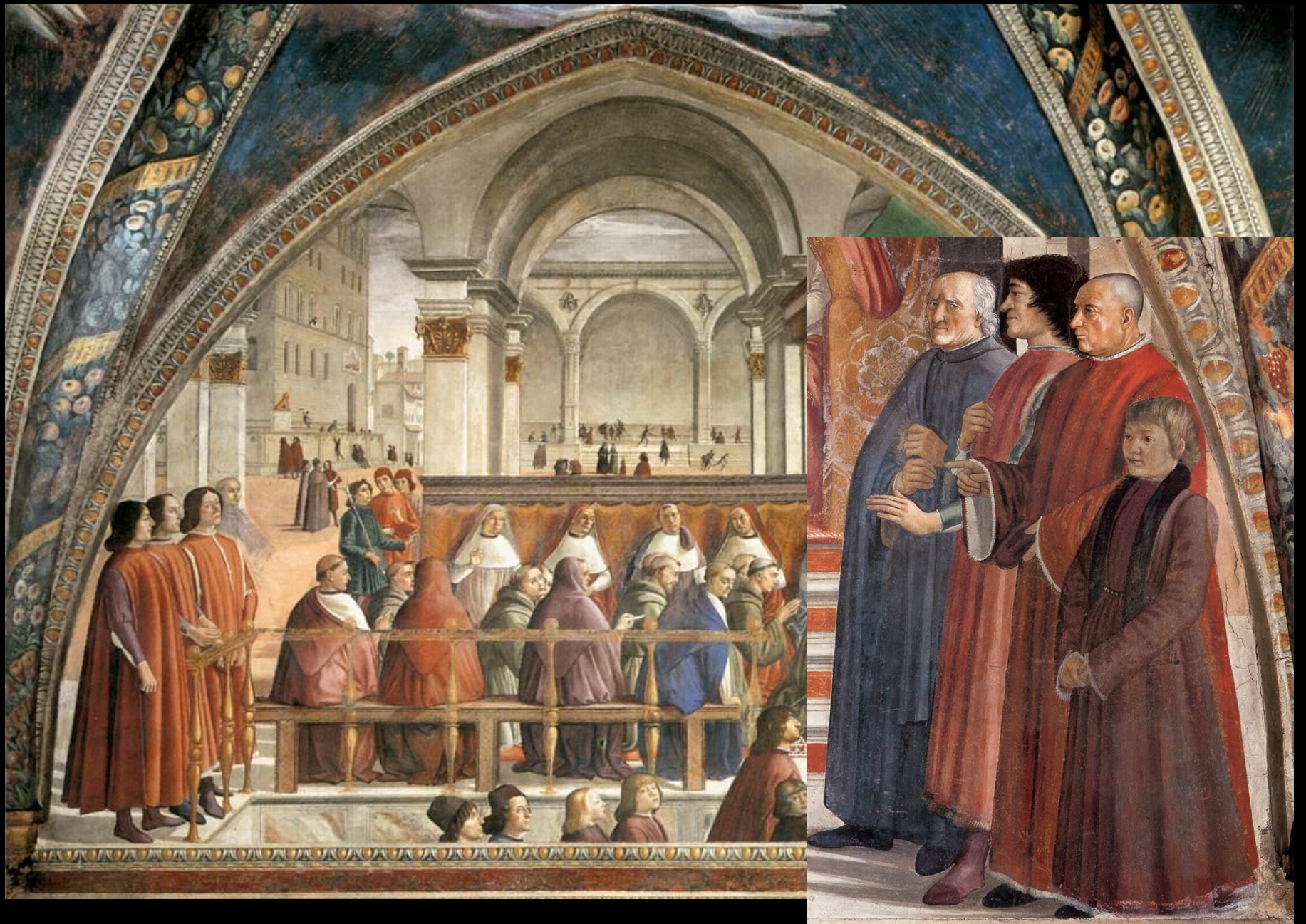






- portraits of important identifiable individuals included in larger works that portray them in the presence of major religious figures or at key religious events



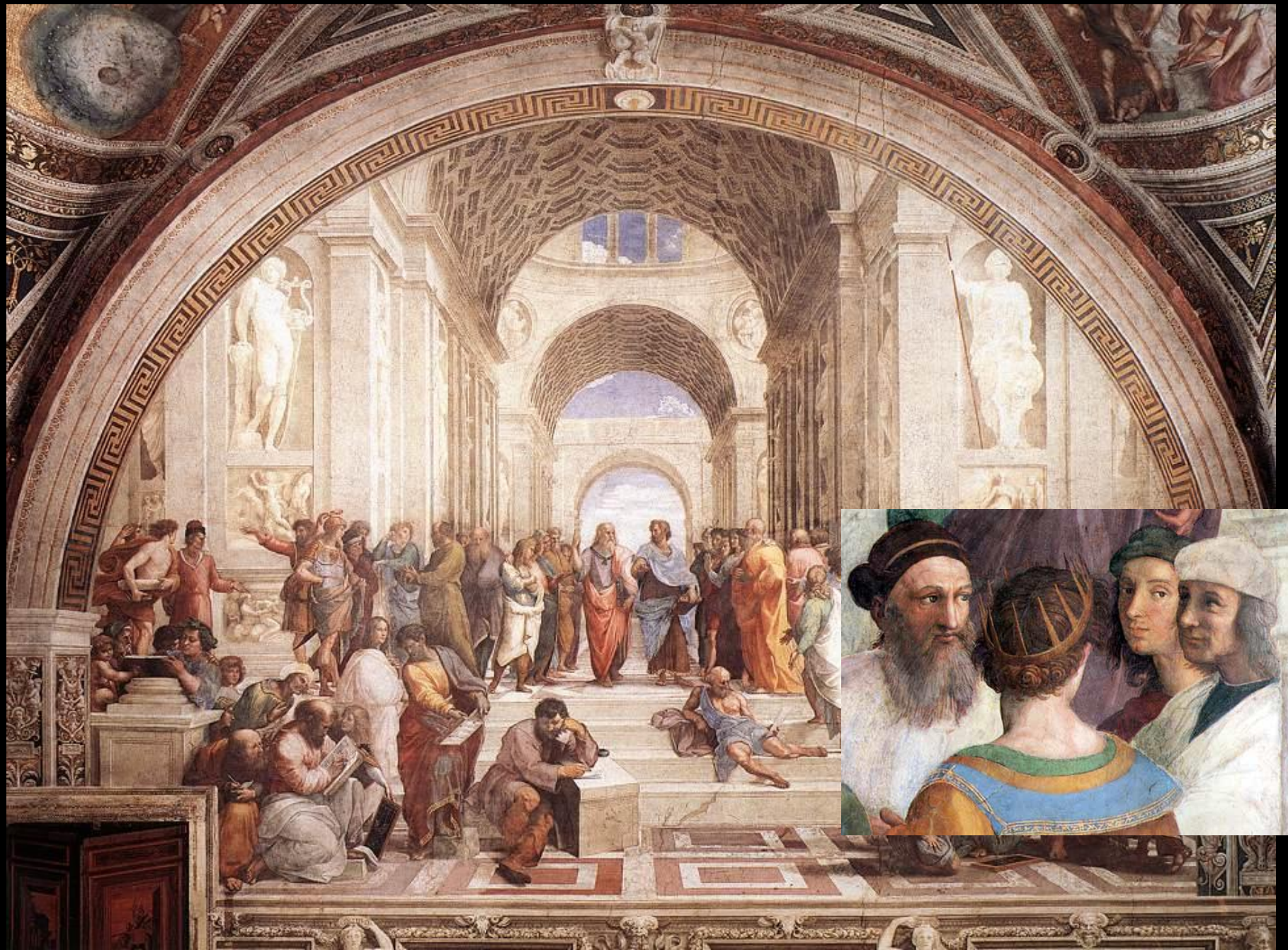


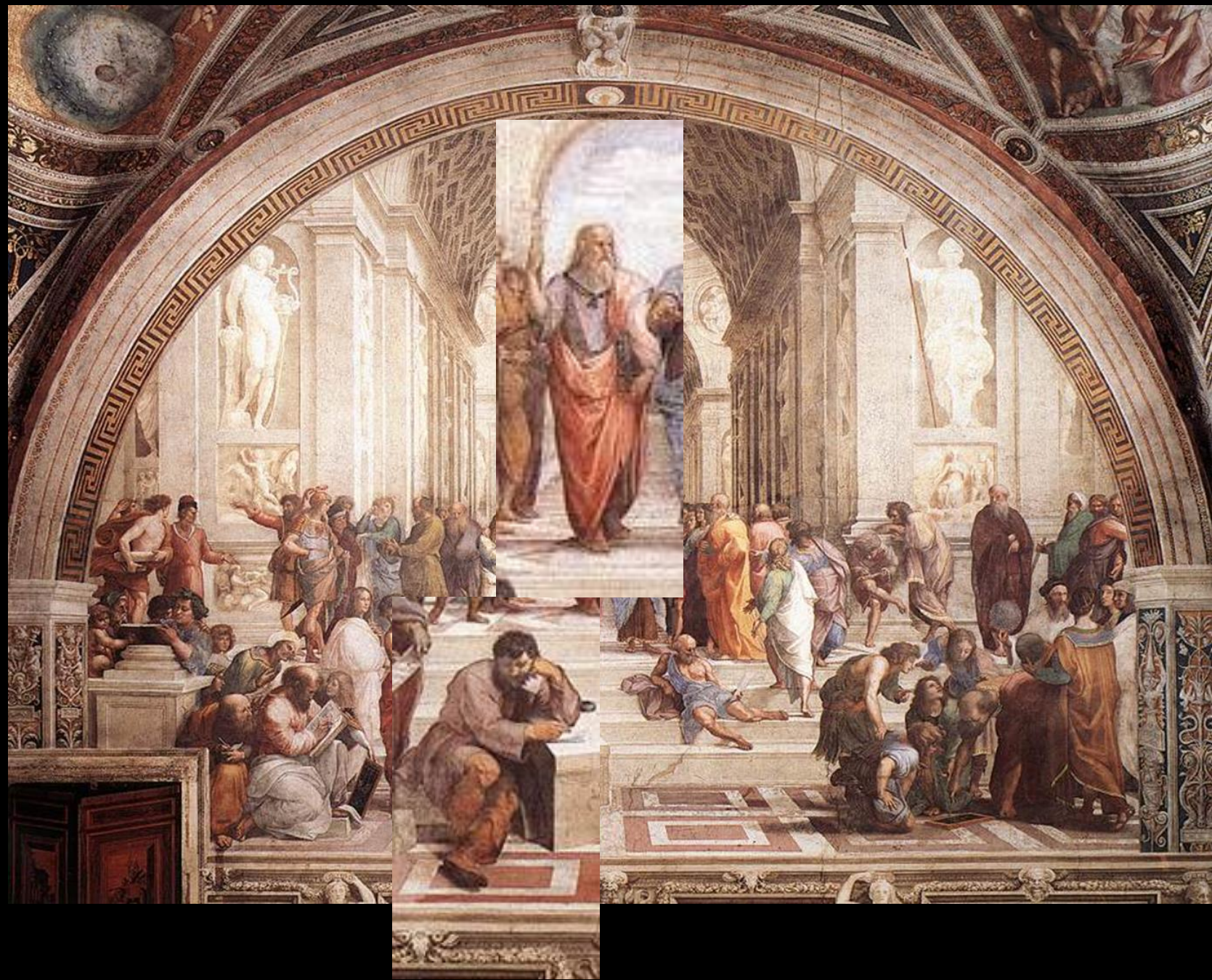


- Artists' self portraits—either stand-alone or included in larger works as above

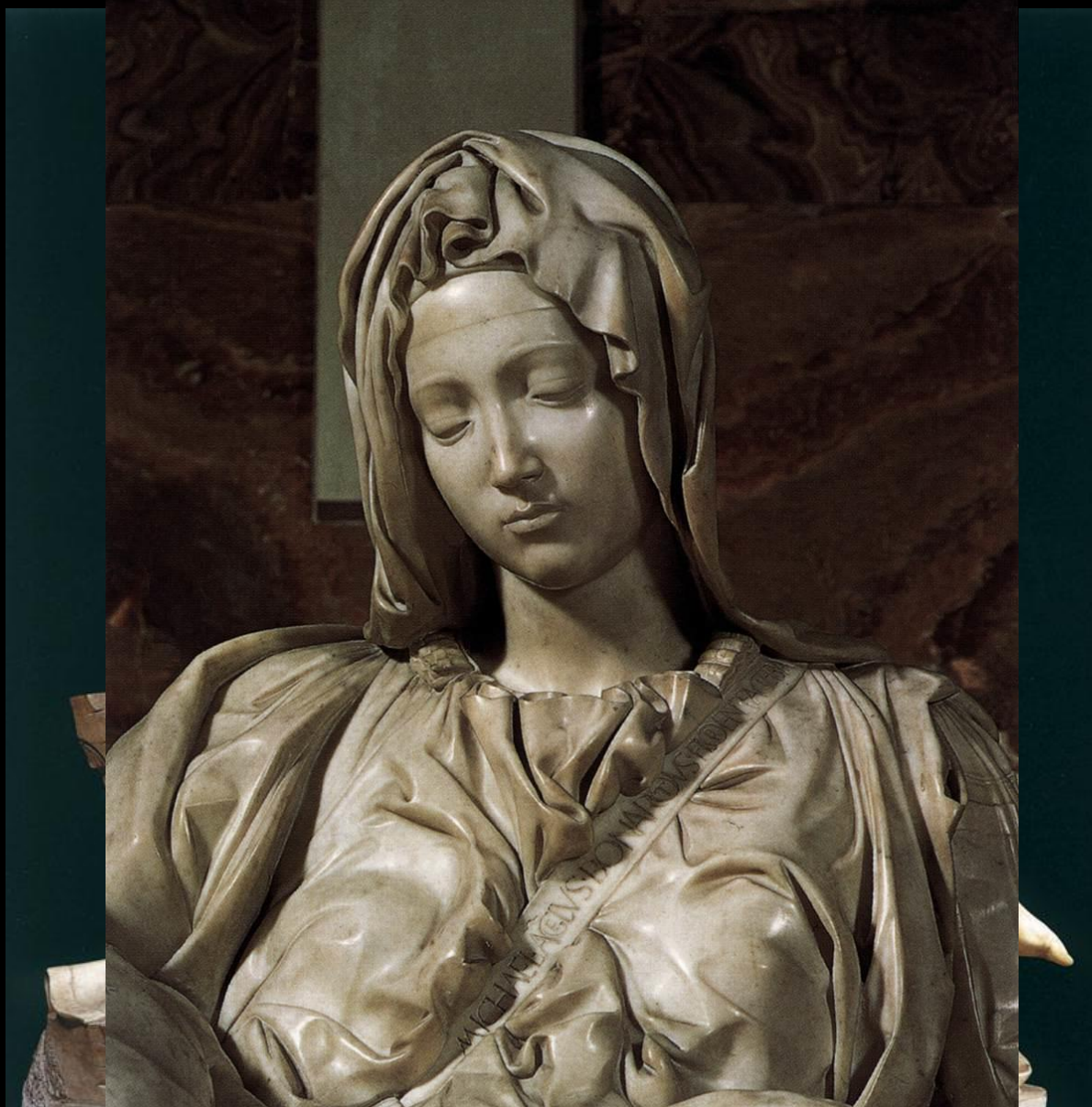








- The overt signing of works by the creating artist





IOHANNES BAPTISTA

- the depiction of the same subject in dramatically different ways by different artists



Secularism

- Secularism was an emphasis on living well in this world and understanding better the activities of this world—political, economic, social and intellectual.
- While the Middle Ages' scholarship had focused on saints and other religious figures as role models for living a life worthy of salvation, Renaissance scholars looked at contemporary and historical figures to discern how to be successful in earthly endeavors.

Secularism was demonstrated in the literature of the Renaissance through

- works dealing with “worldly” activities, especially those where Christian morality was ignored

Niccolò Machiavelli, *The Prince*

- works of history or biography especially when they reveal the methods by which an individual made his way in the world

Vespasiano da' Bisticci, *Poggio Bracciolini*

- Philosophical—as opposed to theological—works on ensuring a worthy life

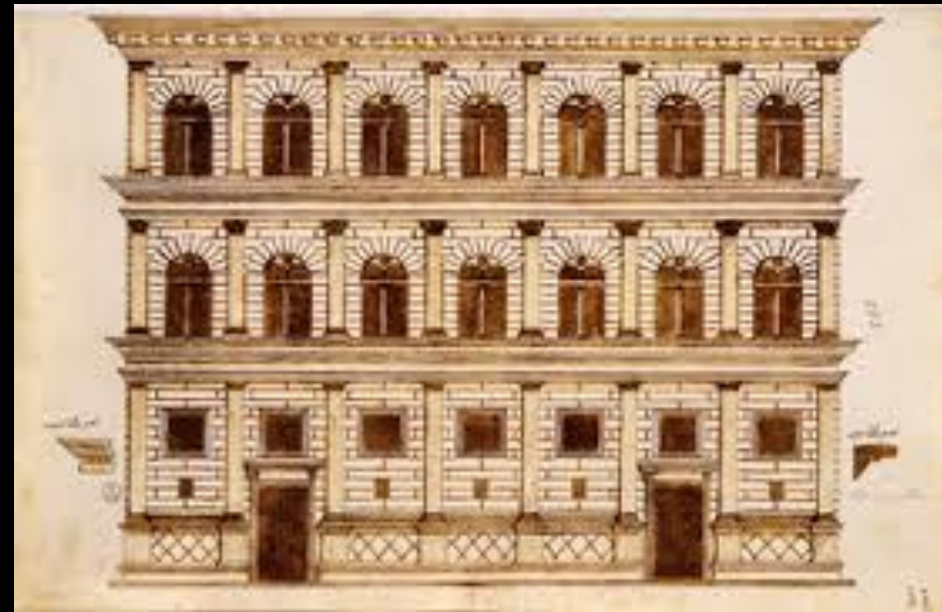
Pier Paolo Vergerio, letter to Ubertinus of Carrara,
“On the Liberal Arts”

Secularism was demonstrated in the art of the Renaissance through

- works with non-Christian (pagan) subject matter



- the commissioning of great architectural works of a non-religious nature—private homes, civic buildings, public spaces





Materialism

Materialism in the Renaissance was defined as the accumulation of wealth and the goods that wealth could buy, especially goods of historical, intellectual, cultural, and/or aesthetic value.

- During the Middle Ages the Church had preached against the accumulation of goods and wealth (although it amassed great fortunes) as indicative of the sin of pride and of the corruption of the spirit.
- As with secularism, the people of the Renaissance, influenced by the psychological impact of the Black Death, saw no reason why material comforts and beauty on the earth should not be enjoyed.

Materialism was seen in Renaissance literature through

- praising individuals in biographies and similar works for their vast collections of art works, books, artifacts, in fact, anything of distinction that demonstrated taste and discernment

Vespasiano's biography of Niccolò Niccoli

Materialism was seen in Renaissance art through

- inclusion of signs of wealth in portraits





- the commissioning of works of art and architecture for private use and enjoyment





