Humanism and the Renaissance

Defining “humanism”

- Humanism is the study and promotion of classical antiquity from 1400-1600, beg. in Italy; it promotes optimistic view of mankind and emphasizes action rather than contemplation.

- Paul Oskar Kristeller (1961): “Early Italian humanism, which in many respects continued the grammatical and rhetorical traditions of the Middle Ages, not merely provided the old Trivium with a new and more ambitious name (studia humanitatis), but also increased its actual scope, content and significance in the curriculum of the schools and universities and in its own extensive literary production. The studia humanitatis excluded logic, but they added to the traditional grammar and rhetoric, not only history, Greek, and moral philosophy, but also made poetry, once a sequel of grammar and rhetoric, the most important member of the whole group.”

Literary Humanists

- Francesco Petrarch (1304-1374)
  - Father of Humanism
  - Italian poet, author
  - Loved Classical world, despised “Dark Ages” & papal corruption
  - His solution:
    - Reconstruct G-R world
    - Study/instrate G-R world
    - Reform own society
  - Wrote biographies, love poems, letters to friends, scholarly annotations, etc.
Civic Humanists

- Applying study/imitation of Classical world to contemporary politics
  - Promote virtues, liberty
  - Praises republics
  - Senator Byrd (W.V.)
- Active vs. contemplative life
- Ex:
  - Coluccio Salutati
  - Nicolo Machiavelli
  - Leonardo Bruni

Educational Humanists

- Study of Latin grammar, Roman history, Roman literature, Classical values
- Rhetoric and oratory are important for public life
- Analogy of a honeybee and nectar
- Guarino of Verona (1374-1460), maestro
- Pier Paolo Vergerio, maestro

Scholarly Humanists

- Ad fontes
- Humanist libraries
- Lorenzo Valla (Noble, p. 401)
  - Donation of Constantine
  - Annotations on N.T.
- Neo-Platonism
- Pico della Mirandola
Historical Humanists

- Nicolo Machiavelli (1469-1527)
  - The Prince & Discourses on Law & plays & ....
  - Civil servant of Florentine Republic
  - Father of modern political science
  - Conversed with the ancients in his study....

- Francesco Guicciardini (1483-1540)
  - Historian, statesman, friend of Machiavelli
  - The History of Italy (multivolume work, w/ innovative use of sources and historiography)
  - Diplomat and civil servant