

THE ENLIGHTENMENT

A BRIEF INTRODUCTION

If an elephant dances and nobody's looking, does it really dance?

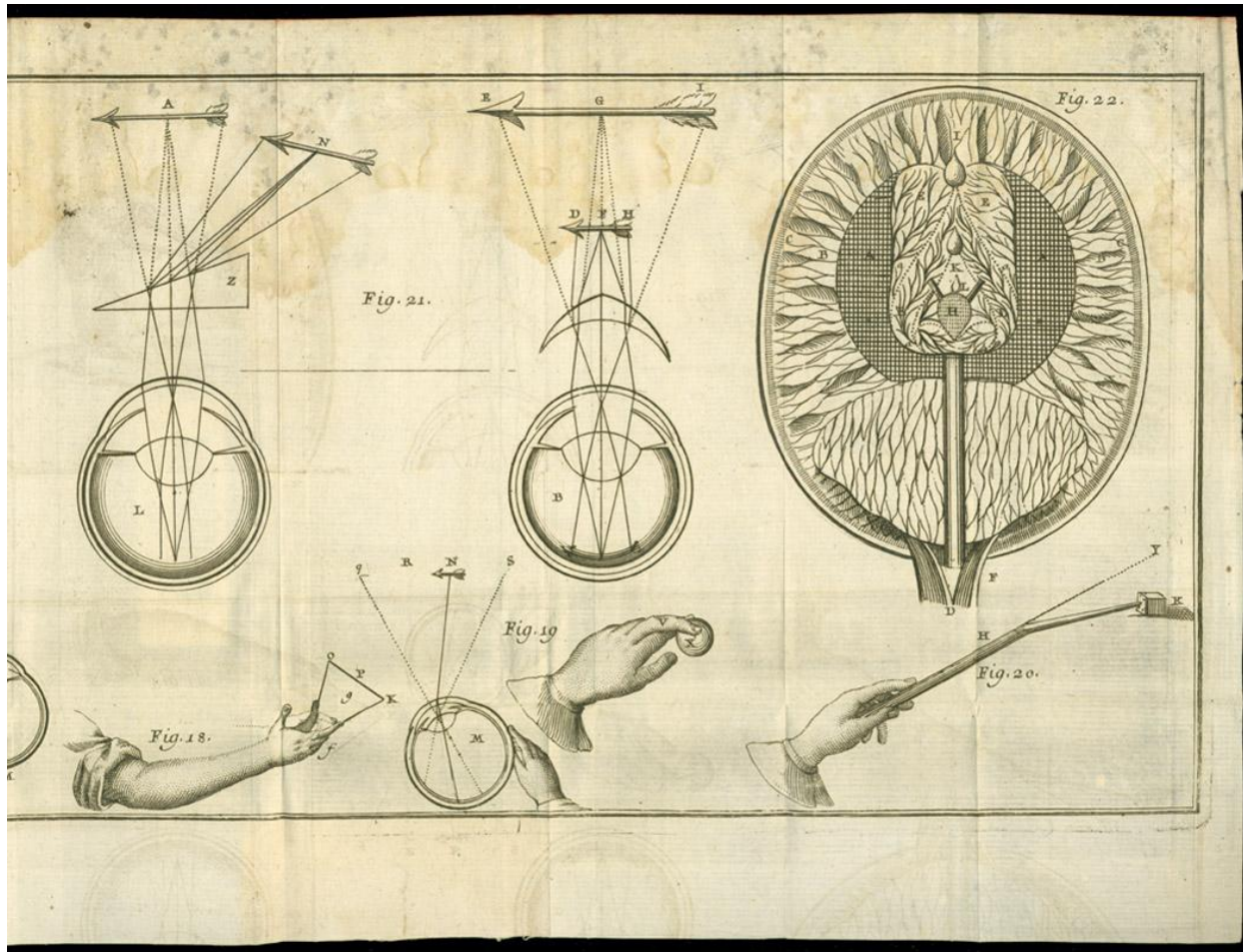


The Enlightenment:

Things got a little revolting

- The English Civil War/Commonwealth (1642-1660)
- The American Revolution (1776)
- The French Revolution (1789)
- The Industrial Revolution (late 18th-19th cent)
- The Scientific Revolution (18th-19th cent)
- Religious schism (during the Interregnum, the English had lots of sects)

The “AGE OF REASON”



The “AGE OF REASON”

- EMPIRICISM
 - Francis Bacon and the Scientific Method
- EXPERIMENTATION
 - The Royal Society of London for Improving Natural Knowledge (Gresham Lectures delivered in ENGLISH)
- MATHEMATICS
 - Isaac Newton and the Clockwork Cosmos
- PSYCHOLOGY
 - Thomas Locke and the Tabula Rasa
 - Rene Descartes and Dualism: THINK = AM (vs. The dancing elephant experiment^{TMENGL 300})

LITERARY SYMPTOMS

- **PERSPICUITY**

- Empiricism pushes English prose in the direction of the “PLAINSPOKEN” style based on
 - a MIMETIC paradigm of TRANSPARENCY: “the equality of words to things” (Samuel Johnson);
 - the assumption that observations of the world can be ACCURATELY DESCRIBED
 - CLEAR PERCEPTION (esp. Vision) → CLEAR EXPRESSION

Hobbes's Irony

The Light of Human minds is Perspicuous Words, but by exact Definition first snuffed and purged from ambiguity, *Reason* is the *pace*, *Encrease of Science* the *way*, and the Benefit of man-kind, the *end*. And on the contrary, Metaphors, and senseless and ambiguous words, are like *ignus fatui*; and reasoning upon them is wandering among innumerable absurdities; and their end, contention, sedition, or contempt.

(Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*)

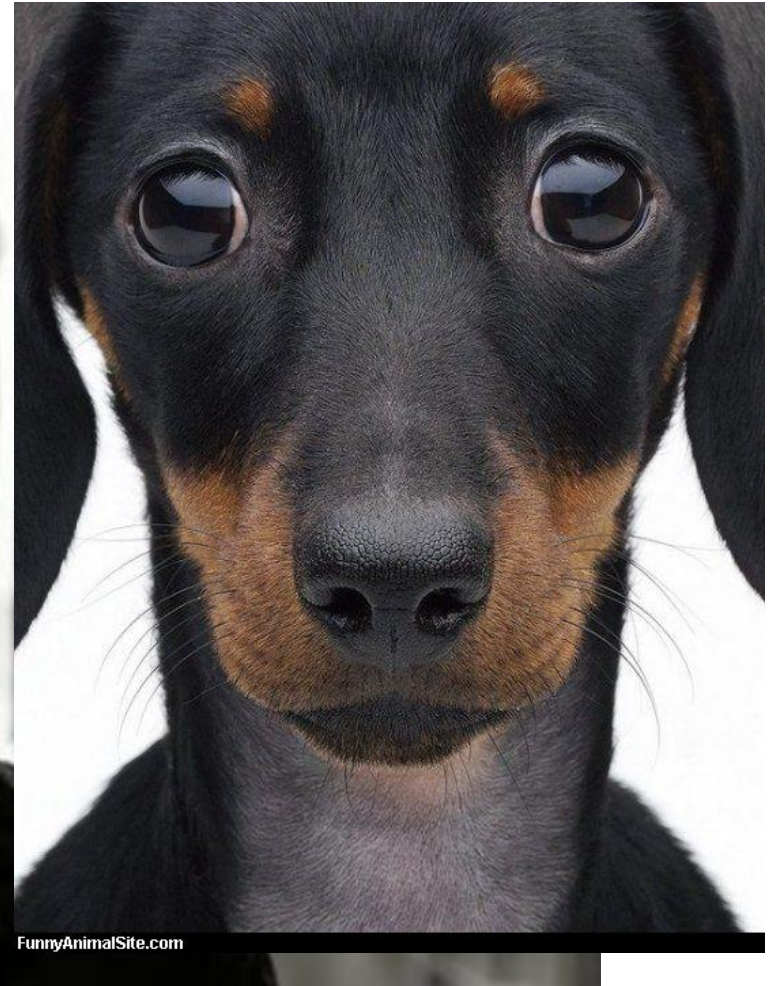
LITERARY CHANGES

- DOMESTICATION: Middle class interests push literary expression toward the observation of the EVERYDAY life of the “regular person”:
 - novel, newspapers, letters, diaries

LITERARY CHANGES

- SATIRE:
 - REFORM
 - IRONY
 - The poet as the “scalpel”:
 - Dryden, Swift, Pope

18th-century SENTIMENTALISM: the one manly tear



SENSIBILITY

- REFORM: the reformed whore;
- SENSIBILITY: the ability of the “gentleman” to respond feelingly to the joys and sorrows of others;
- UTILITARIANISM
- SENTIMENTALISM: BATHOS and SENSATIONALISM—empty sensibility.

Slight Detour: The Great ANCIENTS vs MODERNS DEBATE

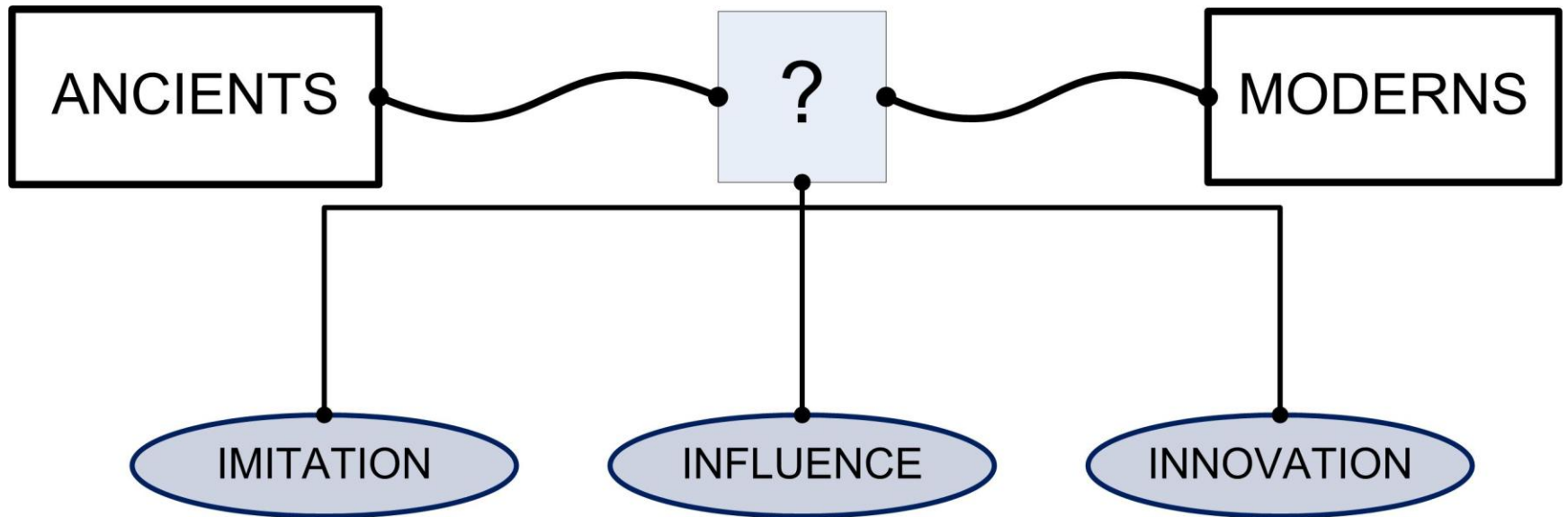
ancient cat



modern cat



ANCIENTS vs MODERNS DEBATE



ANCIENTS vs MODERNS

- NEO-CLASSICISM/AUGUSTANISM
 - ANCIENTS as standard of quality;
 - PRESCRIPTIVE: Horace;
 - Critique of SUPERFICIALITY of modern life;
 - WIT that reflected refined sensibility and acute observation.

ANCIENTS vs MODERNS

- PROGRESSIVISTS
 - INNOVATION;
 - In the “MOMENT”;
 - CUMULATIVE KNOWLEDGE
 - VERNACULAR.

