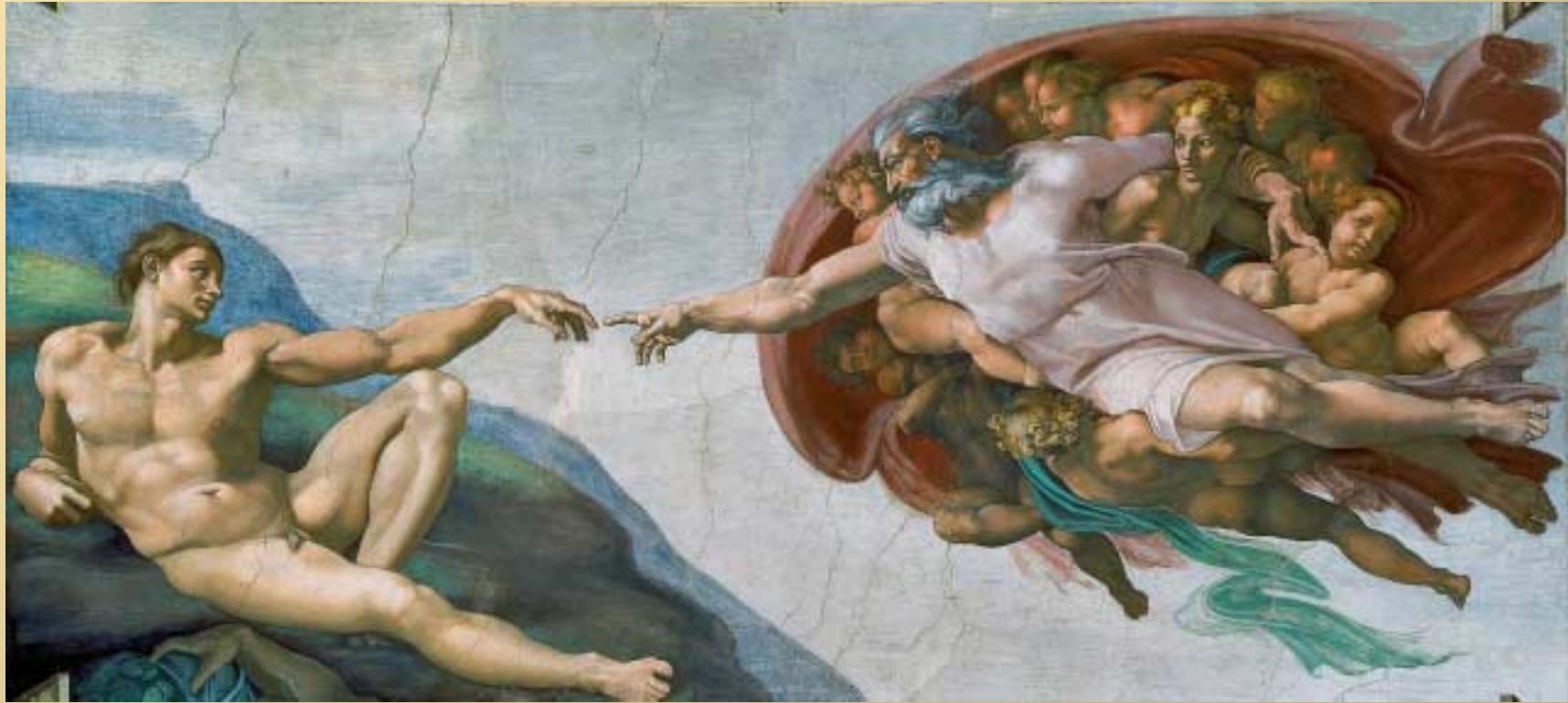


The Art of the Renaissance

And the worldview it reflected



It is worth noting that, throughout human history, we have been prepared to accept (*admittedly with periods of extreme social anxiety and even violent resistance*) new conceptions of both what is 'real' (from *Animism*



to *Polytheism* to *Monotheism* and now *Science*) and how we 'know' it – but only on the condition that the new paradigm promises to explain **everything**

(Just wait until the implications of *Quantum Mechanics* take hold... but, I digress...)

The way in which we define (from Latin '*to circumscribe*') something determines what we think it *is* and what we think it is *for*



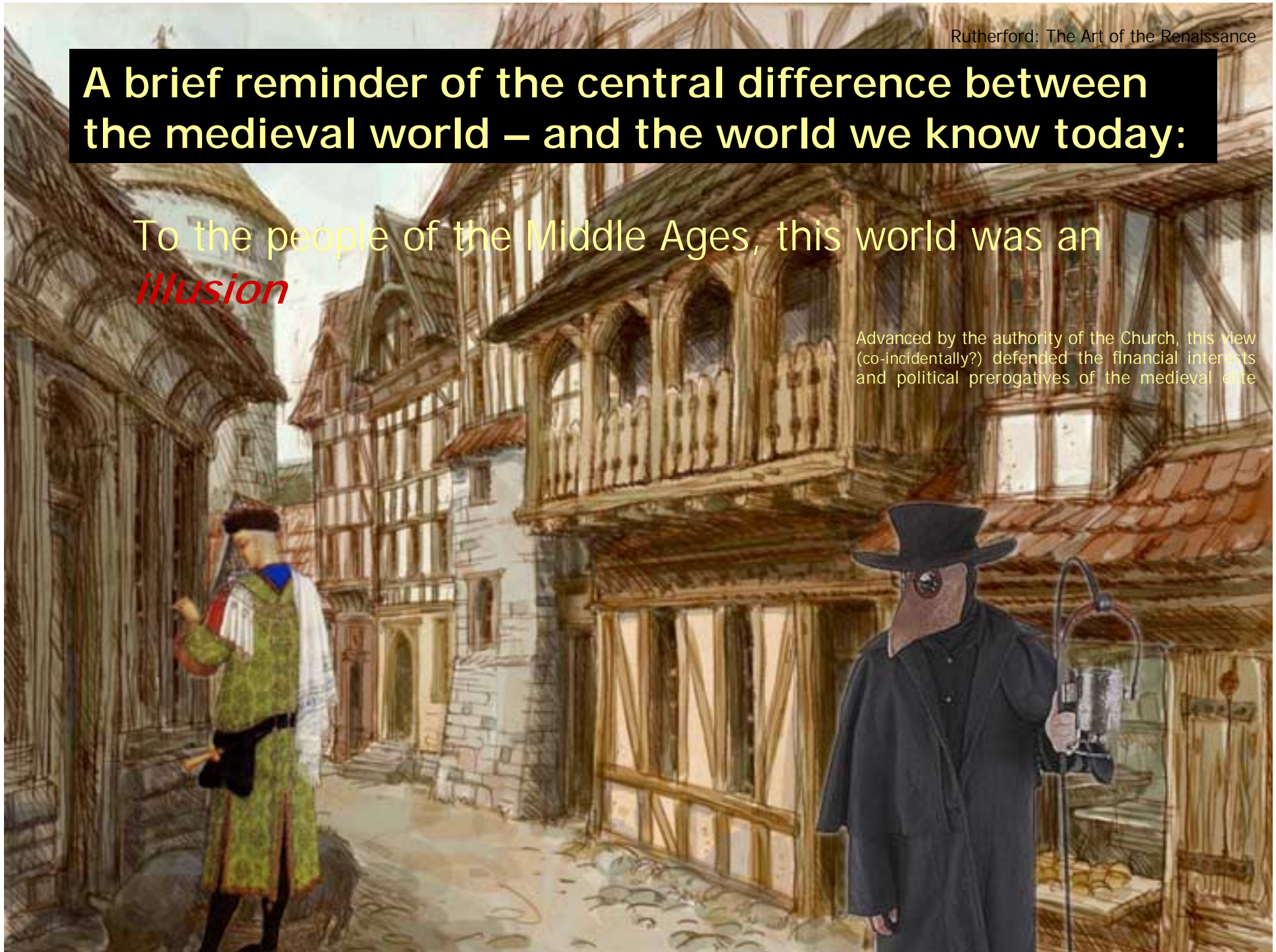
In the late Middle Ages, three events led us to radically re-define both *the nature of the world around us* and *what mankind is & what it is for*

This lecture will briefly explain the origins of these inter-related ideas which, together, led to **the Age of Enlightenment** (aka *the Scientific Revolution*) then to **the Industrial Revolution** – and so to the modern world

A brief reminder of the central difference between the medieval world – and the world we know today:

To the people of the Middle Ages, this world was an *illusion*

Advanced by the authority of the Church, this view (co-incidentally?) defended the financial interests and political prerogatives of the medieval elite



A brief reminder of the central difference between the medieval world – and the world we know today:

To the people of the Middle Ages, this world was an *illusion* designed by God to tempt, test & judge us; only Heaven and Hell were truly 'real'

Advanced by the authority of the Church, this view (co-incidentally?) defended the financial interests and political prerogatives of the medieval elite

In this illusory world, *everything that happens was the Will of God* * – accordingly, it was impossible to *even conceive of* universal laws governing the properties & behaviour of matter to which even God was subject

And so, without confidence in the objective 'reality' of matter, natural philosophy (science) was not possible; the only important thing to know was what God wanted

* see 'Magical thinking'

Three events took place
between the middle of the
14th and the **15th**...

the Flea
the Flight
and the Font

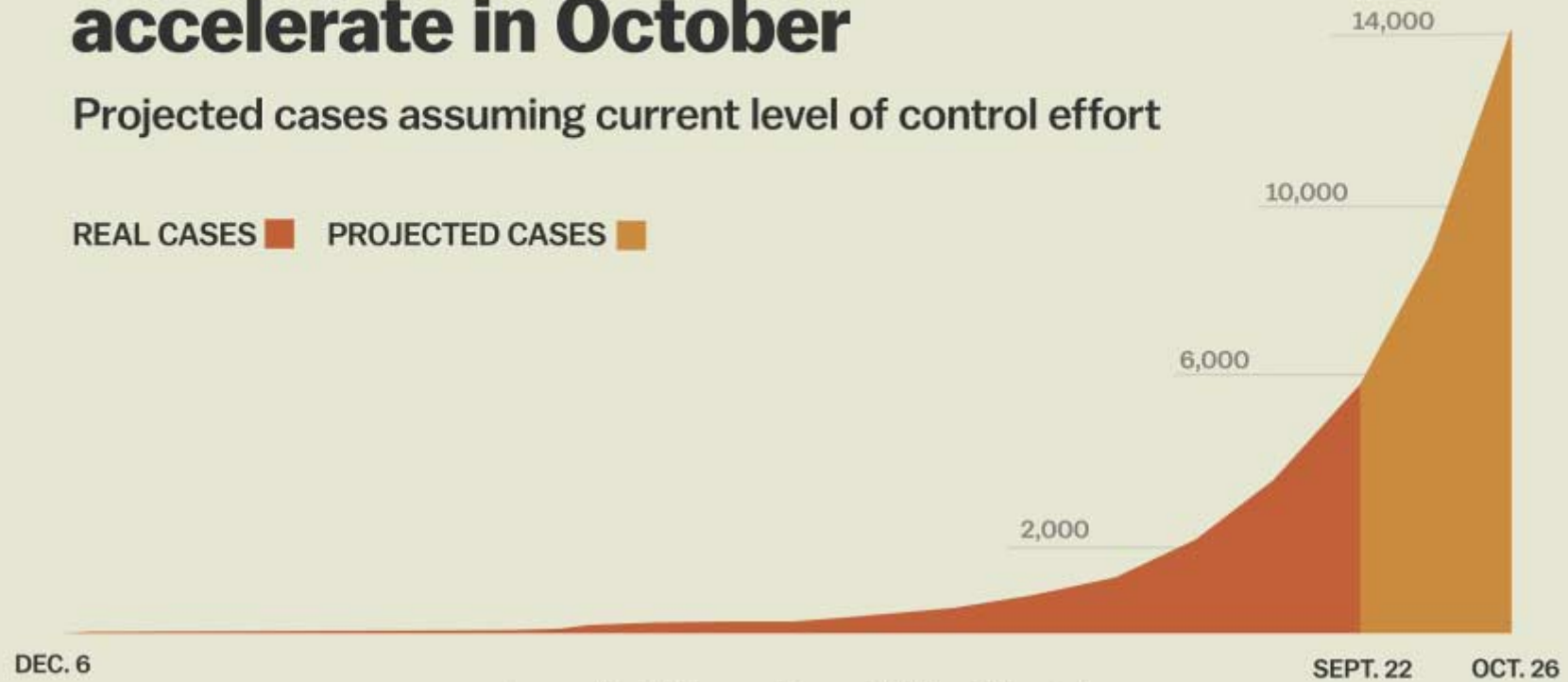
Their consequences changed everything...



Ebola outbreak expected to accelerate in October

Projected cases assuming current level of control effort

REAL CASES ■ PROJECTED CASES ■



Source: HealthMap.org/Boston Children's Hospital



The Flea

Carried to Sicily in 1347 on a Genoese trading ship, by 1351, the Bubonic Plague (The Black Death) had killed 25 million people

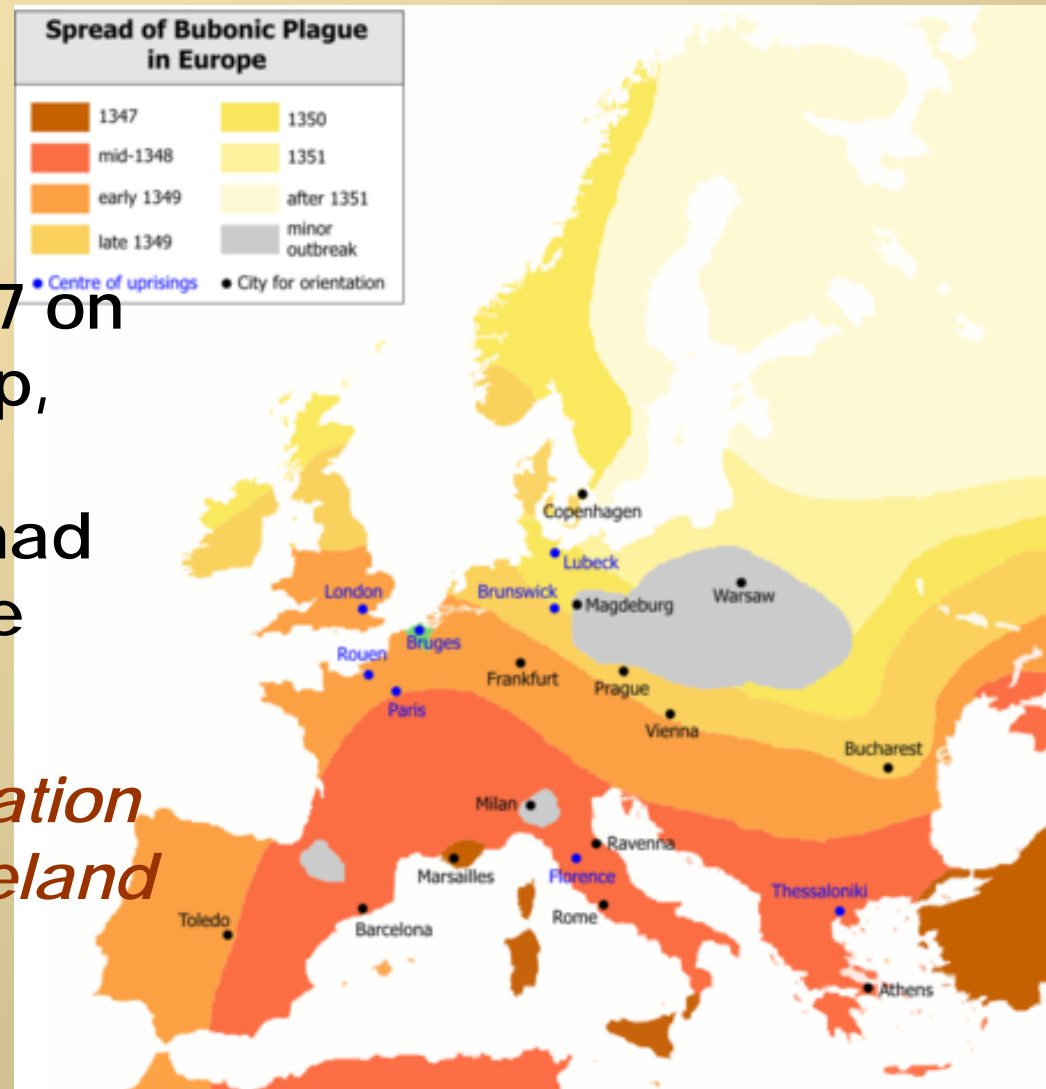




The Flea

Carried to Sicily in 1347 on a Genoese trading ship, by 1351, the Bubonic Plague (The Black Death) had killed 25 million people

one-third of the population between India and Iceland



Revelation Chapter 9:

And I saw a star that had fallen from heaven onto the earth, and the angel was given the key to the shaft leading down to the Abyss. It spoke to the sixth angel with the trumpet, and said, 'Release the four angels that are chained up at the great river Euphrates.' And the four angels who had been kept ready for this very hour and day and month and year were released to kill a third of mankind.



The Flea



The Bubonic plague – which cut through the population like a scythe – gave us the image of 'The Grim Reaper'



The Flea

The Plague's indiscriminate death toll showed that there was no difference in God's eyes between the rich and the poor

(See the '*Cult of Death*' and '*la Danse Macabre*')





The Flea

The widespread belief that the Plague was the result of God's wrath for the sins of Mankind (and, in particular, the behaviour of the clergy and the aristocracy), gave rise to the popular idea (condemned as heretical by the all-powerful Church) that *"All are equal under God"* – an idea that found an eager audience among a population angered by a history of feudal injustices perpetrated by the 1%



The Flea

“When Adam delved and Eve span, who was then the gentleman?”

And therefore I exhort you to consider that now the time is come, appointed to us by God, in which ye may (if ye will) cast off the yoke of bondage, and recover liberty”



John Ball (1338 – 1381) at Blackheath



The Flea

The resulting labour shortages which threatened the income of the nobility led the Third Estate (the peasants) to recognise their economic power – which (eventually) forced the nobility to agree to the demand for an end of serfdom

It was no co-incidence that the Peasants' Revolt took place in 1381 – exactly one generation after the Plague



The Flight

Beginning in 1096, the Crusades were originally an attempt to defend Constantinople, Jerusalem and the Holy Land from the advance of militant Islam

During the Fourth Crusade in 1204, cosmopolitan Constantinople was brutally sacked by the very people called to defend it



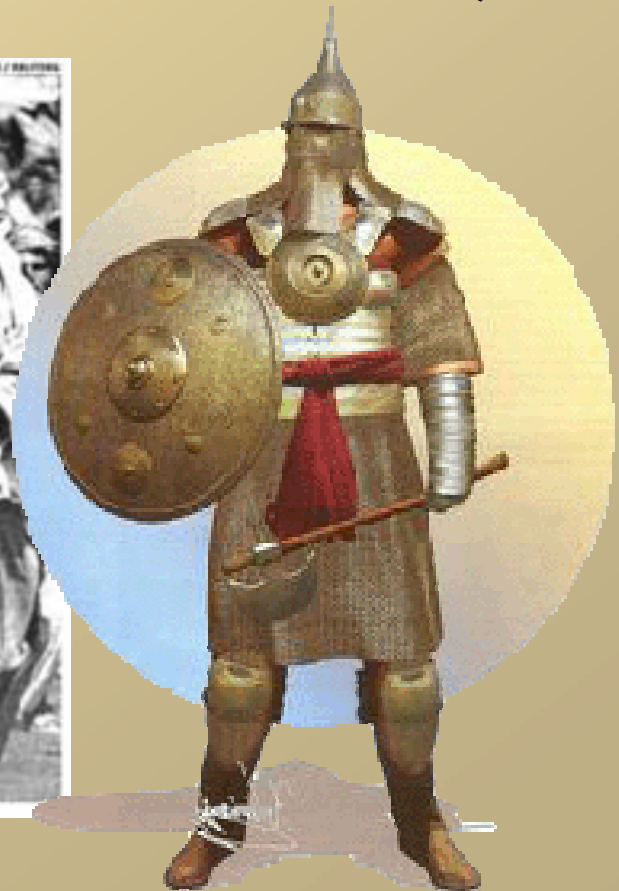
The Flight



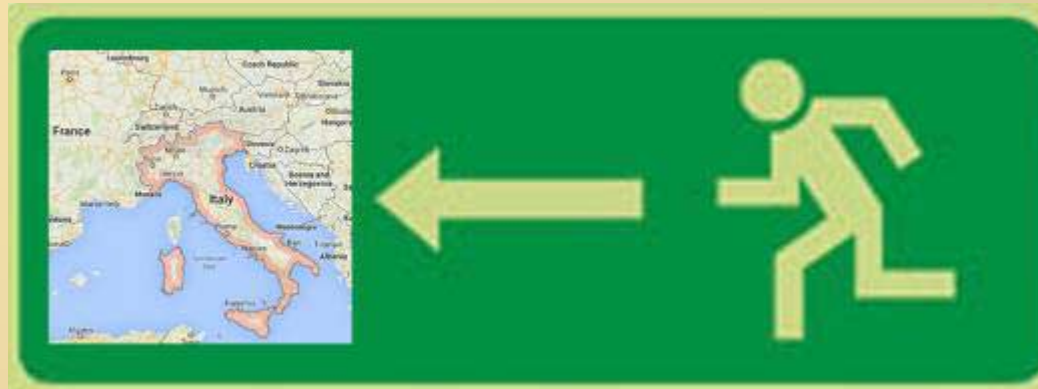
**Its defences fatally weakened,
Constantinople fell to the Ottoman
Turks in 1453 (and renamed Istanbul)**

The Flight

Its defences fatally weakened, Constantinople fell to the Ottoman Turks in 1453 (and renamed Istanbul)



The Flight



This prompted an exodus of educated Byzantine refugees who, fearing retribution, fled to the West (most of whom went to Italy) with their **Arabic translations of ancient Greek texts** (*poetry, theatre, mathematics, natural philosophy, engineering...*).

The Flight



philosophy, engineering...) where, surrounded by the ruins of the Roman empire, the locals were receptive to the ideas (or the reminder?) implicit within these texts that *Man is capable of extraordinary achievements*

The Flight



Medieval scholars had previously known very little of the works of Plato and Aristotle – and even less Greek science. With the arrival of these refugees and their texts, we discovered the surviving* writings of Plato, Aristotle, Democritus, Pythagoras, Euclid, Archimedes *etc. etc. etc...*) whose ideas led to a fundamental change in the European worldview

* Sadly, only a fraction of the works of classical Greece survived the fire of the Great Library of Alexandria. Based on Aristotle's personal library, it contained 7,000 volumes and was the largest library in the world, containing many unique copies of Greek texts which were thus lost forever. It is estimated that **less than a quarter** of the works of Plato survived. Ordered burnt by Archbishop Cyril (the inventor of Cyrillic) in 415CE, he also had the librarians tortured and put to death. Later canonised for his (*ahem...*) piety.

The Flight



The medieval approach to knowledge (called *Scholasticism*) was based on the study of **Platonic ideals** (infused into Christian thought by St. Augustine who had been a Platonic scholar prior to his conversion)



This established both what was 'knowable' and what was considered 'worth knowing', which favoured...

Plato's *Moral Philosophy* (abstract, objective, timeless entities, independent of the corruption of the physical world)

over *Natural Philosophy* (the principles and processes governing the natural world – what we now call 'Science')

The Flight



This fundamental difference of opinion between Plato and Aristotle is depicted in Raphael's painting the *School of Athens*



Plato

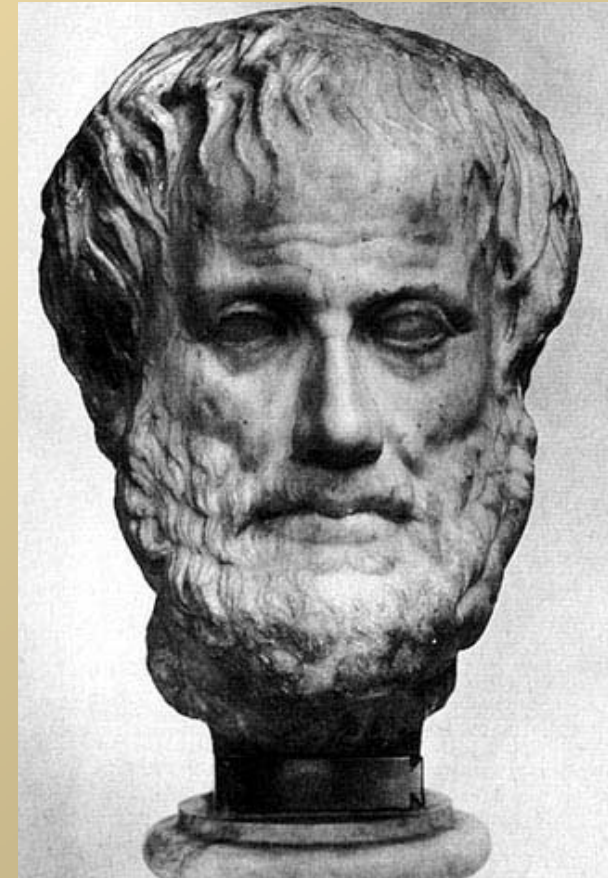
Aristotle

The Flight



The re-discovery of Aristotle and the many remarkable achievements of ancient Greek *natural philosophy* led to:

1. The belief that **The natural world is Knowable**
2. An interest in figuring out **How & Why Things Happened**
3. A new confidence that (as our senses and our intelligence are both gifts from God) **we are both *capable* of 'finding out' and that *it is God's Will that we use His gifts to do so***



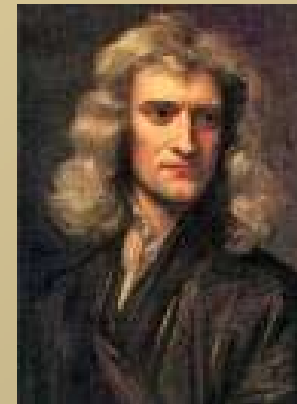
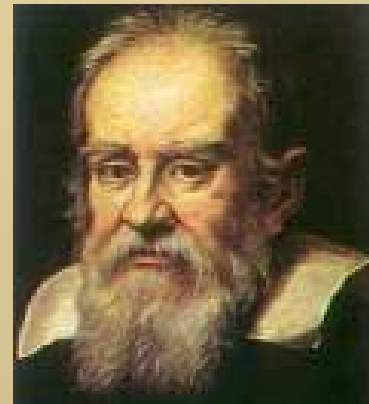
Aristotle



The Flight



Without these new conceptions of the nature of the world and of mankind, we could not have had the **Age of Enlightenment** (aka the Scientific Revolution)



which depended on the belief that 'objective' knowledge of the world is *even possible*

The Flight



This revolution in our conception of the natural world was a shift from *Mythopoeic thought* (the world is seen as 'Thou' – in which things happen because Someone or Something *Wills* them to happen)...
to seeing the world around us as an impersonal 'It' (in which events are the consequence of ubiquitous natural 'laws' acting on quantifiable material properties)

THOU AND IT (or, Thou art not It)

There is a fundamental difference between the world of the ancients and the world of modern man. Our natural and spiritual society sees the phenomenal world as an impersonal 'It', in which all events are the consequence of what we believe to be constant and ubiquitous natural 'laws' acting on consistent and quantifiable material properties. For ancient (and also for primitive) man, the phenomenal world is 'Thou'. The difference between these two perspectives can be compared to the relation between subject and object, or to the difference between the way in which I 'know' that the Earth is round and the way in which I 'know' another living being. The distinction between 'subject-object' (the actor – and that upon which it acts) is, of course, the basis of all meaningful thinking and our conviction that this is 'reality' is the essential prerequisite for scientific knowledge.

The way in which ancient and primitive man 'knows' the world is through the kind of empathetic understanding to which we refer when we say that "I know how you feel", or that we "understand" the fine, delicate, or rugged character of 'Thou', but the unprejudiced, unprejudiced, and unprejudiced character of an individual; a primitive knows only in so far as it reacts to qualities and in 'It' in other words, "Thou art unique." Moreover, 'Thou' is not merely contemplated or understood but is experienced directly and emotionally as part of a direct, unmediated relationship. Primitive man has only one mode of thought, one 'kind' of knowing, and therefore only one mode of expression – the personal. Primitive man projects human characteristics onto an inanimate, non-living object (because primitive man simply did not 'see' an inanimate world).

Primitive man 'knows' the world the way one 'knows' another living being; as 'Thou'. Our modern, unprejudiced nature and natural phenomena in terms of their own expression; accordingly, every event and every action was charged with meaning. Accordingly, the world appears to primitive man, rather than as an object, but as something with life. In nature, in fact, and in every other phenomenon with which he is confronted (the foundation, the sudden shadow, the unknown changing in the world, the stone which suddenly says lies while on a living tree) life somehow lies, not as an impersonal 'It' which acts in accordance with natural laws – but as 'Thou', as something made manifest. In this confrontation, 'Thou' reveals its individuality, its quality, and its will. 'Thou' is not contemplated in the abstract or with intellectual detachment; it is understood and 'seen' as life-creating life – involving as it is a reciprocal relationship in which thought, not less than acts and feelings, are subordinated to this experience.

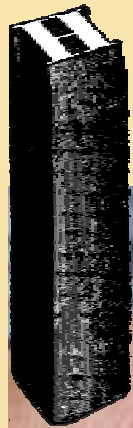
Known as Mythopoeic thought, this way of making sense of the world assumes that 'things happen' because Someone or Something Wills it. We smile indulgently at tales of so-called primitives who, frightened by a solar eclipse, dance around at the increase who devour the Sun, but in times of stress, this very 'irrational' mode of thought is readily, purposeful, and we even to our moderns' mode of relating to the world. (Think back to the last time you desperately wanted or needed something to happen – or not to happen; chances are that you could be 'willed a deal' with the power-that-be.) This is how our modern man deals with the world, believing everything that happens is an expression of Will – and that, if offered the right inducement, 'Thou' cannot be opposed.

Writing about the differences between modern and primitive societies (1920), C. G. Jung wrote:

It is our assumption, according to a primitive conviction, that everything has value which we call natural and which we at least suppose to be perceptible. Primitive man, on the other hand, assumes something is thought about by invisible, arbitrary powers (), if he does not call it chance, but intention.

The way in which we imagine (MAGNET) the world has a profound impact on the way we think – including what concepts are available to our mind – and which in turn, determines the range of experiences that are possible. It is only since the scientific revolution that we have learned to 'see' the physical world as an 'It' in which all actions are the result of impersonal, ubiquitous forces acting on material properties. Everything we 'know' is based on a conception of a world animated by an impersonal 'It' – and (usually) behave accordingly.

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The Font





The Font

The ability to read depends on having access to books (How can you learn to read if you can't afford to buy books?)

Previously available only to wealthy aristocrats, the mass-production of books led to:

- i) a dramatic rise in literacy
- ii) the spread of knowledge and
- iii) an increase in its status





The Font

The proliferation of mass-produced books both *endorsed* and *reflected* an increase in the value of learning and knowledge – radically expanding *what* we know

It also shifted the repository of knowledge – *from* human memory *to* the printed page; it changed us from an *oral* to a *written* culture

This precipitated a seismic shift in *the source* and *nature* of authority (*how we 'know'*)

What if I told you that the population of Canada is just over 55 million people...



The Font

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Canada

From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia

Canada is a country, consisting of [ten provinces and three territories](#), in the northern part of the continent of North America. It extends from the Atlantic to the Pacific and northward into the Arctic Ocean, covering 9.98 million square kilometres (3.85 million square miles) in total, making it the world's [second-largest country by total area](#) and the [fourth-largest country by land area](#). Canada's [common border with the United States](#) forms the world's longest land border.

Canada is a [federal parliamentary democracy](#) and a [constitutional monarchy](#), Queen [Elizabeth II](#) being the current head of state. The country is [officially bilingual](#) at the federal level. It is one of the world's most ethnically diverse and [multicultural](#) nations, the product of large-scale immigration from many countries, with a population of approximately 35 million as of 2015. Its advanced economy is [one of the largest in the world](#), relying chiefly upon its abundant natural resources and well-developed international trade networks. Canada's [long and complex relationship](#) with the United States has had a significant impact on its economy and culture.

[★](#)
[🔒](#)
[🔊](#)

Canada
 <p style="font-size: small; margin: 0;">Flag</p>
<p style="font-size: small; margin: 0;">Motto: "A Mari Usque Ad Mare" (Latin) "From Sea to Sea" <i>(As seen on the Arms of Canada)</i></p>
<p style="font-size: small; margin: 0;">Anthem: "O Canada" Royal anthem: "God Save the Queen"^[1]</p>


Who are you going to believe: me or a printed text?

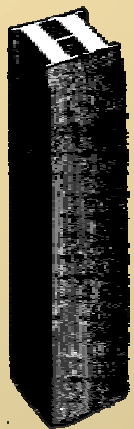
We have seen the consequences of three events:



The Flea showed us that we are all – rich and poor – equal in God's eyes



The Flight showed us that Mankind is capable of understanding the natural world – and that we should all strive to fulfil our extraordinary potential



The Font gave us both the means and the incentive to expand and share our knowledge

The combination of these three events gave rise to two radically new ideas:

Classicism

Humanism

Classicism:

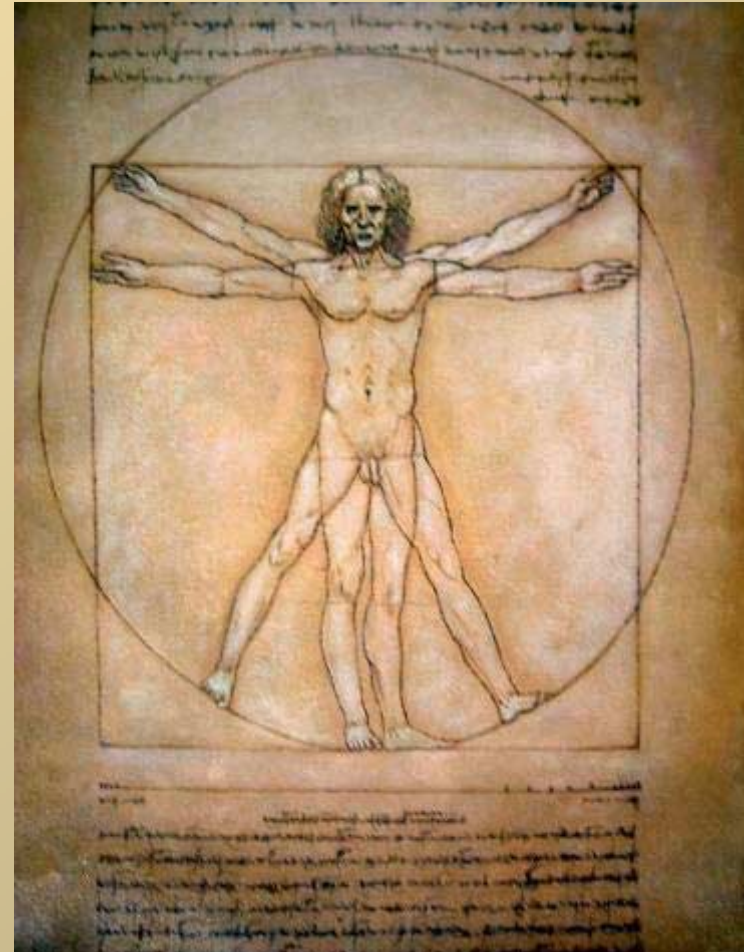
The belief in the existence of **universal & objective standards of truth and beauty** – and that, due to the powers given to us by God, Man is capable of **appreciating** these



Humanism:

The belief in the value of the individual human being – which implied both *the ability* & *the responsibility* to fulfil our (almost unlimited) potential in all areas

This led to the radically new belief that *change (progress) was possible*, and that we could – *and should* – strive to improve our material & social circumstances



Vitruvian Man by da Vinci (1487)

These two new ideas became the foundation for a new worldview:

In the Renaissance (the 're-birth'), all educated members of society were expected to esteem the beauty of the natural world & to esteem the capacity of the individual to understand and appreciate this

Shakespeare illustrates these two values in his play (Hamlet) about a Renaissance prince (Act 2, scene 2)

I have of late - but wherefore I know not - lost all my mirth, forgone all custom of exercises; and indeed it goes so heavily with my disposition that this goodly frame, the earth, seems to me a sterile promontory, this most excellent canopy, the air, look you, this brave o'erhanging firmament, this majestic roof fretted with golden fire, why, it appears no other thing to me than a foul and pestilent congregation of vapours. What a piece of work is a man! How noble in reason, how infinite in faculties, in form and moving how express and admirable, in action how like an angel, in apprehension how like a god! The beauty of the world, the paragon of animals! And yet, to me, what is this quintessence of dust? Man delights not me—no, nor woman neither, though by your smiling you seem to say so.



These two new ideas
(that the natural world was beautiful
and that the individual's experience of
it was unique & worthy of celebrating)
led to three new artforms:

1. Linear perspective
celebrated the human
experience of looking at
the (now 'real') world



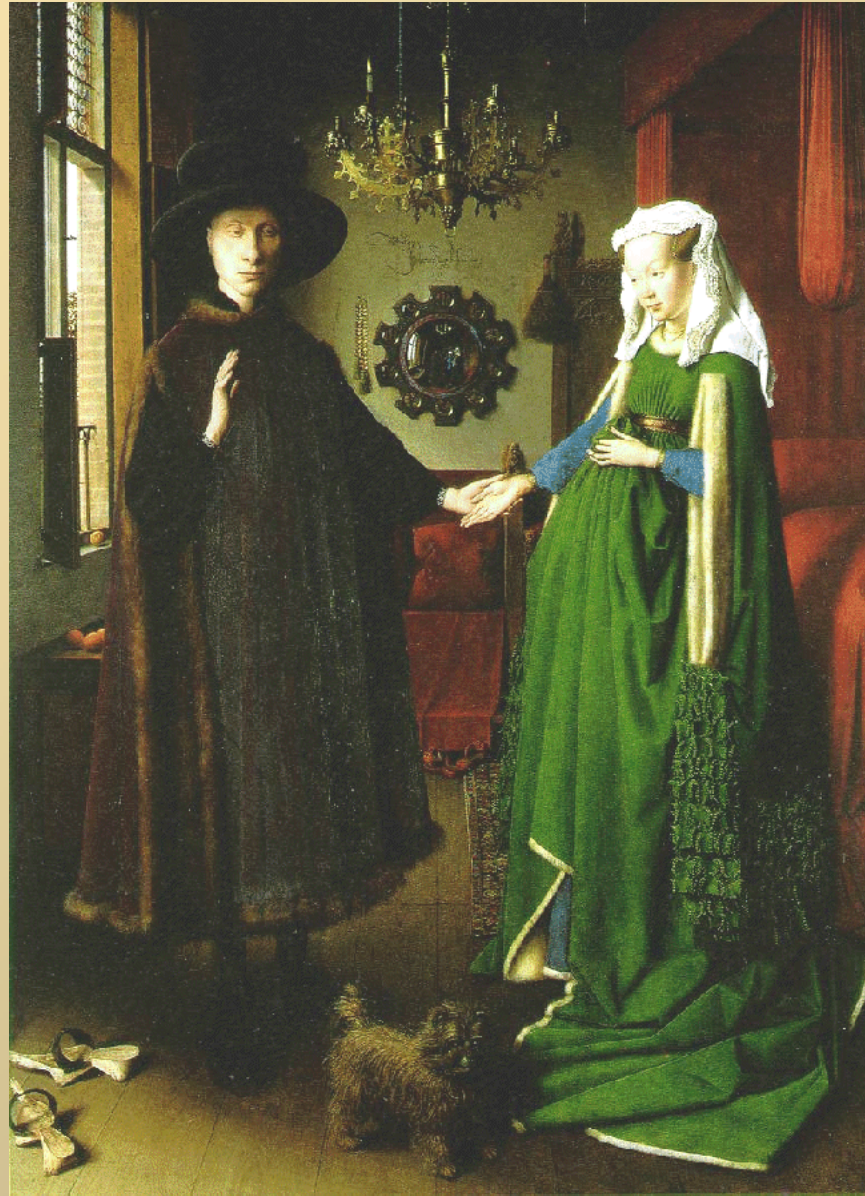
The Holy Trinity by Masaccio (1425)

Compare
this to the
medieval
depiction
of 3D
space:

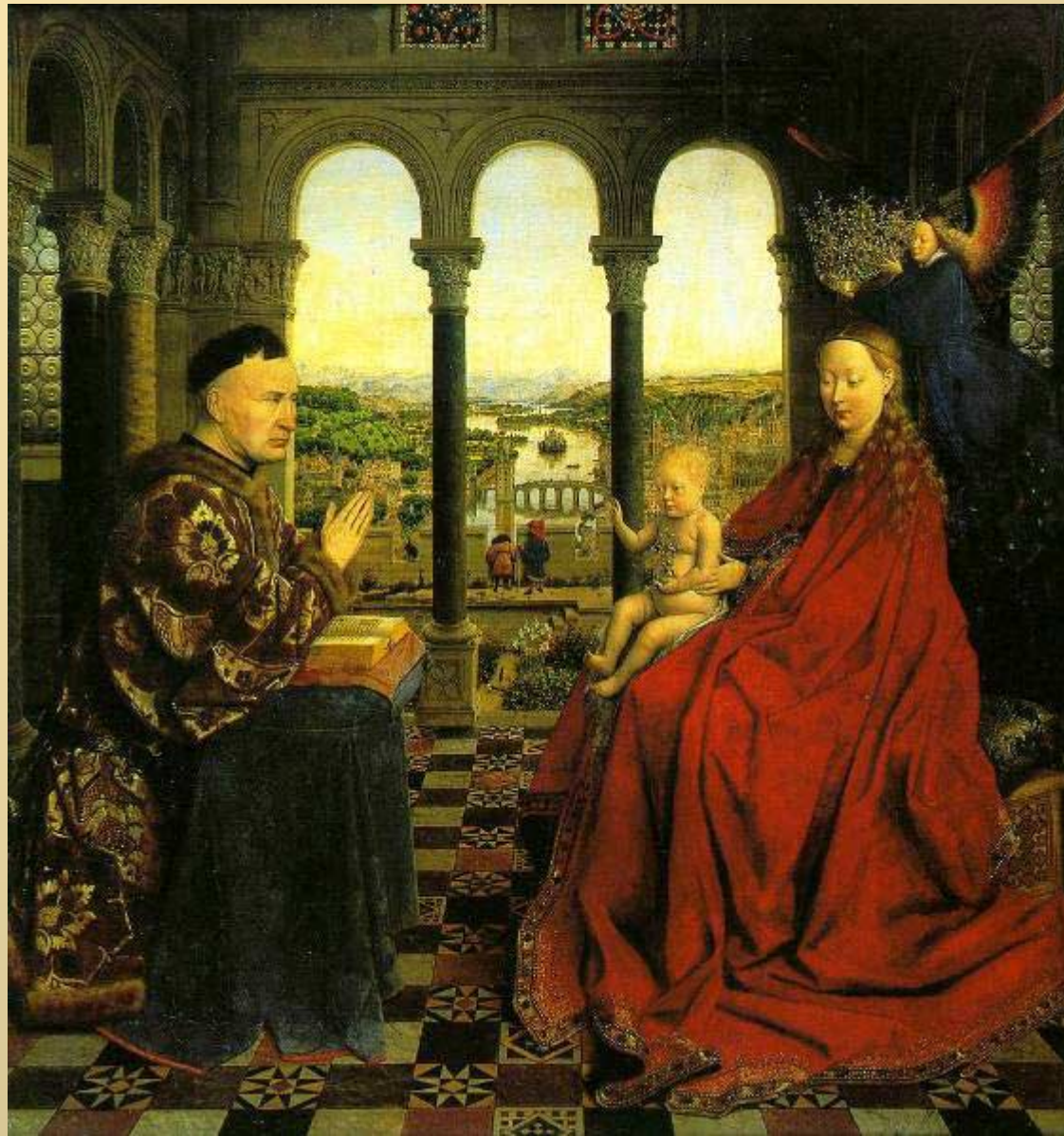
PLEASE do not make
the mistake of believing
that medieval art was
therefore 'not as good';
it was simply based on a
very different view of the
role of art (which was to
serve a didactic purpose)



scene from *Boccaccio's Decameron*, illuminated by Flemish masters 15th century - Bibliothèque de l'Arsenal

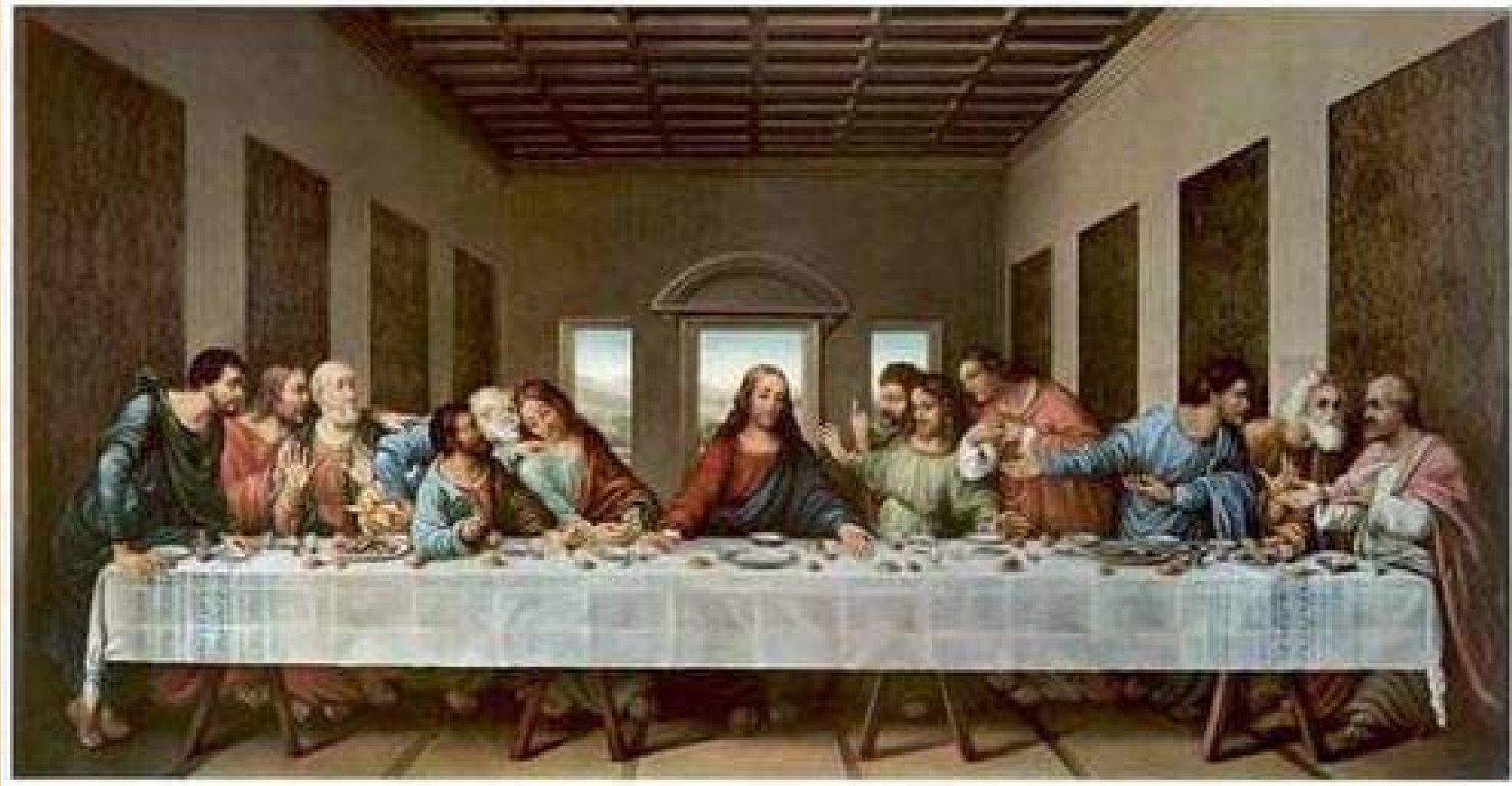


The Arnolfini Marriage by van Eyck (1434)



We don't have time to pursue it here, but the Renaissance also saw the rise of 'the sponsor' who dictated the style & content of the artworks he commissioned

The Virgin of Chancellor Rolin by van Eyck (1435)



The Last Supper by da Vinci (c. 1495-98)



The School of Athens by Raphael (c. 1510-11)

2. the Portrait

celebrated the identity
of the (newly recognised)
unique individual

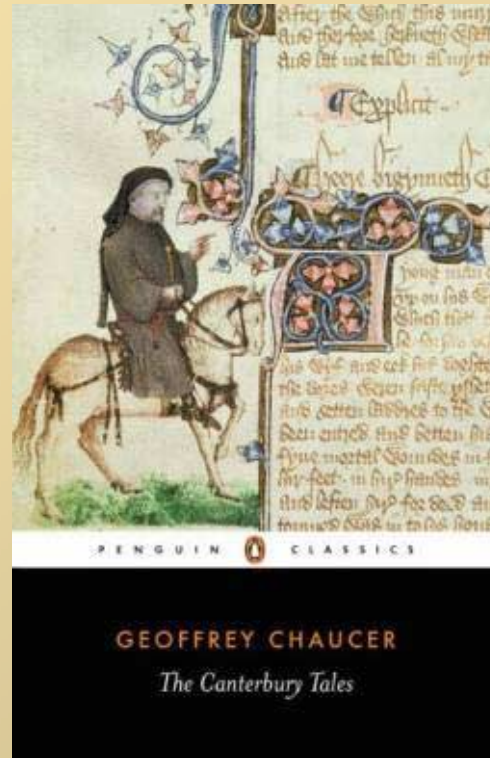


woman (c.1435)

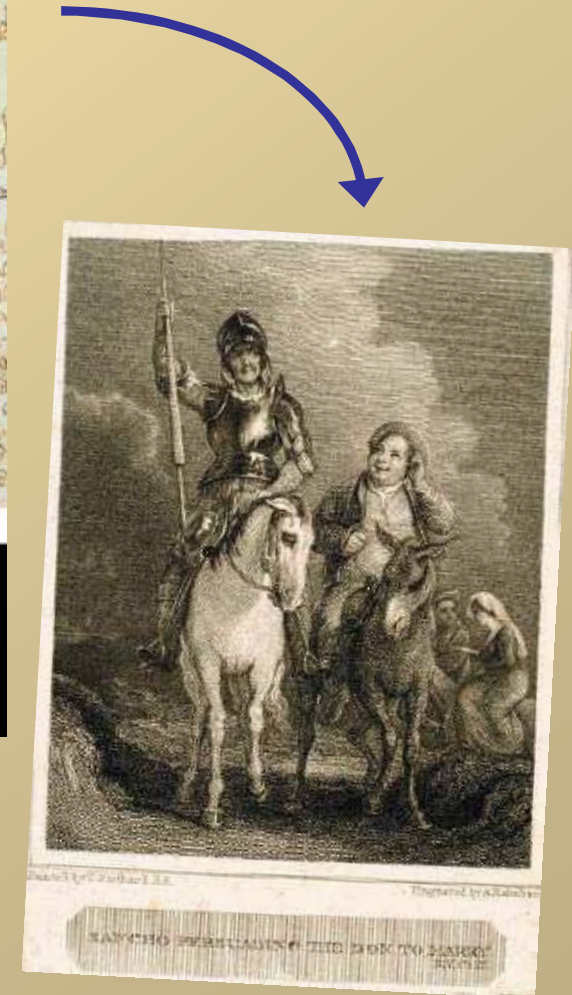


Young man by Lorenzo Lotto (c. 1508)

Written in the
vernacular (not Latin)
& mass-produced
by printing press,
3. the Novel
celebrated the life
experiences of the
(newly recognised)
unique individual



The Canterbury Tales
by Geoffrey Chaucer



Don Quixote
by Miguel Cervantes

The difference between the medieval & Renaissance world views

MEDIEVAL

DENIAL OF THE REALITY AND IMPORTANCE OF
'THIS WORLD'

FOCUS ON LIFE AFTER DEATH

BELIEVED IN ORIGINAL SIN

THE UNIVERSE IS UNKNOWABLE

GOD IS THE SOURCE OF VALUES

STUDIED CLASSICS TO REVEAL GOD

'KNEW' THROUGH SCHOLASTICISM (RELIANCE ON
ACCEPTED AUTHORITY & DIVINELY-INSPIRED REASON)

LARGELY ILLITERATE

BELIEVED THAT ROLES WERE DIVINELY
ESTABLISHED AND ETERNAL

IMPORTANCE OF HUMILITY

Renaissance

Celebrated the beauty of the physical world,
and the acquisition of beautiful things

Attention on here and now

Believed in the inherent goodness of Man

The universe is comprehensible via the intellect

Man as the measure of all things

Studied the classics in order to understand
human nature

'Knew' through empiricism (observation &
experiment)

Valued learning

Believed in the possibility of improvement of
the human condition

Believed that the fullest development of the
individual pleases God

These three ideas from the Renaissance:

1. That the physical world is 'real'
2. That it operates by consistent principles, and
3. That Man is capable of discovering these

led to **the Scientific Revolution** (aka *the Age of Enlightenment*) in which the laws governing the operation of the physical universe were discovered

...this led to **the Industrial Revolution** (which applied these laws to manufacturing & production)

...and this led to **our modern consumer society**

The Renaissance fundamentally changed our views towards both the value and the purpose of being educated

Where the medieval ideals had been **the Knight** and **the Saint** (the warrior and the holy man)...



the new ideal introduced by the Renaissance was ***The Educated Gentleman***: one who was committed to the continual development of an informed and educated mind. (We still call someone who aspires to these ideals "***a Renaissance Man***")

We retained this social ideal until the 20th century – when it was replaced by *the Expert, the Wealthy, Successful Businessman* and *the Celebrity*



'expert' in economics Milton Friedman



'successful businessman' Donald Trump



Who the fuck are these people?

How do you 'mentally picture' the ideal to which you aspire? – and what are the implications for your life choices that result from this ideal?



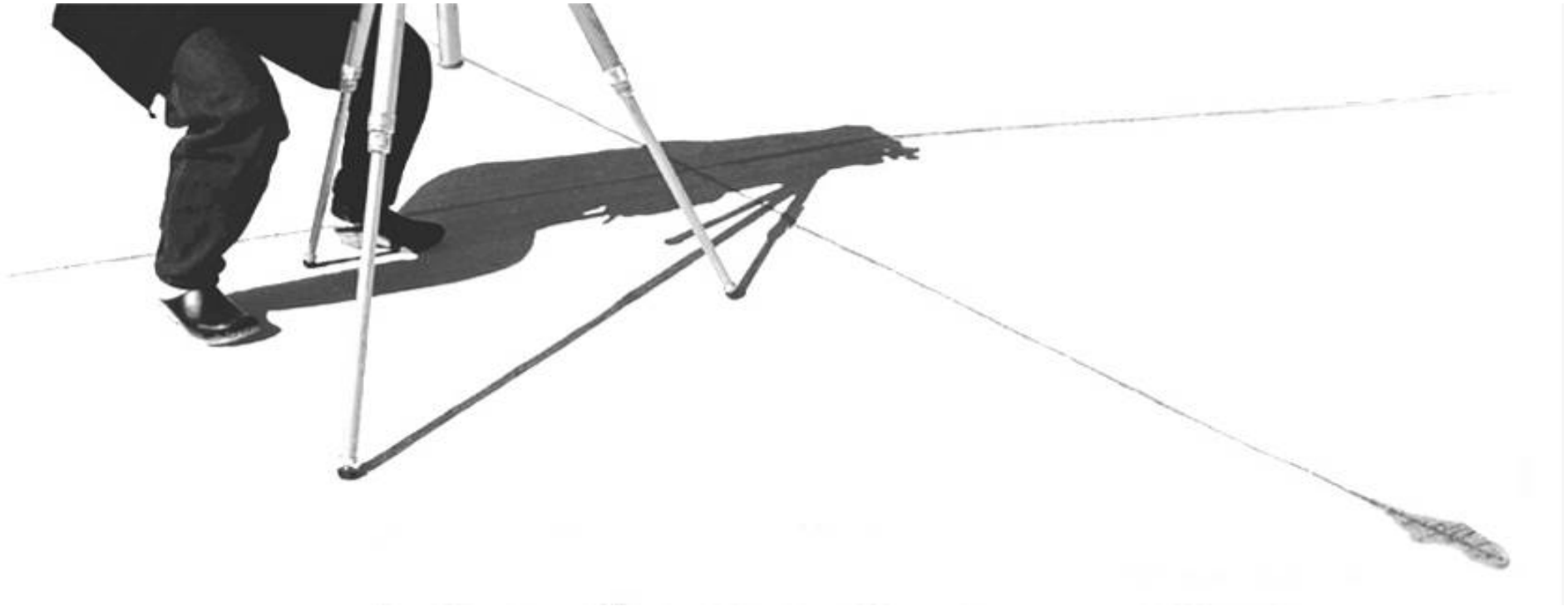
In addition to their impact on our life choices, the narratives implicit in our definitions ('mental pictures') also shape our attitudes and behaviours in the world around us.

Drawn from our memory and imagination, history & culture, popular entertainment and advertising – our mental pictures for everything we encounter 'out there' (and the largely unconscious judgements they subtly promote) are the basis for most of our (supposedly) rational and objective decisions. Like the soldiers concealed inside the Trojan Horse, hidden within our mental pictures for *Female, Homosexual, Fat, Black, Chav, Arab* or *Jew* are powerful cognitive reflexes that influence our perceptions – and therefore our judgements – about the things they describe.

It is worth noting that many of our most potent negative stereotypes are actually reflections of things we fear and detest within **ourselves** – because they threaten the self-image we need in order to maintain the belief that we are 'good enough'. To protect ourselves, we subconsciously project these characteristics onto *Others* where they can be safely despised and persecuted. (If we need to be wealthy to feel 'good enough', we will oppose social programmes; if our self-esteem depends on being a 'real' Man, we will feel despise homosexuals.)

By battering women, bashing gays, belittling children, blaming immigrants, or by supporting policies that punish the poor & vulnerable, we are trying to convince ourselves that 'We' are superior to 'Them' and are therefore among Life's winners.

This isn't politics, it's exorcism – and it's been known to kill.



Thank you very much

Rutherford

Rutherford's website: <http://www.theshadowofthephotographer.co.uk/>