

Enlightenment Historiography

HST 300
Fall 2009
Professor Lavender

Readings:

- Giambattista Vico, *The New Science* (1725)
- Edward Gibbon, *The Decline And Fall of The Roman Empire* (1776, 1781)
- Leopold von Ranke, "Author's Preface," to *The History of the Reformation in Germany* (1839-47)

Approaching Enlightenment Historians...

- Classical Historiography
 - transition from "storytelling" to use of documents (especially for Tacitus, who had access to Roman imperial archives)
 - but main focus was on the meaning of Being Greek (or Athenian, or Roman)

Approaching Enlightenment Historians...

- Medieval and Renaissance Historiography
 - Dominated by Church history (ecclesiastical histories)
 - But with Renaissance, "rebirth" of secular histories
 - Machiavelli's political histories
 - Ibn Khaldun's "scientific" histories
 - and the emergence of an actual "historical method"
 - Jean Bodin

Approaching Enlightenment Historians...

- What happens after the Renaissance:
 - in response to the discoveries of the Renaissance (New World, re-discovery of the mathematical and scientific worldview of the East – both China and the Islamic world)
 - focus on science over faith
 - Scientific Revolution
 - Enlightenment

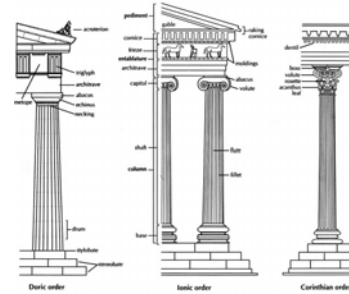
Enlightenment Historiography

- What is the Enlightenment?
 - Period mostly in the 18th century
 - Humanist reaction against the centrality of The Church during the Middle Ages
 - Partly an outcome of the Protestant Reformation (and the excesses of the Counterreformation)
 - Partly the rediscovery of the Classical and Islamic traditions
 - Partly intellectual development, as "The Age of Reason" (scientific thought)
 - Partly economic (the "free market," publishing industries, etc.)

Major events of the Enlightenment

- Revolutions & Political Systems
 - English ("Glorious," 1688), American (1776), French (1789)
 - Establishment of republics (First Spanish, etc.)
 - Constitutional Monarchies based on "Social Contracts"
- Intellectual Breakthroughs
 - Science
 - Sir Isaac Newton, *Philosophiæ Naturalis Principia Mathematica* (1687)
 - Diderot's *Encyclopédie* (1751-1772, and on)
 - Arts
 - Neoclassicism in art and architecture (see images on next slides)
 - Novels of satire and Bildungsroman (coming-of-age)
 - Laurence Sterne, *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman* (1759-1769)
 - Voltaire, *Candide* (1759)
 - Rousseau, *Emile; or, On Education* (1762)
 - Goethe, *Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship* (1795-96)
 - Society
 - Printing, Café culture, Lodges, Salons
 - Adam Smith, *The Wealth of Nations* (1776)
- After-effects of the Reformation
 - Rise of "deism": Belief that reason and observation of natural world alone prove the existence of a supreme creator (a "divine watchmaker") who does not directly intervene in human affairs through such means as answering prayers, performing miracles, or providing revelations.

Neoclassicism



Neoclassicism



The U.S. Capitol Building, Washington, DC (1793-1830)

Neoclassicism



Cass Gilbert, US Supreme Court Building, Washington DC (1928 - 1935)

Neoclassicism



Thomas Jefferson, Monticello, near Charlottesville, VA (1769-1784 and 1796-1809)

Neoclassicism



Jacques-Louis David, *The Death of Socrates* (1787)

Neoclassicism



Jacques-Louis David, *Oath of the Horatii* (1784-85)

Neoclassicism



Jacques-Louis David, *Death of Marat* (1793)

So the Enlightenment...

- Fosters a desire to make inquiries scientific
 - What is Science?
 - What is scientific method?
- OBJECTIVITY as goal, even for historians

Enlightenment Style

- Enlightenment historians wrote broad accounts of social and cultural epochs.
 - with the goal of identifying the nature of human history
 - patterns in it
 - natural bases of human behavior
 - scientific OBJECTIVE approach

Voltaire (François-Marie Arouet) (1694 – 1778):

- French *philosophe*, satirist, essayist, historian
- Saw history as a universal human experience
 - even the poor and weak HAVE history
- The job of the historian was to understand the social and moral aspects of the past.
 - and to explain the fundamental natural bases of human development
- Voltaire rejects religion and God's role in shaping the outcome of history
- Human life is not destined or controlled by greater beings (thus a "humanist")

Giovanni Battista Vico (1668–1744)

- Neapolitan philosopher, historian, and jurist
- Goal was to recognize in history meaningful general patterns.
- Vico best-known for *verum factum* principle
 - first formulated in 1710 in *De Italorum Sapientia*.
 - truth is verified through creation or invention and not, as per Descartes, through observation:
 - "The criterion and rule of the true is to have made it. Accordingly, our clear and distinct idea of the mind cannot be a criterion of the mind itself, still less of other truths. For while the mind perceives itself, it does not make itself."
 - SO: history is what the human mind constructs of the past, NOT the past itself.

Vico's cycles of History

- Civilizations develop in a recurring cycle (*ricorso*) of three ages:
 - the divine,
 - the heroic,
 - and the human.
- In each of these stages, the way that we communicate shapes the age

Vico's Divine Age

- Divine Age Language:
 - we use metaphor
 - God is our father
 - we are God's children
 - we are God's family

Vico's Heroic Age

- Heroic Age Language (Poetic):
 - we use metonymy and synecdoche
 - -metonymy: using one word to represent a collective larger meaning
 - "The pen is mightier than the sword": pen is a metonym for "writing" and sword is a metonym for "violence".
 - synecdoche:
 - A part of something is used for the whole
 - » "threads" for clothing, "wheels" for car
 - The whole is used for a part
 - "body" for the trunk of the body, "the Pentagon" for the top-ranking generals in the Pentagon building
 - The species is used for the genus
 - "kleenex" for facial tissue, "coke" for soda
 - The genus is used for the species
 - "milk" for cow's milk
 - The stuff of which something is made is used for the thing
 - "ivories" for piano keys, "plastic" for credit card
- In the Heroic age, "God" then represents that which humans cannot comprehend, or do, or see; "Man" represents humans.
 - and God acts THROUGH heroes.

Vico's Human Age

- In the Human age:
 - We use irony
 - a figure of speech in which there is a gap or incongruity between what a speaker or a writer says, and what is understood.
 - H. W. Fowler (in *Modern English Usage*):
 - "Irony is a form of utterance that postulates a double audience, consisting of one party that hearing shall hear and shall not understand, and another party that, when more is meant than meets the ear, is aware, both of that 'more' and of the outsider's incomprehension."
 - Example: In June, 2005, the State of Virginia Employment Agency, which handles unemployment compensation, announced that they would lay off 400 employees for lack of work, because unemployment is so low in the state.
 - THUS: God is only messing with us.
 - And that sense of abandonment leads to what Vico termed "barbarism of reflection,"
 - and civilization descends once more into the poetic (heroic) era.

Vico's Cycles

- These cycles represent Vico's concept of "ideal eternal history."

Edward Gibbon (1737 - 1794)

- English historian
 - probably the most important historian since Tacitus.
 - remembered mostly for his magnum opus, *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* (published between 1776 and 1788)
- The first "modern" historian:
 - although he claims that history is not a very noble profession
 - He describes history as "indeed, little more than the register of the crimes, follies, and misfortune of mankind."
 - (Thank you -- some nice Vico-an ironic language there, Mr. Gibbon!)

Gibbon as historian

- He emulates the Greek and Roman Classical Historians in terms of content:
 - "Wars, and the administration of public affairs, are the principal subjects of history."
- But he also argues that "history... undertakes to record the transaction of the past, for the instruction of future ages"

Gibbon as historian

- And his METHODS are modern (dependence on primary sources)
- Never content with secondhand accounts when the primary sources were accessible.
 - "I have always endeavoured, to draw from the fountainhead; my curiosity, as well as a sense of duty, has always urged me to study the originals; and if they have sometimes eluded my search, I have carefully marked the secondary evidence on whose faith a passage or a fact were reduced to depend."

Gibbon as historian

- Gibbon espouses no dogma of natural and inevitable progress in history
 - he is not a historicist
 - he is an anti-historicist
 - although human passions are timeless, circumstances are never the same.

Scientific History

- At the end of the 18th century
 - archaeology and philology (study of ancient texts and languages) emerge as SCIENCES.
 - which contributes to the rise of critical objective history as an academic discipline.
 - Father of the new objective school: Leopold von Ranke
 - Rankeans made history writing into a profession and founded the formal academic study of history

Leopold von Ranke (1795-1886)

- reliance on primary sources
- emphasis on narrative history
 - and especially international politics (*Aussenpolitik*)
- commitment to writing history "as it essentially [was]" (*wie es eigentlich gewesen*).

Ranke, Theories, and Laws

- Ranke did not believe general theories could cut across time and space.
 - Instead, only primary sources tell us what happened
 - "My understanding of 'leading ideas' is simply that they are the dominant tendencies in each century. These tendencies, however, can only be described; they cannot, in the last resort, be summed up in a concept."
- He had no interest in learning the laws which govern history
 - empiricism over philosophy
 - empiricism: "all human knowledge ultimately comes from the senses and from experience"

According to Ranke, the historian must be old

- From his diaries, January 1877:
 - “The proverb tells us that poets are born. Not only in the arts, but even in some scholarly fields, young men develop into full bloom, or at least show their original energy. Musicians and mathematicians have the expectation of attaining eminence in early years. But a historian must be old, not only because of the immeasurable extent of his field of study, but because of the insight into the historical process which a long life confers, especially under changing conditions.
 - It would hardly be bearable for him to have only a short span of experience. For his personal development requires that great events complete their course before his eyes, that others collapse, that new forms be attempted.”
- (Every year, this seems truer to me.....)

Next Time:

- Historiography in the Romantic Period (Hegel, Macaulay, Marx, Plekhanov)
- Also, Study Guide for Midterm will be on website next week (even though we have no class as it is a CSI Monday).
 - Midterm exam is: **10/13/2009**