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HUM 3306: History of Ideas--The Age of Enlightenment to the Age of Anxiety
 Summer 2012

LEARNING ENHANCEMENT SITES:

Here, at the top of some of the unit lectures, will be a variety of outside videos (some serious; some satiric). You are not responsible for them, but please click on the links, pictures, or icons for the perspectives the videos offer. This is an experimental feature of the course, to be integrated more thoroughly in future versions.

Turning Points in History - The Reformation 2 min 27 sec - Sep 29, 2009

Turning Points in History - Scientific Revolution 3 min 55 sec - Sep 29, 2009

THE PROTESTANT REFORMATION (1500-1650) + THE SCIENTIFIC REVOLUTION (1550-1700) lead to THE ENLIGHTENMENT (1700-1800)

The e-text readings for this week and this “prof” lecture and the next one (on the Enlightenment) provide the historical/cultural context for our first major book of the course, John Locke’s *Second Treatise*. The significance of Locke’s work cannot be understood without recognizing that it was written during the transition between older (Middle Ages/Renaissance) notions of social hierarchy and the emergence of newer more egalitarian ones. When you read about the Great Chain of Being below, keep in mind that it reflects the pre-seventeenth-century European hierarchical social structure and supported politically conservative ideas such as divine right monarchy and the power and influence of social betters such as the aristocracy/nobility--in other words, those lords and gentlemen who had land, titles, and privilege. The Great Chain simply begins to fade during the eighteenth century with the Enlightenment and French Revolution (at the end of the eighteenth century). And it is obliterated by modern science and political reform (democracy) during the nineteenth century.

First, let’s get a sense of the vast sweep of history:

<i>Historical Era Labels (rough dates)</i>	<i>Medieval (900-1300)</i>	<i>Renaissance (1300-1650)</i>	<i>Enlightenment (1680-1780)</i>	<i>Romantic (1780-1830)</i>	<i>Victorian (1830-1900)</i>	<i>Modern</i>
<i>Buildings & Work</i>	castles: feudal relations	→→→→→	→→→→→	factories: wage slavery & /industrial capitalism	→→→→→	malls: consumerism
<i>Human Waste & Sanitation</i>	into the moat or woods	→→→→→	gutters	→→→→→	sewers	flush toilets
<i>Tools of War</i>	swords	→→→→→	guns/cannon	→→→→→	Gatling gun	rockets
<i>Coffee</i>		why the	urban	→→→→→	→→→→→	Beat

		Renaissance was so creative	coffee/newspaper culture			Generation
Famous, Artists & Thinkers	Chaucer	Shakespeare	Ben Franklin	Keats	Dickens	Andy Warhol

Some of my items above are intended to be whimsical, but that said: you'd know a lot about cultural history if you really understood the castle/factory/mall sequence! I.e. in very condensed short-hand:

--castle = feudal, hierarchical relations identified with the Medieval period/preindustrial world; security of identity but little autonomy or entrepreneurial drive.

--factory = Modern period--Industrial Revolution producing many goods that "improve" our lives; you choose to work in a factory freely ... its entrepreneurial from both worker/owner ends (capitalism); but you also quite likely become a "wage slave"... and are alienated from Nature. The face-to-face relations of the preindustrial world are replaced by general alienation and a bureaucratic culture.

--mall = consumer culture in the contemporary world; the "self" is comprised of what it buys and etc.

Now, ponder the Medieval to Renaissance theological worldview that preceded the scientific worldview that informs the 18th-century Enlightenment era. The main component of the former worldview is known as the Great Chain of Being, which organized all of nature/the cosmos by hierarchy rather than scientific objectivity:

[E-text: Great Chain of Being "Wiki" article & illustration](#)

- The hierarchy covers the entirety of creation and being(s), from rocks and turnips (yes, that's right; even vegetables are ranked) to angels. It is divinely determined, which means power relations and positions within the hierarchy cannot be questioned.
- Supernatural God, although "above" fallen nature, nonetheless intervenes or extends Godhood everywhere. The vast spread of creation that falls below the total perfection of God becomes by degrees less perfect and comparatively inferior—man has a weakened degree of God's reason; animals lack reason (and women, being daughters of Eve, have less reason than men!). Some minerals—diamonds—have more "virtue" (a Renaissance term that combines our sense of "power" and "excellence" and "status") than others; trees are better than shrubs; horses are better than swine, etc. Satan is defined as "evil" but also as the final nadir, the complete antithesis of God's plentitude.
- The self is viewed in terms of caste-like, status-quo hierarchies (king...knight...peasant); not capitalistic possessive selfhood—in which one, as a free entrepreneur, acquires property/wealth and is a free-agent in one's destiny.

Let's now more methodically distinguish what the three cultural period labels--the Protestant

Reformation (1500-1650), the Scientific Revolution (1550-1700), and the Enlightenment (1700-1800)--mean. Note that these labels designate cultural forces and periods that are chronologically sequential and yet also overlapping by and large. Read the brief "Wiki" articles below, which provide important background to understanding the Enlightenment era (some of the long lists within these "Wiki" articles can be skimmed):

E-text: "Wiki" Reformation

E-text: "Wiki" Scientific Revolution

E-text: "Wiki" Enlightenment

Below is a summation of key points, explaining how the Protestant Reformation and the Scientific Revolution set up the Enlightenment era and, in turn, our own Modern or Contemporary "Age of Anxiety". Please keep in mind that the focus is on the "West" and its cultural traditions and issues; time frames and eras would be different were we looking at Middle-Eastern/Eastern/African cultures. That said, an important (and largely negative) aspect of the Western tradition is imperialism, which this course highlights through the story of Equiano (after you read John Locke) and the essays of Franz Fanon at the end of the semester (not included in the summer version of this course).

1. In the Medieval/Renaissance periods in Europe, God, although out of nature, intervenes everywhere (supernatural miracles) or structures nature: i.e., the Great Chain of Being.
2. With the emergence of scientific experimentation and discovery in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, God is no longer needed to explain natural phenomena: a cannon ball goes up and down, not because God wills objects to (eventually) fall to the ground, but because gravity compels, through the laws of physics, objects to do so.
3. Social practices develop in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries--out of the non-theological study of government or (for example) from the rise of insurance based on statistics (you worry less about your barn burning as an act of demons/witches or godly punishment if you can replace your barn thru insurance)--that heighten a sense of secular control and predictability.
4. John Calvin, French lawyer living in Geneva, publishes *Institutes of Religion* in 1536. He insists upon the logical consequences of perceiving God as omnipotent/omniscient: God knows who will be elected to salvation and who will suffer eternal damnation; God cannot be coerced or cajoled into extending His grace to you and you cannot earn it (to say you deserve His grace, to be saved, is to restrict His power); and so in the "Book of Life," as it were, your name is already written or not written: your fate is predestined.
5. Martin Luther (1483-1546), a German monk, publishes his famous "95 Theses": he challenges Medieval Catholic idea of indulgences (that you could, in effect, purchase redemption). Salvation comes not by good works or individual merit, but by faith in Christ's loving, redemptive sacrifice.
6. Consequence of Protestantism: preoccupation with selfhood and anxiety about selfhood:
 - there is no guarantee that you are saved (your feelings of grace may be a delusion).
 - God, being rational, may so ordain it that those who are saved manifest moral behavior (although moral behavior, does not earn salvation).

--and so, psychologically, you will feel compelled to act morally and dutifully, thinking that such suggests that you *might* be saved.

--you will strive hard in the world, hoping that your success is a reflection that God loves you.

--but you never really know. You are restless.

7. The dark side of all of above. Even as you become liberated from hierarchy and become more individualistic, mobile, and a creator of your own destiny, you also become more anxious about the fate of your soul and, in your restless energy, try to fill up yourself with endless acquisition of consumer goods. You become more individualistic, but your individualism is also defined by modern marketing that spies out how your inward desires fall into a particular selling niche.

8. The modern marketing state is matched by a modern bureaucratic state, which, to guarantee order (in the collapse of tradition, hierarchy, and collective consensus), likes to have lots of rules and regulations. Ponder how many times each day you must attend to some "rule."