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HUM 3306 (online): History of Ideas--The Age of Enlightenment to the Age of Anxiety
Spring 2007/ Profs. Harvey & Fantina

FINAL EXAM: SYNTHESIS ESSAY

--Please note: You will not get feedback because this is being submitted at the end of the semester. Do NOT email asking how you did; wait until the official posting of grades, and if you then have a question about your class grade or grade on the exam, get in touch with Prof. Fantina, the earlier part of Summer A term, through his FIU email: richard.fantina@fiu.edu.

WHEN:

- The Synthesis Essay is due on April 24th, no later than the dawn of April 25th.
- The Synthesis Essay question will be posted on the online syllabus on April 16th.
- Turn it in as a single-spaced WebCT attachment, with the title YourlastnameYourfirstnameFinal.

WHO:

- You write it--no Wikipedia excerpts, no snippets from a website here, a website there. You! No outside sources are allowed; plagiarism will conclude in an "F" for the course.
- However, you may consult with your fellow classmates about pertinent ideas or approaches in the Discussion Forum, and a special section will be set up accordingly, starting on April 16th. If you consult in the Discussion Forum, do NOT post paragraphs you anticipate sending in as part of your essay and ask for feedback; keep the discussion to the "I was confused by what the professor said in his lectures about Darwinian evolution being totally random" sort or the "Clearly, Locke and Marx place a great deal emphasis on the importance of labor. Locke, however, does not seem to think that labor should be self-fulfilling, as Marx did" sort or the "I could not get Marx's Communist Manifesto, but the professor's summary helped" sort.
- Ultimately, of course, the essay is yours so you have to devise your own approach to the question.
- Do not string together paraphrases from the online lectures. Do not rely upon the online lectures overly much; you will not succeed if you just mimic the lectures.

HOW:

- The essay should be between two (full!) and four pages SINGLE-SPACED. DO NOT PAD—this is a bad strategy. Especially do not have an opening paragraph that spins-its-tires in abstract profundity: "As long as humankind has endured, the ages have been witness to...". Get to the point, so your orientation/focus is immediately known: "As we move from non-technological society to highly technological, job-

specialized society, it is no surprise that xxxxx has been xxxx. Great thinkers such as aaa, bbb, ccc, and ddd help us see that xxxx."

--You should have several brief quotes from our texts to show that your ideas are anchored in specific texts (showing us that you've read them!), not just a product of your generalized memory of the course's texts. Do not, however, use up too much space quoting.

--Effective organization, a decent style and clean grammar/punctuation, and lots and lots of thoughtfulness are expected.

--About organization: generally speaking, it is best to discuss each author/text in turn (1st 5th devote to Locke, 2nd 5th devoted to Equiano, 3rd 5th devoted to Wordsworth, etc.), with comparative loop-backs (e.g., "unlike Equiano, Wordsworth does not define himself in terms of economics; he instead is searching for..."). However, you also need to show you have synthesized our readings/the issues ... five separate mini-essays on five authors, strung together, will not be highly rewarded.

WHAT: Choose one of the questions to be posted on the online syllabus on April 16.

--Below is a question that will not be posted on April 16, but which will give you a sense of the type of question that will be asked. It is followed by an "A" final essay that a student wrote for the course in a previous semester.

--Question: Concepts of the "self" or a sense of "selfhood"--in respect to ethics, metaphysics, society, psychology, and artistic production--are partially or largely dependent on historical/cultural context. This course is called "History of Ideas..." but it could also be called "A History of Selfhood..." or "The Rise of Individualism..." Discuss, using at least four of our main authors/texts. Thoughtful interweaving of several of the authors excerpted in the Humanistic Tradition volume will be considered an asset to your essay, grade-wise.

--Sample Synthesis Essay response to above Question. Please note: this student essay does not reference the Humanistic Tradition volume because a different history-of-culture textbook was then being used. It also refers to a specific essay on Marx which you did not read for this class. The essay is not flawless, but it successfully:

--1. covers four major authors/texts with sufficient specificity and insight that there is no doubt that the student has a sophisticated understanding of each (i.e. isn't just paraphrasing lectures).

--2. has an overall point and coherence. It is more than a sum of its parts (i.e. isn't just four mini-essays).

--3. the style falters here and there, but overall the essay is very lucid and well-written (i.e., the student composed the essay, and then revised it before submitting it).

--4. overall: the essay reflects a non-passive, active and curious engagement with the themes and issues/readings of the course.

Throughout this course, the class has seen a chronological ascent of the history of ideas that emphasize 'individualism', which provide explanations for the point that society is at today. Originating in Italy, it is argued that the Renaissance period through its experimentation of the arts and sciences, unleashed a mode of inquisitive and rational thinking, which eventually lead to its pinnacle in the Enlightenment period.

The Age of Enlightenment, which took place in Western Europe, was a radical period in history that rejected the old order of superstition and blind

socialization. Society was becoming increasingly curious and questioned all things that had no readily available explanations and validation; and thus, they wanted to break free of their mental fetters that were a result of unquestioned, social indoctrination.

Consequently, society looked to objective rationality and science to provide logical validations of the world, and went so far as to extend those modes of thinking to analyze the nature of humankind. Society used the Enlightenment ideas of rationality and science to achieve the 'perfectibility of man.' But consequent and paradoxical of the "Age of Reason" was the development of the bureaucratic, oppressive system that plagues Western society today. This paper will illustrate – using the works of John Locke's *The Second Treatise on Civil Government*, Olaudah Equiano's *The Life of Equiano, or Gustavus Vassa, the African*, Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, and Karl Marx's *Communist Manifesto* – how, from the 18th to 20th centuries, increasing individualism paradoxically led to increasing constriction.

The Age of Enlightenment lasted from about the 1700's to the 1800's, and embraced a specific set of ideals: the perfectibility of man; the importance of reason; human progress; rejection of monarchical and religious authority in favor of secularism; the discovery of the laws of nature, man and society; and the ability to uncover causality. However, the quest to achieve these ideals – to set man 'free' of oppression and 'free' of psychological confinement – placed man on an infinite quest for the 'truth,' and to uncover that 'truth' was through science and rational thinking. But as a result of the emphasis put on science and rationality, the world became increasingly impersonal, mechanic in its social discourse, and bureaucratized, which were materialized through the expanding capitalist system.

All these factors contributed to an ever-increasing aggressive socio-political and economic system, which both inspired and tormented people, and culminated in the Romantic Period. The Romantic Period was characterized by the melancholy search for interiority – the pursuit of intrinsic happiness in its most ideal nature. The combination of the features of the Enlightenment – science and rationality – along with the features of the Romantic Period – interiority and euphoria – culminated in today's antagonistic world – the battle to find oneself and one's happiness in a world dominated by systemic bureaucracy and hyper-capitalism. And the sentiments of each period are illustrated by the writings of their theorists and authors.

As a product of Enlightenment thinking, John Locke became one of the most famous thinkers to espouse the concepts of 'individualism' and the logical justifications for the 'state', i.e. government. And again, these ideas helped initiate the movement of people towards freedom of thought with all its rational faculties; but this freedom, simultaneously, gave rise to an era of anxiety as the world became overly obsessed with reason and rationality, and lost in the process the balance for self-awareness and illogical sensation. In his book, *The Second Treatise on Civil Government*, Locke begins with the idea that men naturally live in a state of nature, with "perfect freedom to order their actions, and dispose of their possessions and persons as they think fit, within the bounds of the law of Nature, without asking leave or depending upon the will of any other man [,]" and that the state of nature is "[a] state also of equality" (8).

He continues in explaining how men acquire property: through the individualistic action of extending oneself – and thus one's property – into nature, and the product of that labor becomes one's private property. Labor for Locke, is the source of all value and all that is valuable; and as such, labor is the key distinction between property that is held in private, and property that is held in common. But the very extension of one's labor into the state of nature in order to "own" property is limited. Locke asserts that one can only own as much as he can utilize; spoilage is disallowed, and is actually an infringement onto a neighbor's share. But Locke makes an important distinction between that which can be hoarded and that which can't, which leads him to justify capitalism, an ideology that is seemingly contradictory to his initial arguments.

Locke adds that perishable goods can be hoarded, but not wasted; in that, one can labor over the cultivation of perishable goods as much as he is able to, as long as he or someone else uses those cultivated goods before they spoil. Man can choose to trade those surplus goods before their spoilage with some other commodity he would prefer to have, give them away, or trade his surplus perishable items with something imperishable and durable, like gold.

Through Locke's reasoning there is an assumption that there lies an abundance of goods to nourish each man, and it is each man's right to do so; thus no man is allowed to let goods waste, and should he do so, he is infringing upon another man's share, which is punishable. However, with the invention of money, many of Locke's initial assertions are compromised. Today, the very invention of money – a product that is able to be hoarded – has caused vast discrepancies in the wealth and power of people, and in fact, the driving force behind the machine of today's society, is money; which is both hoarded and squandered, and used as a tool of oppression to control the behavior and workings of society, and also deprives men's fellow neighbors of their Lockean right to "life, health, liberty or possessions" (9).

Enlightenment ideas emerged as an avenue to free people's minds and in effect their bodies, from the tyranny Church and King, through rational thinking. However, this mode of thought – in all its Lockean fashion – has developed into a society that in theory believes that labor is valuable, and the result of labor is the acquisition of money and worldly possessions, which make men respectable. But in reality, labor is undervalued – as a result of powerful men maneuvering through the inefficiencies and biases of the bureaucratic system – and does not promise the acquisition of wealth and possessions; but this social indoctrination that tells society labor will bring about wealth and happiness helps to validate the system, and continues to torment individuals in their battle to find oneself and one's happiness in a world dominated by systemic bureaucracy and hyper-capitalism. This movement from the Age of Enlightenment to the Age of Anxiety is captured by the writings of Equiano, Shelley, and Marx.

Olaudah Equiano's *The Life of Olaudah Equiano, or Gustavus Vassa, the African* was published in 1789; just as the Enlightenment period was giving way to the Romantic Era, which took place from about 1790 to 1830. Equiano's narrative recounts the atrocities of slavery that he witnessed, but it also subtly illustrates Equiano's inner battle: to belong to a nation, to belong to a people, and to define himself accordingly. Besides depicting the barbarism of slavery, this theme of belonging and identity permeates the heart of the book. Both these sentiments are products of Enlightenment ideas, but also of Romantic thinking. On the one hand, Equiano champions the premise that all men are endowed with certain inalienable rights like liberty (ideals of Lockean philosophy), which slavery impedes in its very essence. Equiano support the Lockean premise that "[t]he natural liberty of a man is to be free from any superior power on earth, and not to be under the will of legislative authority of man" (17).

But on the other hand, Equiano has an intrinsic battle to define himself – whether he is African or British – and find 'his' peace and 'his' happiness in the process; all sentiments of Romanticism. In one section of the book, Equiano illustrates his desire to identify himself with the English: "From the various scenes I had beheld on ship-board, I soon grew a stranger to terror of every kind, and was, in that respect at least, almost an Englishman. . . I not only felt myself quite easy with these new countrymen, but relished their society and manners. I no longer looked upon them as spirits, but as men superior to us; and therefore I had the stronger desire to resemble them, to imbibe their spirit, and imitate their manners. I therefore embraced every occasion of improvement; and every new thing that I observed I treasured up in my memory" (50-51). Thus, Equiano experiences the outer battle against slavery, as well as the inner battle to find himself, and this situation is parallel to the circumstances of many people today, in which they are struggling to survive in society's tightly knit system, while simultaneously searching within themselves for their happiness.

Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* further depicts the battle between Enlightenment thinking and Romantic ideals. Blinded by his passion for natural philosophy and science, Victor Frankenstein's idealism impels him to bring to life a pieced together and inanimate body. But once the creature comes to life, Victor "[u]nable to endure the aspect of . . . the wretch, the filthy daemon to whom [he] had given life [,]" continues throughout the remainder of the story seeking understanding of his actions, of himself, of the monster, and of the world, and accordingly turns inward to achieve that end (56, 80).

Frankenstein ingeniously fuses the ideals of Enlightenment with ideals of Romanticism in one story. Victor begins the novel with his thirst for scientific knowledge and progress of humanity. He exemplifies the belief in the unlimited potential of man, so much so as to become 'God' and wield the ability to create life. But after doing so, Victor instinctively realizes the havoc his creation would cause, and roams the rest of the novel

in misery and remorse. Like the Enlightenment ideas, Victor's creation, has spun out of control, giving birth to new and unforeseen tragic forces. The scientist has concocted a world he can no longer control. Or, as Marx eloquently puts it, "a society that has conjured up such gigantic means of production, is like the sorcerer, who is no longer able to control the powers of the nether world whom he has called up by his spells" (Marx qtd in Macionis and Benokraitis, 53).

What distinguishes Marx from perhaps all other theorists is his ability to meticulously, and artfully capture the angst and dialectical forces of the modern world dominated by industrial capitalism. The Age of Anxiety is seen most vividly in the writings of Karl Marx. Of his writings, it is clear, that the *Communist Manifesto* poetically surveys the very nature of an age replete with angst. For Marx, the modern capitalist system which engulfs all social relations is characterized by incessant "revolutionizing of production, uninterrupted disturbance of all social conditions, everlasting uncertainty and agitation ..." (Marx qtd in Macionis and Benokraitis, 52). It is a world in which ideas, cultural forms, commodities and technology "become antiquated before they can ossify"; and consequently, "all that is solid melts into air" (Marx qtd in Macionis and Benokraitis, 53).

Witnessing not only the horrors of the Industrial Age, but also an ensemble of social relations characterized by contradiction and perpetual motion, Marx is able to illuminate the very essence of the paradox of progress. For Marx, rationality, science, politics and entrepreneurial manipulation all coalesce to create the most productive economic system known to man; and yet, it surrenders human beings to relations of "naked self interest" and "egotistical calculation" (Marx qtd in Macionis and Benokraitis, 51). Human beings are now measured by "exchange value" and systems of exploitation in previous ages are now replaced by what Marx calls, "naked, shameless, direct, brutal exploitation" (Marx qtd in Macionis and Benokraitis, 51). The instability of the times has frequently made human beings seem as though they have been once again tossed in a world subservient on nature. It seems as though we have entered famine and starvation once again; why answers Marx: "Because there is too much civilization, too much means of subsistence, too much industry, too much commerce" (Marx qtd in Macionis and Benokraitis, 53).

From the Renaissance to the Age of Anxiety, the authors in this course carefully elucidate through their writings the relationship between ideas and social relations. They have illustrated that ideas themselves are weapons for change and that our modern world is infused with the various strands of thought intricately woven in the fleeting concept we call time.