First topic of semester: Comparing the American and French Revolutions

Archeology:
- Two revolutions
  - Two visions of “democracy”
  - Two visions of “human nature”
    [Phil. Core: “Phil. of the Person”]

**Sister Revolutions:**

Primitive Innocence or Human Depravity?

HS041
Week 01 / Lecture 02
10 September 2004

NOTE: WE ARE BEGINNING AT THE END!!!

After the revolutions we will return to 1300.

Practical: Thanksgiving

Two reasons:
Begin with Familiar Stereotype:

American Optimism

vs.

Rest of world’s tired “pessimism”…

“Culture” (from Mary Douglas, Purity and Danger)

“A system or positive pattern in which ideas and values are tidily ordered.”

IDEAS AND MEANINGS INTER-RELATED WITH POLITICAL / MILITARY / ECONOMIC:

Anxiety? Trust? Fear?

Pessimism? Optimism?

Projections?

Prejudices?

Repressions?
IDEAS AND MEANINGS INTER-RELATED WITH POLITICAL / MILITARY / ECONOMIC:

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American Revolution (1776):
“human nature” is fundamentally corrupt, selfish, even depraved. Reason is fallible.
“Check and balance” it at every step of the way… Best authority is blocked (gridlocked?) authority.

French Revolution (1789):
“Liberate” [liber = free] them and they can be trusted to make the right decisions…
“Rational choice…”
Best authority is activist authority.
Carry out the General Will.

Key question for HS041:
What is the relationship between the individual and the community?

“Pre-modern” --- communitarian:
-- Understand the individual in terms of the whole

“Modern” --- individualist:
-- Understand the whole as a composite of individuals

Modern society:
“democracy” / individual rights / representative government… Sounds familiar???

but a little more complicated than that!!!

Activist judges???
USA/French SHARE: Common belief in representative governments based on popular sovereignty and the will of the majority

DIFFER: Two conceptions of unity:
American: conflict / dissent is good
French: no place for dissent --- a unified General Will

Two revolutions based on opposed visions of “human nature.”

American Revolution (1776):
Human depravity
Prevent the tyranny of the majority.

French Revolution (1789):
Primitive innocence
Enforce the General Will.

The Terror of 1792-1794
A desperate effort to stabilize subjective individualism into a community where they will be interconnected and care for one another.

Begin with American:
Gridlock against the tyranny of the majority.
• Dunn’s explanation:
  • 1. Americans were “men of experience”
    • what does that mean exactly???
  • 2. Not deluded about “human nature”
    • what does that mean exactly???
  • 3. English tradition: government v. opposition
  • 4. Believed: reason essentially fallible
    • they were modest/pragmatic, not utopian
  • 5. Believed: value of factions
    • resist concentration of power

Note the implicit culture: ideas and values
Sufficiently deep archeology of American mindset???

What’s missing: Calvinism

John Calvin 1509 - 1564

Doctrine of “Total Depravity”

• The one who most thoroughly knows his/her total depravity has the best knowledge of oneself.
• Leads to total despair/hopelessness.
• Opens the way for total dependence on God’s grace.
• Calvin: “Our condemnation is not set before us in the law, that we may abide in it, but that having fully known our misery, we may be led to Christ, who is sent to be a physician to the sick, a deliverer to the captives, a comforter to the afflicted.”
  [Commentaries on Romans]

Calvin exported to America

Calvinism in America:

The Puritans

“Thus it is that natural men are held in the hand of God, over the pit of hell; they have deserved the fiery pit, and are already sentenced to it; and God is dreadfully provoked, his anger is as great towards them as to those that are actually suffering the extremities of the terrors of his wrath in hell, and they have done nothing in the least to appease or change that anger, neither has God in the least bound by any promise to hold them up one moment, the devil is waiting for them, hell is gaping for them, the flames gather and flash about them, and would him by hold them; and meanwhile the fire is raging within their own hearts, is struggling to break out, and they have no interest in any Mediator, there are no means within reach that can be any security to them. In short, they have no interest, nothing in the world of, all that preserves them ever moment is the mere arbitrary will, and unceasing, unceasing forbearance of an enraged God.”
  ~from “Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God”

Jonathan Edwards (1703-1758)

NB: The “depravity” doctrine preserves God’s absolute sovereignty. God absolutely free to do what God wills.
  [Predestination]

Note also: Sounds depressing but is it more depressing than being told “in order to be saved you must do x, y, z...”??

Key for American democracy: vision of “human nature”

“The people” are not “good.”

The “majority will” Must not be allowed to tyrannize.

Keep in mind while reading Adams / Madison!!!
Behold, I fall before thy face,
My only refuge is thy grace,
No outward form can make me clean,
The leprosy lies deep within.

No bleeding bird nor bleeding beast,
No hyssop branch nor sprinkling priest,
Not running brook, nor flood, nor sea,
Can wash the dismal stain away.

from Psalm 51

Constitution of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts

John Adams 1735-1826
Constitutional Convention 2004

Abraham Lincoln:
Emancipation Proclamation
1 January 1863

Harry Truman
Executive Order: Desegregation of US Armed Forces
26 July 1948

1947: Inspection of African-American sailors on the U. S. S. Missouri as it brought
President Truman and his family back from their trip to Rio de Janeiro, Brazil.
SENATOR STEVEN A. TOLMAN, 49
DEMOCRAT OF BRIGHTON
YEARS IN LEGISLATURE, 9

"Is it OK for four judges to change 3,000 years of history?" Tolman wonders, referring to the 4-to-3 decision handed down in November.

Yet Tolman also worries about holding public referendums on issues involving minorities or unpopular groups.

"If we put a question on the ballot that state tax dollars should not be used to give prisoners dinner, that would pass too," he said.

Like Rogeness, Tolman said he feels that he has to ultimately decide for himself how to vote. If the voters don't like his decision, he said, they can vote him out of office.
The French:
A peculiar mixture of Classical / Science / Catholicism

• Dunn’s explanation for French:
  - No “English tradition” of government vs. opposition
  - No chance for “experience”
  - Thought was:
    - “simple and rational”;
    - “theorized in a vacuum”;
    - “naively thought”;
    - “utopian”

Sufficiently deep archeology of French mindset???

Three deep sources:
1) Enlightenment Classicism
2) Scientific Revolution
3) Catholicism

Classical: Jean-Jacques Rousseau

• THREE KEY IDEAS:
  - A) Original innocence
  - B) Social Compact
  - C) General Will
    - [la volonté générale]

“childhood” // “innocence” // “nature”

• 18th c. neo-Classicism
  Pre-Christian mythology
  Innocent “state of nature”

Jean-Honoré Fragonard
Diana and Endymion, c. 1753/1755

Jean-Honoré Fragonard
A Game of Horse and Rider, 1767/1773
a) “Original Innocence”
--- in the [mythical / classical?] “state of nature” we are innocent and transparent
--- “civilization” (society) corruptions us; we must wear masks and play roles
--- we need to “regenerate” ourselves – get back to primal innocence

b) “Social Contract”: the foundation of society is not given “in nature” --- rather, we create society by mutual agreement
--- NB: atomistic individuals come together to form society

--- Indefinite perfectibility
--- Arrested shortly after completion of “Sketch”
--- NB: Committed suicide as a free act rather than await execution
10

NB: Adams' contempt for Condorcet's idea of "The Infinite Perfectibility of Man" [inevitable progress]

Dissent and factions essential

Prevent tyranny of majority

over individual (minority) wills

Human nature/reason fallible

Dissent and factions not allowed

Contrary to idea of "social compact"

Human nature/reason both innocent and ever-progressing

Catholic: Abbé Sièyes

Catholic theology of "grace" and "nature"

Original Sin of Adam and Eve: corrupted human nature but not radically — i.e., not "depraved"

"Grace": not radically opposed to "nature"

Rather: "grace builds on nature" — transforms nature into its supernatural potential

Hence: "nature" is capable of being good

Hence: strong human institutions: monarchy, government, church

Abbé Sièyes: What is the Third Estate?

1. Mathematical view of society: atoms equidistant from center ["law"]

— "I imagine the law as being at the center of a large globe; we the citizens, without exception, stand equidistant from it and occupy equal places."

2. What should we do with "privileged orders" [nobility and clergy] who do not want to be stripped of privileges and become citizens like everyone else?

— "This is the equivalent of asking what place one wishes to assign to a malignant tumor that torment and undermines the strength of the body of a sick person. It must be neutralized."

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Déclaration des Droits de l'Homme

USA Bill of Rights: 10 Amendments

26 August 1789: Human Rights

Strong nation/society = Equal dignity:

"positive freedom": "freedom for...

"negative freedom": "freedom from...

25 September 1789: Immunity

Protect indiv. against state/majority

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Optimism: volatile mixture!

Always progressing …. “forced to be free”….. “neutralized”……

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21 January 1793: Louis Guillotined
Crime: “Crimes against the state”

28 October 1793: Marie-Antoinette Guillotined
Crime: “Promiscuity”

→ Contrast with “pessimism” of American →

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→ Contrast with “pessimism” of American →

Constitution of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts
Constitutional Convention 2004

John Adams 1735-1826

“Unity”

United in concrete: allegiance to THIS constitution
Factions / dissenting in visions
→ cf. Jefferson: necessity of parties

Unity is mathematical
Dissent not logically permitted
→ or else no “compact”
Activist?
Or check & balance against majority tyranny???

What is the human being “in the state of nature”?
What vision of negotiation between individual and community does your answer entail?
In the end: what is “pessimistic”? “Optimistic”?

The function of ideology is to cover up origins . . .

. . . and all origins are bloody.

History is against ideology …

History uncovers what has been covered;
redisCOVERs what has been purposely repressed.