Sister Revolutions:

Primitive Innocence
or
Human Depravity?

HS067
Week 13 / Lecture 01

4 December 2007
A turn to the “Third Estate” --- not just Popes and Kings [First and Second Estates] powerful: Third Estate: accumulation of wealth and power through commerce as merchants.
TWO KEY WORDS:

**REPRESENTATION**: “Making present
[re-presenting] what is not-present.”

**SOCIAL CONTRACT**: a contingent agreement
Jacques Louis David, *The Tennis Court Oath* (1791)

“Social Contract”

Archeology:

Two revolutions

↓

Two Enlightenment visions of “democracy”

↓

Two visions of “human nature”

[Phil. Core: “Phil. of the Person”]
Sister Revolutions thesis: two revolutions based on opposed visions of “human nature.”

**American Revolution (1776 [1789]):**

“human nature” is fundamentally corrupt, selfish, even depraved.

Reason – yes, but remember it is fallible.

“Check and balance” it at every step of the way…

Best authority is blocked (gridlocked?) authority.

*Prevent the tyranny of the majority.*

**French Revolution (1789):**


“Regenerate them and their selfish particular wills once again will conform to the General Will …

“Rational choice…”

Best authority is activist authority.

*Carry out the General Will.*

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Key question for HS067:

**What is the relationship between the [subjective] 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???

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

but a little more complicated than that !!!
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, a defender to the oppressed.”

[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 executions of the fierceness of his wrath in hell, and they have done nothing in the least to appease or abate that anger, neither is 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 fain lay hold on them, and swallow them up; the fire pent up in 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 refuge, nothing to take hold of, all that preserves them every moment is the mere arbitrary will, and uncovenanted, unobliged forbearance of an incensed God.”

~from “Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God”

Jonathan Edwards (1703-1758)
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

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

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!!!
Constitution of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts

The French:

A peculiar mixture of Enlightenment neo-Classicism Scientific Revolution [Mathematics] Catholicism

John Adams 1735-1826
• 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 -- Mathematics
3) Catholicism

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**Neo-Classical: Jean-Jacques Rousseau**

• THREE KEY IDEAS:

  • A) Original innocence
  • B) Social Compact
  • C) General Will
    • [la volonté générale]
18th c. neo-Classicism
French “Rococo”
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

“childhood” // “innocence” // “nature”
a) “Original Innocence”

--- in the [mythical / classical?] “state of nature” we are innocent and transparent

--- “civilization” (society) corrupts us; we must wear masks and play roles

--- we need to “regenerate” ourselves – get back to primal innocence

Contrast with Biblical / Calvinist vision
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

Rousseau: *The Social Contract*
Modernity: not an Organic World-Atomistic World

- **Modernity:**
- the “atom” <individual member>
- is prior to
- the organism <society / community>

Social Contract:
- “atomistic individuals” come together and form society
- Society does not precede individual; individual precedes society

c) “General Will”

1. In the act of making the social contract, “Each of us puts his person and all his power in common under the supreme direction of the general will.”

2. Problem: an individual’s “particular will” may be “contrary or dissimilar to the general will which he has as a citizen.”

3. So that “the social compact may not be an empty formula,” “whoever refuses to obey the general will shall be compelled to do so by the whole body.”

**NB:** Phrygian cap of freed slaves!

*Republican government is the only legitimate government*
3. So that “the social compact may not be an empty formula,” “whoever refuses to obey the general will shall be compelled to do so by the whole body.”

- 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 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 Sieyès: “What is the Third Estate?”
Abbé Sieyès writes a “revolutionary script”:
- transforms Rousseau’s analytical ideal [social contract] into a revolutionary plan
- Question: “What is the Third Estate?”
- Answer: “I answer: Everything”
- In other words: NOT REPRESENTED according to “Estates” [5% v. 95%] but rather by “Subjective Individuals” [mathematically = 1:1 ratios]

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.”
Abbé Sièyes: What is the Third Estate?

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 torments and undermines the strength of the body of a sick person. It must be neutralized.”

--- NB analogy: EXCOMMUNICATION of dissenters

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Declaration of the Rights of Man

3. The principle of all sovereignty resides essentially in the nation. No body nor individual may exercise any authority which does not proceed directly from the nation.

4. Liberty consists in the freedom to do everything which injures no one else; hence the exercise of the natural rights of each man has no limits except those which assure to the other members of the society the enjoyment of the same rights. These limits can only be determined by law.

5. Law can only prohibit such actions as are harmful to society. Nothing may be prevented which is not forbidden by law, and no one may be forced to do anything not provided for by law.

6. Law is the expression of the general will. Every citizen has a right to participate personally, or through his representative, in its formation. It must be the same for all, whether it protects or punishes. All citizens being equal in the eyes of the law, are equally eligible to all dignities and to all public positions and occupations, according to their abilities, and without distinction except that of their virtues and talents.

26 August 1789: Human Rights

Strong nation / society = Equal dignity:

“positive freedom”: “freedom for...”

USA Bill of Rights: 10 Amendments

25 September 1789: Immunity

Protect indiv. against state / majority

“negative freedom”: “freedom from...”
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4. Liberty consists in the freedom to do everything which injures no one else; hence the exercise of the natural rights of each man has no limits except those which assure to the other members of the society the enjoyment of the same rights.

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“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”
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.

21 January 1793: Louis Guillotined
Crime: “Crimes against the state”
28 October 1793: Marie-Antoinette Guillotined
Crime: “Promiscuity”

→ Contrast with “pessimism” of American

Optimism: volatile mixture!

General Will ....
“forced to be free” ..... 
“neutralized” ......
Pessimism???

Constitution of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts

John Adams 1735-1826

Constitutional Convention 2004