Individual v. Community:  
18th-c. Revolutions and Beyond

Week 13 Lecture 1
HS041 Final Lecture
8 December 2004

1) Understand 17th → 18th centuries
See in terms of the end-game --- i.e., 1789 French Revolution

A) Politics: Absolutist monarchy of 17th century →

B) Social: Combines with newly-invented social class: “merchants” [bourgeoisie… “middle-class”]

C) Intellectual/cultural: produces “Enlightenment” →
value/idea of “toleration” // rights-bearing individual (citizen)

→ LEADS TO REVOLUTION of the “Rights of Man”

1715: Death of Louis XIV: crumbling of Absolutist 17th c.

- Louis XIV: 1643-1715
- Louis XV: 1715-1774
- Louis XVI: 1774-1792
  - guillotined 1793

Introduces the 18th-century
“Age of Enlightenment”

Death of old order:
not only political but also economic/social:
The “third estate” now includes the merchantile class / newly-rich
AND THEY WANT REPRESENTATION [“no taxation w/o representation”]

Hence: “What is the Third Estate?”

VOLTAIRE: one of two most famous of the Enlightenment philosophes [other is ROUSSEAU]
Most important of Enlightenment values: TOLERANCE

NB: Should be read in contrast with Revocation of the Edict of Nantes [i.e., edict of toleration] and the “Age of Reason”]
Read the meaning of “tolerance” from perspective of V’s skepticism: an “epistemological modesty” → a recognition that human reason is limited/fallible.

We do not have absolute [mathematical] certainty about religious truths → hence, it is in accordance with natural law that we should be tolerant of what we do not know. And human law should follow natural law.

1755: “The Great Lisbon Earthquake”
Lisbon, Portugal, November 1st, 1755
i.e., All Saints’ Day --- think: “All Hallow’s Eve”

Thirty minutes later: tsunami drags people out to sea
Dramatic rescue of child: Madonna and child in sky

St. Alexius, protector against earthquakes: where was he?

Roger Rosenblatt essay, Christmas 2001:
“If there is a God, he doesn’t seem to be thinking about us.”

Infinite gap / distance between God and human --- trauma

Baroque: Leibniz/Newton/Bach --- mathematical certainty

Enlightenment: Voltaire --- epistemological modesty

Candide, or Optimism: “This is the best of all possible worlds.

REVIEW: Rousseau: “Social Compact”:
The foundation of society is not given “in nature” --- rather, we create society by mutual agreement

---NB: atomistic individuals come together to form society
1789

Problem: Last meeting of Estates General had been 175 years earlier!!! (1614)

- Louis XIV
  • abolished it
  • Absolutist monarchy: eliminate possibility of being "checked" by nobility
  • L'état, c'est moi

- Dunn:
  • this is why the French had no "experience" of governing
  • no "checks" or balance against monarch

Think chess: insure that neither “bishops” nor “knights” and “castles” — i.e., clergy nor nobility — can “check” the king!

Three sacred moments:
create a “social compact” and “General Will”

One nation: a “sacred unity”

American sense of “unity”: factional

“Unity”

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

Unity is mathematical
Dissent not logically permitted
--- or else no “compact”

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American tradition: checks and balances

Constitution of Mass. Commonwealth

John Adams 1735-1826

Constitutional Convention 2004

Abraham Lincoln:

Emancipation Proclamation

1 January 1863

"If you look at things that intrude into American politics through a non-traditional method — through a judicial vein — they tend to have a huge impact," he said.

Harry Truman

Executive Order:
Desegregation of US Armed Forces
26 July 1948

U.S. Supreme Court

Brown v. Board of Education
17 May 1954

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U.S. Check and balance system:
Protect individual against majority tyranny.
Judicial is the “traditional” method.