

D0251

Class lists qu. re. mod., attendance mandatory, group discussions at end. 80 pages  
Rev: Modern science in its cultural impact: knowledge and seeming infinite possibility (cf. Philip Rieff): when infinite possibility, no common values, a culture disintegrates.

2) The problem is further complicated by the modern understanding of history. The topic covers at least three items:

- a) modern methods of studying history
- b) modern understanding of culture as a result of the modern study of history, these modern methods
- c) modern awareness of human responsibility for the constitution of the human world through praxis (a term we will use in a very precise way).

At the end of each, a problem peculiar to modernity.

as we will see later, this in a way is still an insufficiently developed notion that needs emphasis -- perhaps not as much a constituent as it should be. I will be introducing my own position, related to Lowygon.

a) First, then, modern methods of studying history. We introduced something of this in our last class when we argued that today we are interested in all the men and women of every time and place, all their thoughts and words and deeds, [and when we indicated that an appeal to authority, e.g. to great names in our past, will not help us find our way through the morass of data available to us about our possibilities, because there is serious question as to precisely what these authorities meant.]

These are not only of human sciences, but also of history.

What has come to be called the historical-critical method of inquiry into the past was developed in Germany in the first half of the 19th century. This method involves a sustained critical attempt to recover the past by patient analysis of all available data, of evidence, and by an insistence on impartiality, truthfulness, objectivity on the part of the historians. The aim of the historians became to tell "what really happened," and in the course of pursuing this aim several important

- realizations occurred:
- 2 +) At times correctly and at other times bec. of an unacknowledged or uncritical acceptance, historians came to acknowledge that much of what previously was accepted as fact may have instead been fiction, myth, legend, "literary genre"; e.g., a great polemic against miracles in modern history writing.
  - 1 =) They also came to see that their insistence on impartiality and objectivity meant that they could not allow their

of a certain sci'c world-v.

own personal beliefs to influence the histories they wrote, that they had to provide the proper kind of evidence for every claim they made, and that an announcement of their beliefs -- historical, religious, cultural -- did not constitute such evidence. If any assumptions were allowed, it could only be the assumption of the modern scientific world view.

3) This realization led to ~~the notion of the possibility, indeed the reality, of~~ conflicting moralities of inquiry. <sup>that affected most strongly the area of Christian theology.</sup> The traditionalist in any area,

incl. a Christian theologian of whatever denomination preached and practiced a morality of belief in and obedience to the tradition. The modern historian preached an exactly contrary morality. According to him, one cannot investigate a ~~cognitive claim~~ <sup>data</sup> ~~investigation~~ with intellectual integrity if one insists simultaneously that one already knows what is true because the tradition believes it. One's fundamental loyalty must be to historical method, and this method leaves one in principle open to the overthrow of ~~present~~ <sup>previous</sup> conclusions.

4) History came to be understood, then, as every bit as hypothetical as the natural sciences, and thus as lacking in certainty.

History is essentially a construction on the part of the mind of the historian, <sup>a construction based on the evidence of the data,</sup> and constructions will differ and will be more or

less adequate to the extent that they take account of a wider or narrower range of data. <sup>Nobody ever has all the data, and so</sup> All history is thus contextual, <sup>the best opinion one could come up with,</sup> and this realization has again opened the door to relativism in certain circles. Can we know what events really lie at our origins?

6) The modern understanding of culture resulting from the modern study of history. We can understand the modern notion of culture <sup>best</sup> if we contrast it with its predecessor, with the culture that gave rise to the scene of the Greeks. <sup>I will keep Longgan's terminology here, since you will be running into this in heading line.</sup> The old notion of culture we will call classical, and the modern the empirical notion of culture resulting from historical-mindedness.

The classicist notion of culture, upon which all education in the West was based until <sup>modern times</sup> ~~very recently~~ as well as all education done elsewhere in the world by Westerners, was a normative notion of culture. Only one culture was normative, <sup>i.e. was really culture,</sup> and it was that culture which had its roots in Greece and Rome and which was spread more or less effectively to the other parts of the world by conquering armies and Christian missionaries. Thus the Greeks distinguished between Greeks and barbarians, not between Greeks and Persians, Greeks and Jews, Greeks and Egyptians, etc. If you were not educated in the meanings and values of Greek culture, you were not educated at all, you were a barbarian.

<sup>That attitude is not too hard to understand, if you've ever travelled.</sup> Now, difference is a very difficult thing for human consciousness to deal with, especially different difference in life style and underlying assumptions of meaning and value. We are threatened by cultural difference, more often than not, and we react to it by declaring that what is different is inferior. We elevate our own cultural standards to a position of normativity. Classicism is a celebrated e.g. of this. But we all do it.

Thus the classicist mentality assumed the prerogative of judging everything in every other culture against its own highly developed set of standards: art, literature, correct of speech, ways of interpreting, thinking, doing philosophy and science, positive law, morality, education -- classicist mentality assumes it has achieved, not one particular way among others of doing these things, but the way. Everybody had to be educated to these precise ways -- or remain outside the sphere of the cultured.

Modern historical study has given rise to a very different notion of culture, an empirical notion. According to the empirical notion, a culture is the operative set of assumptions regarding meaning and value that inform the way of life of a given group of people. A culture's roots lie in the way a group of people understand the world and project that understanding into their living and action. Every culture is a result of a particular way of understanding experience and of constituting the human world on the basis of that understanding. ~~Especially~~ <sup>In particular,</sup> a culture is a result of what a group apprehends and appreciates as worthwhile, valuable, furthering of life. A culture, <sup>then,</sup> is constituted by the common sense of a people. There are as many varieties of common sense, and thus as many cultures, as there are sets of assumptions regarding meaning & value.

Common sense is a set of insights into meaning and value that is parcelled out among the members of a group and that is geared especially to the practical execution of the task of living. It is always supplemented by additional insights into concrete situations as these situations arise, and so it is continually, though very gradually, in a process of development.

But this set of assumptions of meaning and value will differ from one people to the next, and the differences can be more or less dramatic. Europe: one common sense after another, different ways of structuring the world. Jung's experiences in Africa and among North American Indians. Sometimes the differences become so acute as to lead not only to mutual incomprehension but even to hostility and open warfare -- unless the standpoint of common sense is transcended in favor of a more universal and cross-cultural position, <sup>wh. seldom happens.</sup>

The important point about this empirical notion of culture, the point that distinguishes it most sharply from the classicist notion, is <sup>again</sup> that there are as many different cultures as there are operative sets of assumptions regarding meaning and value informing different lifestyles and common projects. Cultures are many and diverse in time and space. They are a function of different ways in which the world is mediated by meaning, i.e. understood and evaluated. Every culture, including classicist culture is only one particular mediation of the world by meaning. No culture is normative, and to uproot an individual or a people from the culture that is theirs is perhaps the most cruel and violent action we can perform against another.

Because of the empirical notion of culture, we find ourselves today in a situation of irreducible cultural pluralism. For every operative set of meanings and values informing a particular lifestyle, there is a different culture. No culture is normative of another. Classicism is a thing of the past. It lingers <sup>on</sup> in a few isolated quarters of our Western world, <sup>but</sup> for the most part it is behind us, an interesting historical phenomenon but of no normative significance for us.

But out of this there comes the question: is anything normative? <sup>Where do we go? Again, we are presented w. the seemingly almost infinite variety of possibilities.</sup>

c) The modern awareness of human responsibility for the constitution of the human world through praxis. (A slowly emerging awareness)

i) In general  
Once modernity was sufficiently persuaded of the differences in cultural outlooks and mentalities, we were able to gain a deeper awareness than was ever entertained before that, to put it bluntly, the world in which we live is what we make it. It is a direct

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product of human acts of meaning: of insight, judgment, and decision. We are the agents, not only of our own destiny but of the future of the human world. Human consciousness and human labor constitute a world by grasping possibilities, affirming that they are worth while, and following through <sup>on</sup> our decisions. Why are cultures and lifestyles different? Because people have structured the world differently, have understood it differently, have valued different things. It is especially in decision and action that we can root the constitutive principles of the real world in which we live. We live in a world that was made by human choices and human labor, that can be changed <sup>for the better</sup> only by human choices and human labor, and that we will leave to the generations that follow us according as we have chosen and acted. What I decide to do with my life, and whether I follow through on that decision or not, will contribute for better or for worse to the making of the world in which not only I but other people will have to live. Human history is a direct product of human decisions, a function of human consciousness, human knowledge, human choice. The world is what human agents make it be -- nothing more, nothing less.

2) A specific understanding, related to T. de Chardin:

Let's examine this third result or dimension of the modern understanding of history more closely, and let me see if I can summarize a particular understanding of it, <sup>(mine) Teilhard.</sup> Let us assume that basically the evolutionary postulate is correct, that a process of physical, chemical, biological, and animal evolution has resulted in human consciousness. If this is the case, if in fact human consciousness is

the most recent development in the evolutionary process, then <sup>later</sup> it ~~would also be the case~~ <sup>also assume</sup> that the evolution of human consciousness is a part of the entire process that continues to issue in the world, to change the world. Evolution did not stop with the emergence of human consciousness. The emergence of human consciousness is itself an evolutionary phenomenon, and not just in its origins but in its own history. It is an arena of continuing evolution. The same evolutionary process that gave rise to us is going on through us. What until human consciousness emerged on the scene was a process of physical evolution, and then chemical evolution, and then biological evolution, and then animal evolution, is now a process of human evolution, of psychological, intellectual, and cultural and political evolution. The level is different, but the same process continues in and through us that for billions of years occurred in and through subatomic particles, atoms, molecules, cells, living organisms, and animal life. Evolution transposed onto the human scene is a dimly perceivable course of <sup>development,</sup> ~~progress,~~ <sup>at times going down</sup> ~~through and around~~ blind alleys, <sup>(the collapse of) civilizations</sup> and breakdowns and collapses, to ever fuller conscious capacities, to a heightening and broadening and deepening of the potentialities of human consciousness.

But there is one major difference: human consciousness is not only intelligible just like all the other arenas of the evolutionary process. It is also intelligent. <sup>The ev. process can be directed by intelligence.</sup> By insight it can grasp possibilities of historical evolution, <sup>it can</sup> anticipate, <sup>both developments and</sup> blind alleys and breakdowns, work out laws and probabilities of development, decide on courses of actions,



follow through freely on its decisions. It is not programmed, and its evolution need not be a matter of simple trial and error or of survival of the fittest, where "fittest" means most brutal and "survival" means some lowest common denominator of continuing existence. To the extent we are intelligent and free, <sup>we grasp by might what needs to be done, follow through it,</sup> we can direct the course of evolution in at least one strand, perhaps the most dominant strand, of the cosmic evolutionary process: in our making of human history, in the evolution of human consciousness itself. And not only there, for by intelligence, judgment, and decision, we act on the rest of the world, we change nature, nature itself becomes manmade, changed and transformed by the decisions and the work of intelligent human beings. <sup>This we will call praxis.</sup> Work, human labor, affects the evolution not only of human consciousness but of the subatomic, atomic, molecular, cellular, organic, and animal dimensions of nature. A significant portion of the continuing process of cosmic evolution is, then, the responsibility of human intelligence, judgment, decision, praxis: of human consciousness. With human consciousness, what was the universe, the cosmos, has become the human world, and we are responsible for it. Its future is not determined but will be the function of human acts of meaning and of consequent human work, praxis.

But with this, we are back to the same plight we found ourselves in at the end of our discussion of modern science in the last class. <sup>of the modern notion of culture to day:</sup> What are we to make of the human world? Where are we to find the reference point that will provide a trustworthy criterion of decision for us? The alternatives on what we are to be and do are manifold and frequently contradictory. Where are we to go? Who is to show us what we are to do with our freedom? We have already ruled out

They just present  
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them is up  
to us.

philosophies, scientific theories, psychologists, and authorities. Now we even relativize our culture and declare it to be but one among many with no title to normativity. Yet we must judge and we must decide and we must act for that is what human consciousness is all about. <sup>In the West, with the collapse of classicism,</sup> All the old and accepted criteria have <sup>and the modern world has yet to develop its own -- those it has developed are partial & often</sup> broken down. What is the criterion for the authentic employment of the capacities of human consciousness in effecting the ongoing evolution of the human world? We end up with the same question, and if Philip Kieff's article in yesterday's Journal is anywhere near the point, this is the ~~for~~ question that is of most momentous significance for contemporary humanity. Is there any source of meaning and value that is normative, that is not subject to the revisions that seem to relativize everything?

contradict each other.

Qu: Do you find any emerging point of convergence in our discussion so far?