

Introduction to History, HS3.201

Quiz 2

Date-27/10/2025

Max Time: 45 Minutes

Maximum Marks: 20 (10x2)

Instruction: Answer **any two** of the following three questions in approximately 500 words each.

Q1) Write an essay on Marx's theory of alienation elaborating on the kinds of alienation the working classes experiences in the capitalist mode of production.

Reference literature :

https://www.yorku.ca/horowitz/courses/lectures/35_marx_alienation.html

Introduction: What is meant by alienation (1). Where did Marx put forth this theory. Its relevance for times beyond the one in which he wrote about it(0.5+0.5). — Alienation in general, at the most abstract level, can be thought of as a surrender of control through separation from an essential attribute of the self, and, more specifically, separation of an actor or agent from the conditions of meaningful agency.

- 1) Alienation from the product of labour (2)
 - In capitalist society that which is produced is lost to the producer; The object is a loss
 - The labourer produces that which is hostile to them
 - The more the labourer produces the more the owner of that product has power over them
 - The more we work the more society gets wealthier but the individual does not necessarily
- 2) Alienation from the activity of labour (2)
 - In labouring one loses control over their life-activity
 - The labourer's activity is not self-expression
 - It merely a means of self preservation and survival
 - The labourer's life-activity is directed by someone/something else
 - This from where the idea of 'leisure' comes
 - Human labour is turned into a commodity
- 3) Alienation from one's humanity (2)

As capitalism advances human start thinking of themselves as appendages of a machine

This leads to a loss of humanity
- 4) Alienation from Society (2)
 - Capitalism is built on the idea of self-interest
 - Everyone has to fend for themselves; Everyone else is a threat or competition

- Every other is an obstacle, but a needed obstacle
- The feudal society was based on some sort of solidarity (even if exploitative)
- In capitalism interpersonal relationships are based on indifference
- We work for money
- There is only an illusion of freedom
- There still exist hierarchies but everyone is equal by law

Q2) What are some of the thematic and methodological innovations made by the historians of the Annales School? Discuss with examples.

Answer Rubric:

Reference Literature: Lecture ppt + Peter Burke's *The French Historical Revolution*

The ideal answer should begin with a general introduction of the Annales school which should include when it was founded, the origins of the journal and the first editors (Febvre and Bloc).

(1)

Following this, the question need to be answered in three parts as follows:

Annales school - a methodological revolution in history writing (4)

- It is considered a revolution in historiographical progression because it re-invented the study of the past and the lens through which the historian looks at it.
- The main historiographical interventions it makes:
 - Incorporating methods of all the social sciences (Total History)
 - Elevates the discipline of history above all the others
 - Unfolding the layers of a society or region over a long span of time (The Longue Duree)
- New, previously un explored themes were taken up for historical analysis: Such as climate, environment, geography, emotions, mentalities, systems of belief, notions (of youth, childhood, faith, etc)
- New methods of conducting historical research incorporated as well as the corpus of primary sources that historians could tap for writing about the past widened substantially:
 - The historian had to venture beyond the archive
 - The incorporation of new databases
 - Anthropological fieldwork
 - Psychological analyses
 - "Text yes, but all kinds of texts and not texts alone"

Annales school: a rebellion against two kinds of history-writing

i) Rankian history/positivist history: Moving beyond Ranke's positivist exposition that "history tells us how it really was". Moving beyond the history of political events, kings, wars and diplomacy that had been the concern of most positivist histories.

Replaces singularity by plurality of historical interpretation

Replaces certitude (upheld by positivism influenced by the natural and physical science) by ambivalence which encourages and infuses more creativity into the writing of/about the past (1)

ii) Marxist historiography: (2)

- A rejection of the Marxist certitude of causal hierarchy: Replaced by a moving hierarchy of conjunctures
- In Marxist historiography, a historical occurrence/event/phenomenon can have several causes – social, cultural, political, economic etc. However for Marxists there exists a causal hierarchy for studying and explaining the past. All the causes are not equal and hence there are those which are more important than others in historiography. In this Marxist causal hierarchy, the economic cause

occupies the top-most spot and towers over all other causes. This corresponds with the base and superstructure theory in Marxism.

The Annales school however, rejects this causal hierarchy that Marxist historiography imposes on the study of the past and in the writing of history. For the Annales School there exists no causal hierarchy but only a moving hierarchy of (what they call) conjunctures. This implies that it is not productive to look for universal causality in history but that each historical occurrence comes with its own causal hierarchy where one cause might take precedence over others while in another the same cause might take a backseat in favor of another.

3) Examples (2): The examples can be about any of the books and articles to have come out of the Annales school that were discussed at some length during the lectures on this topic. One example is fine. Two correctly used examples would be a very good answer. The example must correctly mention the name of the book, the author of the work, its broad premise and why it belongs to the Annales School

The works that can be used as examples: *The Royal Touch* Marc Bloch (takes up larger questions of belief, faith, power and authority of the king over that of the Church through a very specific example)

The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World in the Age of Phillip II by Fernand Braudel (the longue durée, looking beyond political history, minute and detailed painting of a world, a milieu – not just the history of Spain but that of the world of the Mediterranean)

Church Time and Merchant Time in the Middle Ages by Jacques Le Goff (History of mentalities, changing ideas about time and its significance and people's attitudes towards it)

Montaillou: Cathars and Catholics in a French Village by Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie (Microhistory and history of mentalities)

The Cheese and the Worms by Carlo Ginzburg (Microhistory)

Note the example/s can either be integrated into the other points wherever relevant or can be written about as a separate section. Both is fine as long as the way in which they are written about is correct.

Q3) Reflect on why the social history movement was more than merely an academic historiographical lens. How did it build upon and depart from the schools of history-writing that preceded it? (4+6)

Answer rubric

Part 1: Reflect on why the social history movement was more than merely an academic historiographical lens.

- Has a target audience beyond academia and its very academia specific concerns such as finding a research gap and seeking to fill it for advancement of one's career and acceptance and relevance within the historical community. Social history is more public facing. It aims to reach out to and engage a wider audience because its focus is not only seemingly distant and obscure themes but those which shape and provide meaning to ordinary people's everyday lives
- Social history is also inherently activist in its approach. Many of the most prominent social historians were in fact career long activists apart from being academics. They not only studied the past through an intellectual lens but also sought to change society through their praxis and by championing the cause of the marginalised groups that were the subjects of their historical analysis – labourers, peasants, women, etc

- It touches on and helps focus major issues of public debate such as British national character or the nature of family life. The idea is to understand such things (among others) in the present but to do so by understanding their history.
- Social history can help create public interest in certain issues and themes by making them more mainstream and popular. Example: How, a pre-existing interest in 'Victorian values' was read and capitalised upon by Thatcher who appropriated it as her Party's election platform,

Part II: What are the main influences on and points of departure for the social history movement

Influences on the Social History Movement

- The Annales School: The Annales school paved the way for the emergence of the social history movement by halting history's unbridled attention on political history which invariably focused on the elites of a society because it was them whose lives were most reflected in the official archives. The Annales School widened the horizons of historical scholarship and its subjects through its emphasis on microhistory and history of mentalities which were not always about those who were rich, powerful and influential. This would have a significant impact on the contours that social history would take.
- Anthropology and sociology: The disciplines of anthropology and sociology and the developments within them also informed and influenced social history. Both these disciplines concerned themselves with the nature of human society and culture in the present. This involves looking at not only the elites of that society but all of it in its entirety. The more sociologists and anthropologists sought to study society and its structures, the more it became clear that society in the present cannot be studied in isolation from the past. Consequently, social history draws heavily from these two disciplines and vice versa.

Points of departure:

- 'History from below: Focus on social groups which have historically lacked wealth and power
- More interested in groups than in individuals: Was interested in looking at history through the collective experiences of social groups and categories such as 'gender', 'race', 'ethnic groups', 'age', 'class' etc.
- Focus on 'ordinariness' and 'everydayness' of life: Social history is not interested in the big, bombastic moments of history but rather on the ways in which ordinary people lived out their everyday lives.
- An effort to understand agency: Even though social history is interested in looking at the past through the lens of communities and social groups which have historically been at the receiving end of oppression and exploitation by those more privileged and powerful, it is not interested in merely documenting and telling the story of their oppression. Social history wants to look at marginalised groups as active and agential rather than merely passive recipients of the hand that was dealt out to them on account of their specific social positionality.