

Introduction to Human Sciences HS8.102
Mid-Semester Exam
27/02/2025
GRADING RUBRIC

Max Time: 90 minutes

Max Marks: 30 (10*3)

Instructions: Answer the following three questions in approximately 500 words each.

Q1) The nineteenth century placed great emphasis on writing history ‘the way it really was’ (*wie es eigentlich gewesen*). Reflecting on this statement, what do you understand by the common-sense view of history.

Relevant reference material: E. H. Carr, *What is History* (chapter 1: “The Historian and His Facts”), class ppt (first lecture in the IHS history module)

Answer Rubric:

Common Sense view of history (10)

- Nineteenth century was the great age for facts. Most historians placed immense store by ‘getting the facts right’ in writing history. They essentially upheld what E.H. Carr has called the common-sense view of history. It is a positivist understanding of history and is derived from three traditions: 1) August Comte’s positivist philosophy 2) The British Empiricist tradition and 3) The Rankian tradition (1)

1) **August Comte’s positivist philosophy:** Laced by a universalism espoused by the Enlightenment tradition. Advocated the formulation of universal/general laws. History, like science, is subject to certain general laws which could explain the process of human development. (3)

2) **The British Empiricist tradition:** It upholds that the only legitimate form of knowledge is that whose truth can be verified. Our senses (sight, sound, smell, taste, touch) are the only way in which the world can be experienced and understood. Extending this to the discipline of history, ‘facts’ are external (like sense impressions) to the observer’s consciousness. The observer receives them passively. (3)

3) Rankian tradition

Leopold von Ranke – Credited with laying the foundations of modern historiography.

- The historian does not need to think for him/herself as to what facts mean. Their job is simply to collect the facts. Once all the facts have been collected by the historian, it would be possible to know what really happened in history

- The past should be understood/studied in isolation from the present

- The historian should write about the past based on ‘sources’. (3)

Q2) What are the commonly held assumptions about the relationship between history and progress addressed by E.H. Carr and how does he counter them?

Answer rubric:

Relevant reference material: E. H. Carr, *What is History* (chapter 5: History as Progress, pp.252-257), class ppt (third lecture in the IHS history module)

1) The first commonly held assumption about the relationship between progress and history is that **biological evolution can be equated to historical progress.**

The origins of this assumption can be traced to the **Enlightenment**: Since Enlightenment philosophy sought to establish that human beings, through rationality and objectivity, can conquer the natural world around them, it also placed them at the apex of the natural world. At the same time, it also believed in progress. This, however, came with the problem of assuming that nature was progressive and constantly moving towards a goal.

The **Darwinian revolution** did away with this deadlock and by simply equating evolution with progress. In the Darwin's formulation nature, like history, became progressive.

Carr's counter: The problem that E.H. Carr identifies with this is that it opens the scope for a problematic equation of biological inheritance (the stuff of evolution) with social acquisition (that is concerned with historical progression).

He **counters** this by arguing that the two in fact are not the same. Evolution by inheritance is measured in Millennia while historical progression is mostly measured across generations. Knowledge amassed is passed on to successive generations which build upon it to keep the wheel of historical progress even as size of the human brain has remained the same for the last several thousand years. (3)

2) The second assumption is that **progress has a definite beginning or end**

There have always been efforts to chronologically establish the beginnings of civilization (by historians) as well as the creation of the universe (by scientists). Either can be taken as possible starting points for the 'beginning' of progress.

Similarly, the attempts by different historians and philosophers to pronounce a definitive '**end**' of history have not been particularly successful. (for example, Marx's famous 'failed prediction of communism as the end of history').

For Carr, the obsession with defining the beginnings and ends of progress is counterproductive. The birth of human civilization cannot be attributed to one definitive moment as it is not an but a slow process of human development. Further, the pronouncing of the 'end' of progress (and by relation history) according to Carr, appears to be more in the domain of theology than history. Progress should be understood as an ever-unfolding process the content of which can only be realised as they are experienced. (3)

3) The third assumption is that **progress is an unbroken line** without reverses and deviations and shows an inherent, immutable continuity.

This assumption has been countered by Carr by pointing out that historical progression also experiences periods of regression. It also does not move at the same pace but in bouts and spurts of intense activity and relative lull at other times.

Further, he argues that it is not necessary that after a retreat, historical advance will resume from the same point where it had slowed down. The effort required for driving civilization might die at once place and be resumed at another.

Hence, for Carr, it is entirely possible that classes, nations, regions, continents, civilizations, that have played a very prominent part in historical progression at one time might lose that place of prominence to others at another time. Hence, one group's decline can be another's rise. Read this way, progress does not mean equal and simultaneous progress for all. (3)

Relevant examples to support any of the points above that have been used by Carr in the relevant portions of the book (page numbers provided above) (1)

Q3) How is historical progression and transition from one mode of production to the next explained in the Marxist theory of history?

Reference Material: Class ppt (relevant slides from lecture 4 of the IHS module) + Eric Hobsbawm's article *Marx and History*

Answer rubric:

Part 1: Historical progression in Marxist conception of history (5)

- The Marxist theory of history explains historical progression in terms of changes in the material/economic conditions of a mode of production.
- It aims to understand society as a product of particular material conditions: This is what he calls historical Materialism
- Production and the exchange of things produced: the basis of all social structure
- Determines the nature of social relations in all societies in history
- Each stage of historical development is defined by a particular mode of production: Slave, Feudal, capitalist

Part 2: Transition from one mode of production to another (5)

- The transition from one to the next is explained by Marx through his philosophy of dialectical materialism Dialectics: Two aspects of a contradiction exist both in unity and opposition with one another (1)

- Historical change occurs as a result of the contradiction within each historical epoch being resolved through:

- 1) The development of the society's productive forces: This means its capacity to produce more and more through advances in the means of production and labour power.
- 2) Transformation of the relations of production through **class struggle**. (1)

- Each mode of production has two categories of people – the exploiters and the exploited (3)
They exist both in unity and opposition to each other. For example within the capitalist mode of production there are the workers and the capitalist. They are dependent on each other and yet their interests are also oppositionally aligned. As the forces of production within this mode of production become more and more developed, the co-dependence of workers and capitalists on each other increases but so does their antagonism between their interests. The capitalists want the workers to work more and more so as to maximise profit while the workers want more from the capitalists in return of their labour – better wages, better working conditions, better working hours etc. As this contradiction grows and there is more and more class conflict, it would eventually and finally be resolved through a revolution where the working class emerges victorious. This would result in eradication of class struggle as there will now be only one class – the workers. This would complete the transition to next mode of production – communism.