

Why Study History?

Also
What Do We Do When We Study History

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History Module
Introduction to the Human Sciences
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Aims of the History Module

- What does it mean to think historically
 - How do we know what really happened
 - Does learning History help us understand today's world
- Main methods of doing history

Mi2Lethal

What Is History?

- History shifts from God's story to Man's story
- Study Human and Natural Causes of Past Events
- History is about both understanding and explaining...
- Human Actions
 - Find their causes and their consequences
- Theory of change
 - **Why** do things change

"History is preoccupied with fundamental processes of change."

~ E. H. Carr, *What is History*

Where is History?

- Everywhere!
- Every Nation, Region, Community, Individual is made up of its Past
 - Every Action is done in time
- We all work and live with a sense of History
 - What we were and who will we become
 - Implicitly aware of our History
- Every Text, Artefact, Image, Sound, Relationship moves in time with a past, a present, and a future
- Academic History: Make the Implicit, Explicit!!

Explicit History

- Learn to find History everywhere
- Learn the **protocols** of doing History
- Learn what history can tell us....
- ... and what it cannot
- There can be No Objectivity, No Certitude
- Only levels of **possibilities**, degrees of **probabilities**

What is a **FACT?**

- A thing that is known or proved to be **true**
- Information used as legal evidence, as report or news
 - Synonyms: Reality, Certitude, Actuality
 - Antonyms: Lie, Fiction
- Till recently, a **FACT** was supposed to be the truth **without interpretation**

BUILDING BLOCKS OF KNOWLEDGE

Birth of the Fact: Ancient Greece

- *Historia* : Inquiry, Finding out
- Herodotus (c.484 – c.425 BCE)
 - Wrote on the history of the wars between Greece and Persia
 - Collect **evidence**, ask **witnesses**, systematic narrative of events
- Thucydides (5th century BCE)
 - History of the Peloponnesian Wars (between Athens and Sparta)
 - **Evaluate** evidence, **neutral position**, cause and effect
 - Realism : Evaluate behaviour and outcomes without emotions and self-interest
- Later, Fact based History was forgotten in favour of **Revelation**

Fact rises again

- Ibn-e-Khaldun (1332 – 1406)
 - *Kitab al-Ibar*: History of the world; Muqadimmah (Introduction)
 - Principles to evaluate evidence
 - Categorised errors and mistakes in historical investigations
 - Partisanship, beliefs, lack of context, lack of knowledge
 - History is a “New Science” to gain knowledge
- Edward Gibbon (1737 – 1794) *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* (b/w 1776-88; 6 vols)
 - Made distinction between Primary & Secondary Sources
 - Historian’s aim: Objectivity
 - Secular History (Church and Christianity secularised)
 - Massive backlash

Fact is Crowned King of History!

Leopold von Ranke (1795 – 1886)

- Facts, and only Facts
- Banish Interpretation
- Only Primary Source
 - Interrogate the source: how, where, who
 - Build credibility of facts
- History of the Catholic Popes:
 - “tranquil, objective treatment”
 - “without rancour, without enthusiasm”

Empire of Interpretation Strikes Back!

- Facts are not value free
- Facts do not exist outside of our seeing
- Our act of seeing, *aka* recognising them as such, **creates the fact**
- What is a **fact constituted by** (made up of)
 - Smaller facts, Antecedent facts, and
 - Assumptions, Perspective, Interpretation, etc
- What we see as a Fact depends on our **Assumptions**
- Which facts we select, out of the universe of all facts, is determined by our **perspectives** and **interpretations**, and in turn determines our thinking....
- **Historical Fact**
 - Is created in time, by humans, and fades in time, due to humans

What then is a Fact?

- There can be no Neutral, Objective Fact
- An act, thing, event is recognised as a Historical Fact within the world of meanings created by humans
- Thus, all facts are created; constituted by human actions
 - That does not mean facts have same evidentiary value as fiction
 - Rather, facts exist as a human creation
- Fact can be objective and impartial
- Possible to distinguish between fake, erroneous, and genuine Fact

Framing Questions

- **What** happened
- **Who** was involved
- **When** did it happen
- **Where** did it happen
- **How** did it happen
- **Why** did it happen

How to Find and Preserve Facts

- Evidence which can be crossed checked
 - Methods which can be scrutinised
 - Open and accessible standards of verifiability and falsifiability
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- Facts change
 - Importance of Facts change
 - New Facts emerge and old Fact die

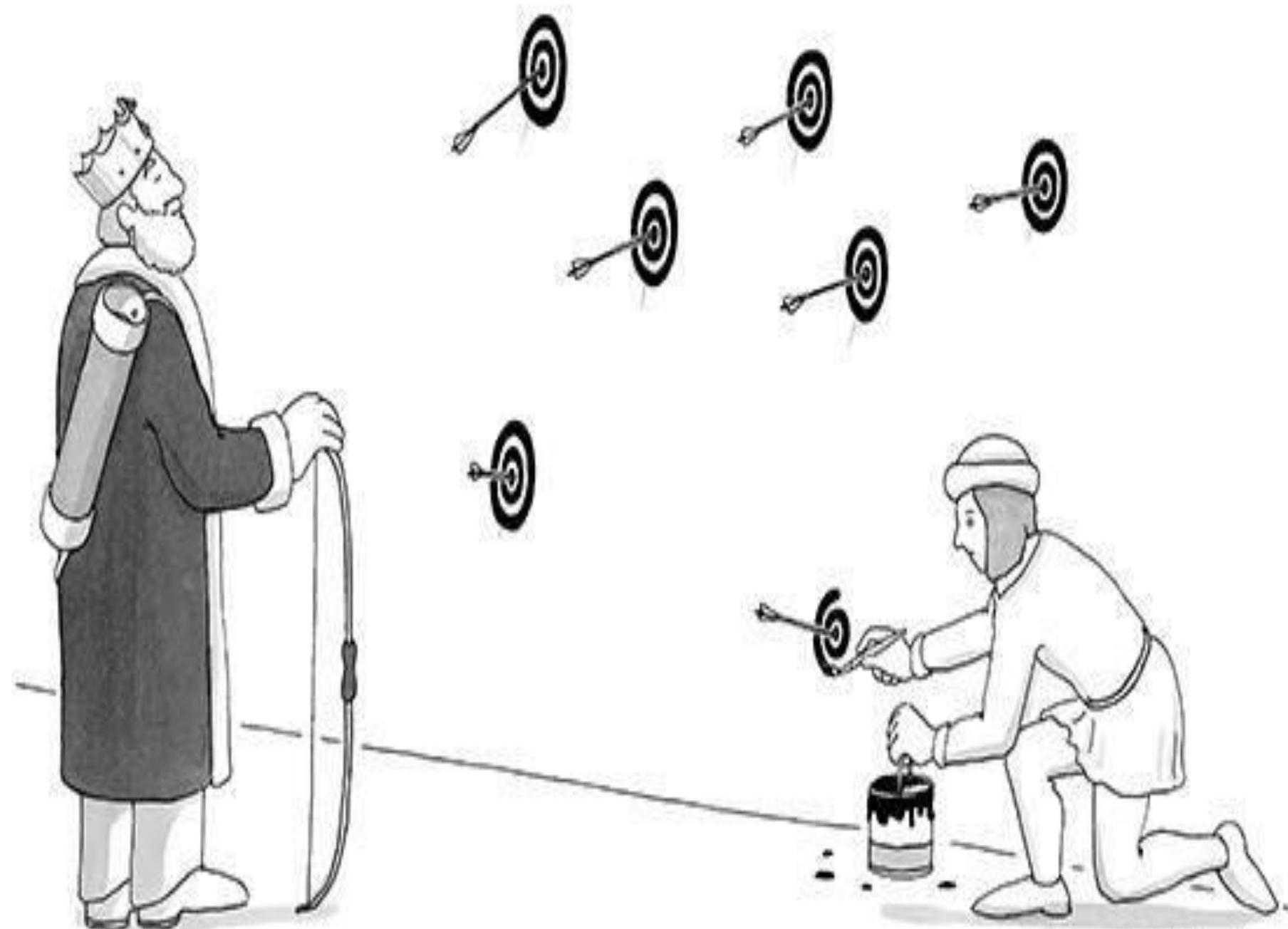


"It doesn't mean a thing, but boy, will it drive them crazy a thousand years from now!"

False Facts

- Historians all too often **misread** the meaning and intent of **facts** of the past
- There is **always another interpretation** possible

Deliberate
Errors



Hankin

Tragedy of the Historian



**"Those who don't study history are doomed to repeat it.
Yet those who *do* study history are doomed to stand by
helplessly while everyone else repeats it."**