

Rankean History

(Also Humanism, 'Facts', Science, Progress)

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Introduction to History
HSS343a

Visions of History

- Cyclical or Spiral
 - Beginning and end are merged
 - Nothing new in History; we merely live our assigned roles, as best as or slightly worse than the origin
 - Every action has happened before: Predestination
- Linear
 - Creation (Beginning) and Destruction (End) are polar opposites
 - Human beings create their own history...
 - ...within divine will or by their own will

PRE-MODERN WORLD

- Knowledge unified; not divided into categories and disciplines like we know it today
- All creation was considered emanating from the same divine source and interlinked in a divine law/plan
- Thus knowledge about the world was interlinked and there could not be a division...
- ...once we know divine will, we would know everything there is to know about the world, the humans and everything else

**EVERYTHING WAS THE WORK OF DIVINE WILL
OR
HUMANS WORKED WITHIN THE BOUNDS SET
BY DIVINE LAWS**

DE-CENTRING CREATION

DISENCHANTMENT OF NATURE

- Archaic knowledge systems held world to be the centre of creation
- The Sun, Moon and Heavens moved around the earth (which was usually flat)

Major Shift

- Sun the centre of the solar system and earth merely one among many planets
- Physical laws same everywhere and explain physical world
- Natural Sciences are bereft of any divine will (other than first causes)

CENTRING THE HUMAN

IN ARCHAIC SOCIETY

- Study of history was study of God's actions; or morality

MODERN SOCIETY

- Shift towards study of Man and his actions in its own right, not as an agent of God
- First in arts and literature, then in the study of history
- Emergence of Humanities, or Human Sciences
- Like natural sciences, bereft of any divine will

HUMANISM:

IDEA THAT SUBJECT OF KNOWLEDGE IS HUMAN
BEING

MODERN HISTORIANS

IBN-E-KHALDUN

- *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 as “New Science” to Discover the Past

MODERN HISTORIANS

- Edward Gibbon (1737 – 1794)
 - *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* (b/w 1776-88; 6 vols)
 - Primary v/s Secondary sources
 - Church and Christianity secularised
 - Search for objectivity; but also a lesson from history
 - Massive backlash
- Barthold Georg Niebuhr (1776 – 1831)
 - *Roman History* (early history of Roman empire)
 - Established History as a modern discipline in universities
 - Brought together scattered ideas and methods into a single methodology
 - Mentored the first generation of academic historians

MODERN HISTORIANS

- Leopold von Ranke (1795 – 1886)
 - *Primary* sources; publish them; search for primary sources
 - Interrogate the source; how, where, who: credibility
 - Facts
 - Understand past on its own terms
 - Universal History based on facts
 - History of the Catholic Popes: “tranquil, objective treatment”; “without rancour, without enthusiasm”
 - Method of teaching history; secular periodisation; journals and publications

Definition of the Discipline

- Not God's Revelation (maybe his "Story")
- Man's Story
 - Account of human agency; human actions
- Need to find causes and their effects
- Theory of change

"History is preoccupied with fundamental processes of change."

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

A CONTINUOUS, SYSTEMATIC NARRATIVE OF
SIGNIFICANT PAST EVENTS

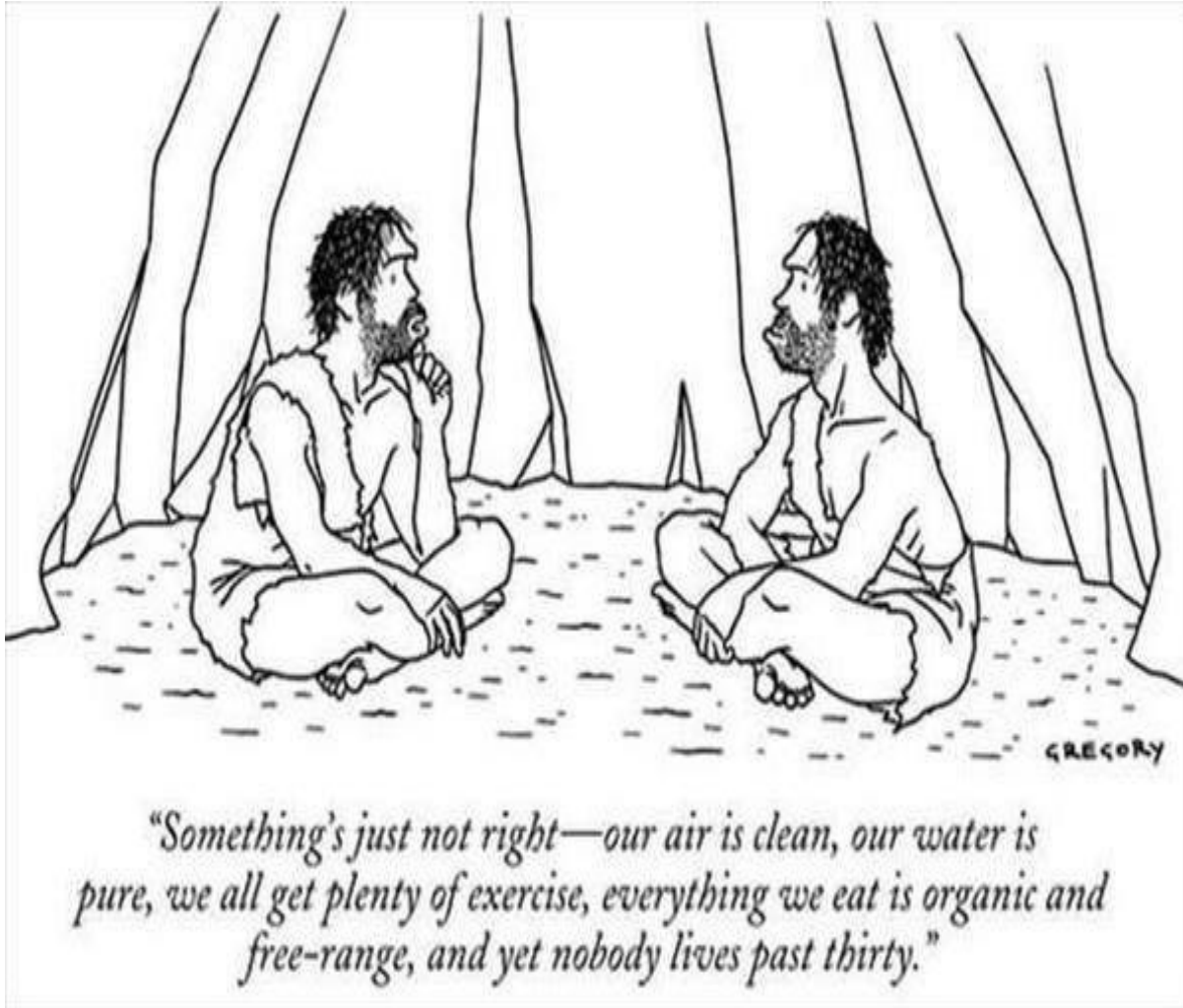
Foundational Methods

- Evidence which can be crossed checked
- Methodology which can be scrutinised
- Universal (scientific) standards of
 - Verifiability
 - Falsifiability
- Claims of Universal Applicability (?)

History: Progress or Decline

- The Story of Decline
 - Traditional view; all religions have a version of this
 - Till modern discipline this was also the academic view of history
 - Non-scientific but aligned with the idea of entropy
- The Story of Progress
 - Idea of Enlightenment
 - Idea of human progress
 - Better society is not just possible but inevitable
 - Based on science as method but contrary to idea of entropy

Story of Decline or Progress

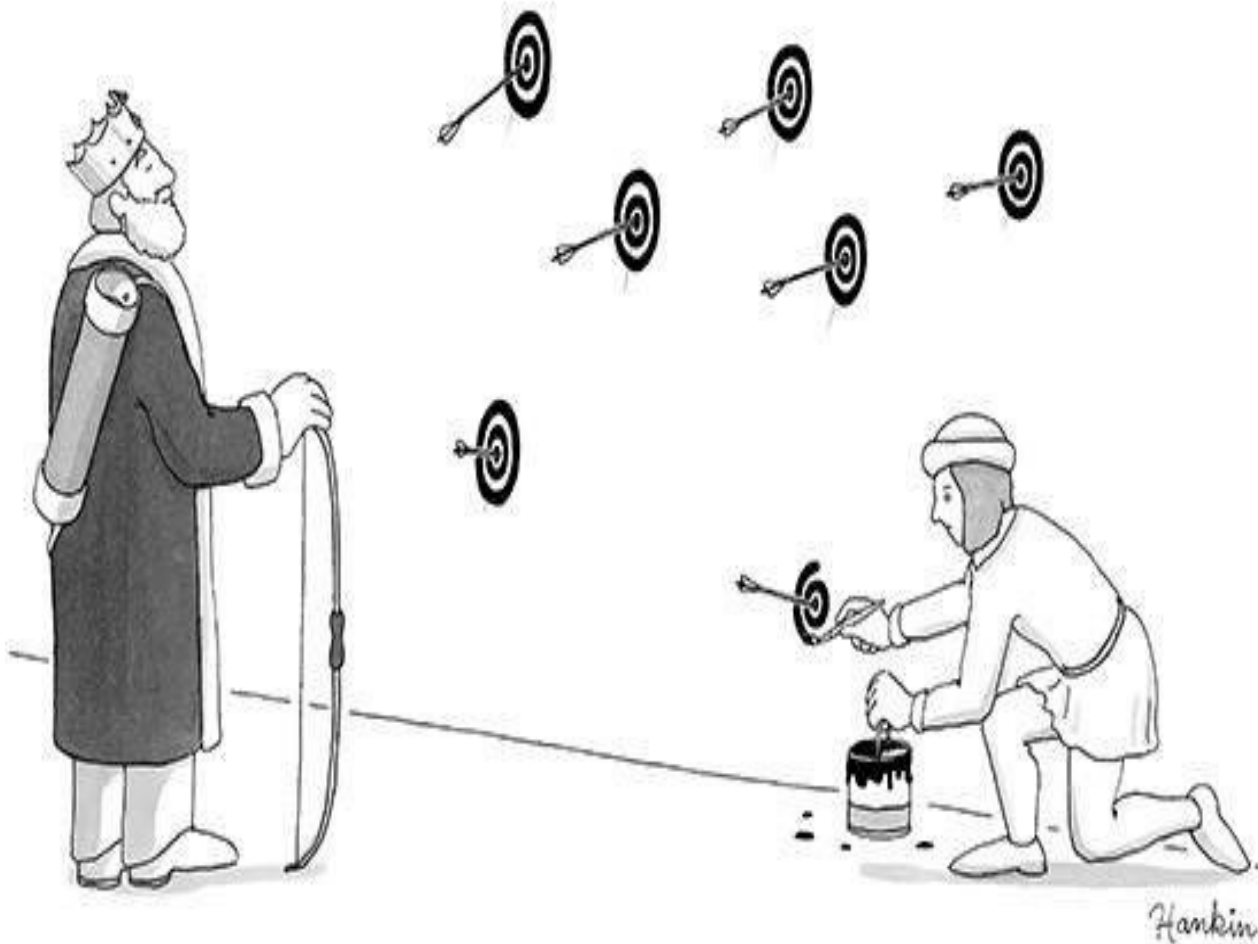


Fake Sources



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

Deliberate Errors



The Tragedy of the Historians



**"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."**