

CIV 100 Definitional Outline

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(Revised for use in sections taught by Professors Dannehl and Kelley)

I. ZEITGEIST MODEL & CATEGORIES OF HISTORY

All of the events of Western civilization cannot be considered in one semester or even in one lifetime. In any historically based course, a conscious or unconscious selection is made from a vast quantity of possible material for study. The criteria for selection are based on some “model” of history that makes sense of isolated events. The most familiar model emphasizes the development of political institutions through the exploits of “great men,” but there are several others. In this course the *Zeitgeist* model is used. Just as we may speak of a generation gap between different age groups, we may refer to a general change in attitude between different periods in history. The climate of opinion in any given age is usually referred to as the spirit of the age or *Zeitgeist*. In order to be valid as characteristics of the spirit of an age, the features chosen must be independent of a partisan position in any particular religious, political, or other controversy. In other words, they must be shared perceptions of the world or those matters that are considered “relevant.” They tend to reveal themselves in the consensus of each period about the “big questions” concerning values, truth, standards of beauty and morality. This does not mean that there is agreement about the answers to these questions, merely that there is agreement that they are the important questions. Though they are most easily seen in this philosophical context, they influence all aspects of existence because they influence the underlying attitude toward existence, the meaning of life, and the nature of humanity. For the sake of convenience and to demonstrate the pervasive nature of the spirit of an age, historical subject matter will be divided into six categories: 1) social history is concerned with relations within families, communities and other social entities; 2) political history is concerned with wars, kings, government and relations between governments; 3) religious history involves questions and systems of faith and worship, including the relationship between religious authorities, social groups, and the state; 4) intellectual history deals with philosophy, science, and similar enterprises of the mind; 5) technological history involves the development of tools for providing the necessities and comforts of life; 6) economic history is the investigation of how people earned their livelihood. These six categories together comprise the SPRITE model for organizing information presented in the course.

II. PERIODS OF STUDY

ANCIENT: The Greek and Roman spirit is distinguished from that of earlier civilizations in its increasing emphasis on rationalism, secularism, and humanism.

Social: Greek tradition and Roman law determined family relationships, the place of the individual in society, and the status of women in ways that were unconnected with religion. *Political:* Kings and emperors were no longer gods or necessarily priests but justified their power in other ways. *Religious:* Religious belief and practice were an important part of both Greek and Roman civilizations, while the influence of mythopoeism—a focus on mythical and supernatural “explanation”—declined over time. *Intellectual:* Philosophy and science could be removed from revealed religion. *Technological:* The engineering and technological feats of the Romans indicated the materialism of their culture that is an important part of the heritage of the Western world. *Economic:* Athenian domination of the ocean and Roman expansion of imperial control were no longer explained as being due to superior gods but as being undertaken to enrich the polity.

MEDIEVAL: The Middle Ages were dominated by a quest for physical and spiritual security. *Social:* A functional theory of society that emphasized the interdependence and hierarchy of groups within society linked social structure with the search for spiritual security. *Political:* The feudal system was designed to provide governance and security for all members of society. *Religious:* The Western Christian Church strongly influenced all areas of life because the spiritual concern of the age was the attainment of immortality to the exclusion of nearly everything else. *Intellectual:* Christianity dominated intellectual activity through the efforts of religious thinkers like the Scholastics and the role of monasteries in preserving ancient texts. *Technological:* The iron reinforced plow and horse collar were introduced, promoting an increase in agricultural output. The stirrup made fighting from horseback possible. Windmills and water power provide the basis for development of manufacturing. *Economic:* The manorial system was an economic institution for ensuring survival in an agrarian society.

RENAISSANCE: The 15th and 16th centuries constituted a period of “rebirth” in Western civilization after the problems of the late medieval era. The Renaissance saw a renewed emphasis on rationalism, humanism, secularism, and individualism, and rediscovery of classical Greek and Roman culture. *Social:* The emergence of new classes and the new money that affected the standard of living had a quickening and, perhaps, secularizing effect. *Political:* The structure of government began its slow evolution from the decentralized system of feudalism into larger, more powerful political entities known as nation-states. *Religious:* The Reformations of the 16th century marked the division of Western Christianity into competing Catholic and Protestant faiths. *Intellectual:* Rational investigation was considered as much a gift of God as revelation and must be used to understand this world and the next. Humanism takes on an additional meaning during the Renaissance as a cultural movement devoted to the study of classical texts. *Technological:* The printing press, gunpowder, and other developments were fundamental to the transition from medieval to modern times. *Economic:* The emergence of banks, the influx of gold and silver, the economic aggressiveness of the Italian city state and northern cities such as the Hanseatic League, led to new economic structures, inflation, etc. that had a profound effect on all of the institutions of the day.

AGE OF POWER: The 17th century was an age in which power in all of its forms was sought after and celebrated. *Social:* The wars and other dislocations of the age reinforced the desire for stability and control, thus even more emphasis on family, church, crown. *Political:* The wars of religion, absolute monarchy, and the unsettled nature of politics heightened the sense of pessimism and the desire for power. *Religious:* Horrific wars of religion resulted from the clash between Catholic and Protestant systems of faith, and religious connotations influenced the course of the Scientific Revolution. *Intellectual:* The Scientific Revolution, influenced in part by mystical or magical beliefs, constituted an attempt to explore and to master nature in order to learn its secrets. *Technological:* Much of the Scientific Revolution was dependent on the development of instruments such as the telescope and vacuum pump. *Economic:* Contact with new cultures during overseas exploration and the aggressive nature of mercantilism reflected the desire for control and the instability of the age.

ENLIGHTENMENT: Rationalism was re-emphasized and the effort to understand and conform to nature through reason becomes paramount. *Social:* The growing wealth and education of the bourgeoisie create a strengthening challenge to the social standing of traditional groups like the nobility. *Political:* The ideas and programs of writers such as Montesquieu, the philosophes, and enlightened despots all point to the attempt to rationalize the political order. *Religious:* Deism developed as a system of belief that combined an emphasis on reason with criticism of the past excesses of organized religion. *Intellectual:* Locke, Newton, Kant, and many others show the effect of rationalism on intellectual activity. *Technological:* The Agricultural Revolution and beginning of the Industrial Revolution traditionally have been placed in this period. Steel making processes, steam engines, and the general development of machinery mark the period. *Economic:* The economic natural order as reasoned by Adam Smith in *The Wealth of Nations* illustrates 18th century economic thought.

AGE OF REVOLUTION: This period is characterized by a general attitude that change could bring about improvements in all areas of people's lives, and this conscious desire for change led to several forms of revolution. *Social:* These revolutions fundamentally altered social relationships and conditions. The idea of social equality and fully developed capitalism meant a revolution in social relationships as, for example, in the romantic idea that childhood is a special time. *Political:* The French Revolution made permanent a feeling that the state belongs to the citizens, so that modern wars, political movements and international relations involve the "nation in arms" and whole "races" of peoples. *Religious:* The Catholic Church retrenched and sided with politically and socially conservative forces while various stages of the French Revolution challenged the status of the Church and religion itself. *Intellectual:* The romantic revolution's emphasis on the individual, the heroic, and the emotional in addition to the search for the unique and peculiar as opposed to the universals of the Enlightenment characterize this age. *Technological:* In all areas of life from industry to travel, the technical aspects of the era are almost self-evident. *Economic:* The Industrial Revolution can be seen as the greatest watershed in human history since the beginning of agriculture. Certainly modern materialism, with all its implications, owes its existence to what we term the Industrial Revolution. In the 19th century, nostalgia led to a rejection of

the materialism of the day and a kind of escapism, but at the same time mass-produced medieval ornamentation and concern with alienation and the plight of the worker led to new concerns; economic nationalism was as powerful a force as political nationalism.

UNCERTAINTY: With the destruction of faith in reason and intuition the Age of Uncertainty arrived. This was accomplished by the agency of the two distinguishing characteristics of the age—psychology and relativism. *Social:* The extreme individualism, the breakdown of the family on one hand and the unprecedented mobility and wealth provided by the industrial revolution on the other hand also highlighted the uncertainty of the age. All of these trends were set by 1920. *Political:* Both totalitarian dictators and democratic politicians manipulated public opinion or reacted to it in a way that emphasized the irrational nature of 20th century political life as indicated by the two World Wars and the Cold War. *Religious:* Discoveries in the fields of biology and physics posed strong challenges to tenets of religious belief, while religious fundamentalism marked a renewal of faith and practice. *Intellectual:* The ideas that there are no standards and that both reason and emotion are products of conditioning gave rise to an anchorless hedonism or a sense of despair. These effects were heightened by increasing specialization in the sciences that gave rise to the feeling that the world was an unknowable mystery. *Technological:* Uncertainty is increased by the astounding possibilities which now seem to confront the Western Civilization. Nuclear power, space travel, environmental control, genetic engineering, and many other technological possibilities are both frightening and reassuring. *Economic:* The quest for material wealth in the 20th century gave focus to the lives of many people, but, at the same time, it underlined uncertainty about the meaning of existence.

III. KEY TERMS

There are a few terms used throughout this course that it would be well to learn and keep in mind from the outset. They are:

- **Rationalism** is the view that the physical and moral universe is orderly and functions in accord with laws or principles. Since people are rational, they have the power to understand the working of the universe if they can discover the laws or principles.
- **Humanism** means placing an emphasis on humanity as the most important element in the universe. Thus, people are the subjects of the arts and they dominate in all interests and activities. Humanism takes on an additional meaning during the Renaissance with a focus on textual study.
- **Secularism** is the placing of emphasis on this life in this time rather than on religion, an afterlife, and the supernatural.
- **Intuition, feeling, emotion, and faith** are all words used to mean an emphasis on the non-rational. They usually involve an implication that the world is not accessible to human reason. In other words, people can best live in harmony with

the universe by depending on revealed truth from supernatural sources or their own instincts.

- **Classicism** refers to a frame of mind and implies an inclination to *Conservatism*, or a view that the models and directions pointed out by the “ancients” should be followed; *Unity*, or the idea that a play, picture, etc. should have a clear subject and be uncluttered by extraneous material; *Restraint* of emotion and a rational portrayal, even of emotion; *Balance* of composition; and *Simplicity* in order to provide clarity of meaning and exposition.
- **Platonism** is the belief that concepts, forms, ideas, or ideals represent absolute truth and should be the subject of artistic and philosophical endeavors. For example, the concept of roundness, or beauty, or terror or emotions in the imperfect world of real objects.
- **Neoplatonism** is similar to Platonism except that the concepts, forms, or ideas are given supernatural attributes as being divinely inspired or in some way relating humanity to the heavenly.
- **Aristotelian** means an emphasis on the world as it is and a conception of ideas as being the products of the observation of the physical world.

IV. SUGGESTIONS

One of the most common causes of trouble in this course is the failure to take notes. You must take notes. This does not mean merely writing down what you see on the overhead projector or blackboard. The outlines placed on the screen are meant only as an aid in following the logic of the lecture or to give the spelling of unfamiliar words. It is a mistake to believe that only copying the lecture outlines will provide you with adequate notes. The best policy is to listen to the lectures and take notes rather than to focus on copying down what is on the screen. It is also a serious mistake to miss lecture and instead attempt to rely solely on the textbook. Much of the material presented in the lectures is in the textbook, but the lectures establish the key themes and subjects in the course and indicate to you which parts of the textbook are most important for you to study. Many students also find it useful to take notes while reading the textbook.

The essay portion of the exams is meant to test your ability to analyze, synthesize, and organize the material. You will not have time to write everything you know about the subject. Rank the items of information you have on a subject in order of importance and write them in that order. When you are asked to compare two topics or are otherwise asked to amalgamate two topics, do so. Try to find the connections or relationship between the two topics. A definition of each is necessary, but not sufficient. In your essay you are constructing an argument. You should always clearly explain and support the component parts of your argument. Never rely on a “laundry list” of facts to support your argument; always explain why the examples you provide in your essay support your argument.