



Ministero dell'Istruzione, dell'Università e della Ricerca
PL01 – ESAME DI STATO DI ISTRUZIONE SECONDARIA SUPERIORE

Indirizzo: LI04 - LICEO LINGUISTICO

Tema di: LINGUA STRANIERA - INGLESE

B – STORICO - SOCIALE

The problem of systematically rejecting the past arises only when innovation is recognized both as inescapable and as socially desirable: when it represents “progress”. This raises two distinct questions, how innovation as such is recognized and legitimized, and how the situation arising from it is to be specified (that is how a model of society is to be formulated when the past can no longer provide it). The former is more easily answered.

We know very little about the process which has turned the words “new” and “revolutionary” (as used in the language of advertising) into synonyms for “better” and “more desirable”, and research is badly needed here. However, it would seem that novelty or even constant innovation is more readily accepted as far as it concerns the human control over non-human nature, for example science and technology, since so much of it is obviously advantageous even to the most tradition-bound. Has there ever been a serious example of Luddism directed against bicycles or transistor radios? On the other hand, while certain socio-political innovations may appear attractive to some groups of human beings, at least prospectively, the social and human implications of innovation (including technical innovation) tend to meet with greater resistance, for equally obvious reasons. Rapid and constant change in material technology may be hailed by the very people who are profoundly upset by the experience of rapid change in human (for example sexual and family) relations, and who might actually find it hard to conceive of constant change in such relations. Where even palpably “useful” material innovation is rejected, it is generally, perhaps always, because of the fear of the social innovation, that is disruption, it entails.

Innovation which is so obviously useful and socially neutral that it is accepted almost automatically, at all events by people to whom technological change is familiar, raises virtually no problem of legitimation. One would guess (but has the subject actually been investigated?) that even so traditionalist an activity as popular institutional religion has found little difficulty in accepting it. We know of violent resistance to any change in the ancient holy texts, but there appears to have been no equivalent resistance to, say, the cheapening of holy images and icons by means of modern technological processes, such as prints and oleographs. On the other hand certain innovations require legitimation, and in periods when the past ceases to provide any precedent for them, this raises very grave difficulties. A single dose of innovation, however great, is not so troublesome. It can be presented as the victory of some permanent positive principle over its opposite, or as a process of “correction” or “rectification”, reason prevailing over unreason, knowledge over ignorance, “nature” over the “unnatural”, good over evil. But the basic experience of the past two centuries has been constant and continued change, which cannot be so dealt with except sometimes, at the cost of considerable casuistry, as the constantly necessary application of permanent principles to circumstances ever changing in ways which remain rather mysterious, or by exaggerating the strength of the surviving forces of evil.

Paradoxically, the past remains the most useful analytical tool for coping with constant change, but in a novel form. It turns into the discovery of history as a process of directional change, of development or evolution. Change thus becomes its own legitimation, but it is thereby anchored to a transformed “sense



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of the past”. Bagehot’s *Physics and Politics* (1872) is a good nineteenth-century example of this; current concepts of “modernization” illustrate more simple-minded versions of the same approach. In brief, what legitimates the present and explains it is not now the past as a set of reference points (for example Magna Carta), or even as duration (for example the age of parliamentary institutions) but the past as a process of becoming the present. Faced with the overriding reality of change, even conservative thought becomes historicist. Perhaps, because hindsight is the most persuasive form of the historian’s wisdom, it suits them better than most.

But what of these who also require foresight to specify a future which is unlike anything in the past? [...]

Some sort of historicism, that is the more or less sophisticated and complex extrapolation of past tendencies into the future, has been the most convenient and popular method of prediction. At all events the shape of the future is discerned by searching the process of past development for clues, so that paradoxically, the more we expect innovation, the more history becomes essential to discover what it will be like.

[754 words]

Eric Hobsbawm, *On History*, Orion Books, 2010 (first ed. Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1997).

<https://books.google.it/books?id=WVuIyMVegT8C&printsec=copyright&hl=it#v=onepage&q&f=false>

COMPREHENSION AND INTERPRETATION

Answer the following questions. Use complete sentences and your own words.

1. When is the past systematically rejected?
2. What research is necessary according to the author?
3. When is innovation easily accepted?
4. Why does social and human change meet with greater resistance?
5. What idea does the example of prints and oleographs support?
6. Why does a single dose of innovation cause no problem?
7. What is the paradox about the past?
8. How is history interpreted?
9. How is the present legitimized and explained?
10. What does the author mean by historicism?



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PRODUCTION

Choose **one** of the following questions.

Number your answer clearly to show which question you have attempted.

Either

1. “To be a member of any human community is to situate oneself with regards to one’s (its) past, if only by rejecting it. The past is therefore a permanent dimension of the human consciousness, an inevitable component of the institutions, values and other patterns of human society. The problem for historians is to analyse the nature of this “sense of the past” in society and to trace its changes and transformations.” (Eric Hobsbawm, *On History*)

Discuss the quotation by linking and supporting your ideas with your readings or by recalling your studies in history. Write a 300-word essay.

Or

2. Focus on the concepts of “innovation”, “novelty” and “progress” and express your views by linking and supporting them with examples which refer to your readings and your personal experience. Write a 300-word composition.

Durata massima della prova: 6 ore.

È consentito soltanto l’uso dei dizionari monolingue e bilingue.

Non è consentito lasciare l’Istituto prima che siano trascorse 3 ore dalla dettatura del tema.