

Summary on Clark's Short History and the Age of Revolution

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The Philosophy Café

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As is the pattern of the program questions, in the session on 'Present Humanism & Understanding from the Age of Revolution and Nationalism', we are focusing on the following:

- In terms of our 'progress of western thought', where did the Age of Revolution and Nationalism (1774-1865) pick up the philosophy of its past and where did it end up?
- For the Age of Revolution and Nationalism (1774-1865), where were the subtle influences of thought systems of 'the East' in this development, and how did that translate into western thought?
- What remaining challenges of Age of Revolution and Nationalism (1774-1865) does philosophy bring to the present?

To answer the questions, as we have done in the program series, we turn to Stephen Trombley's *A Short History of Western Thought*. In this case, Trombley has only devoted four pages in a section called, 'The improvement of man'. Trombley's very summative conclusions for the Age of Revolution are the philosophical ideals of:

- Jean-Jacques Rousseau's *The Social Contract* (1762)
- Edmund Burke's *Conciliation with America* (1775)
- Thomas Jefferson's *United States' Declaration of Independence* (1776)
- Thomas Paine's *The Rights of Man* (1791)

among many other works, and from other later philosophers, including the British utilitarians, Jeremy Bentham and James Mill, and the British political economists, such as Thomas Malthus.

However, these political ideals are *inadequate* in understanding the Australian experience of the Age of Revolution. Australians do not have, generally, clear ideas of their own 'revolutionary' experience and nationalism. For this reason, we must turn to Manning Clark's *A Short History of Australia*. There have been three documents that I have put out there, in the online world to link Clark's history to the ideas of revolution and nationalism. In the last week, it has been personally pleasing that one of those papers has met with a

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positive global response, and I am in the top 4% of researchers on Academia by 30-day views!

The first document was actually an article which explained what are the aims of this program, outlined Clark's historiography, and doubled as an argument for reinvesting in the humanities through these types of Adult and Community Education programs, since our universities are not really doing do it. The first reading document provided four different versions of 'revolution' during the Age of Revolution (1774-1865). In this second reading document I have laid out eight versions of 'nationalism' that emerged in Australia after the Age of Revolution, as my reading of what was described and explained by Clark.

In summary, we have four Australian versions of 'revolution' during the Age of Revolution, and beyond:

1. Past Revolution as Land, Labour, and Class. These are revolutionary ideals of the past, in that the certain forces of the neo-liberal era, since 1989, has done much to discredit the narratives of property ownership, labour and full-employment, and the narratives of class conflict. However, the impacts of the past are still something we are living with.
2. Present Revolution as Big Belief, Education, and Class. Ours is an ideological age, as much as any age has been ideological. Often those who complain that someone else is being 'ideological' are wanting to hid or ignore their own ideological frame. Big beliefs do not go away simply because politicians find them inconvenient for own agendas. What happens instead is that politicians find ways to underfund the higher learning which can threaten their hidden or ignored ideological frame. Often underfunding means those areas of history, social psychology, political science, sociology, which demonstrate the ways that politicians have exploited class divisions. Both sides of politics in Australia's past are equally to blame, but the more important need is to hold governance accountable.
3. Fleeting Revolution as Gold Fever and Rebellion. The 'revolutions' of materialism and consumerism are fleeting in the benefits for Australia society. Political, sustainable, change is not about a narrow focus on the economy, whether that economy is for the country or for individual entrepreneurs. If there has ever been the highest global priority, it is the problems of materialism and consumerism. This is what the politics of climate change is about.
4. Sustained Revolution as Gradual Legislative Change. Hence, the last revolutionary possibility is the sustainable politics of representative democracy. This means not having the revolving door of political leadership based on short-term gain, but having both big belief ideals and sustainable practice, working together.

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In summary, Clark provided an understanding of different versions of Australian nationalism and myth:

1. Rural and Urban Folklore (with crossovers, as many rural folklorists were urbanists);
2. Provincialism (with the possibility of scaling 'the local' up to the region or the nation);
3. Philistinism (with one of its old versions as 'Puritanism');
4. 'Bourgeois Civilization' (which aligned to the old British-Australian nationalism);
5. 'Working Class' (which is more commonly referred to as 'Radical Nationalism');
6. ANZAC Nationalism (and there are different versions, see Carolyn Holbrook's *ANZAC: The Unauthorised Biography*);
7. Cosmopolitan Nationalism (from the 1980s a variant arose as multiculturalism); and Clark's own
8. Tragic Nationalism.

In bringing these many ideas together, what can be said is that we need to, first, turn to our own revolutionary past, understand the global big ideas which were played out, and look to having both big belief ideals and sustainable practice, working together in the present. Secondly, we need to stop being beguiled by different versions of nationalism. We have to be aware that nationalism is a political tool, as well as a cultural identifier. Whether good or bad, we have to have our eyes wide open, thus to understand Australia's past.