History of Information

scientific "revolution"

authenticity & authority
truth and trust

History of Information
Feb 16, 2017
The three Rs

"The impact of printing, experienced first by literate groups in early modern Europe, changed the character of the Italian Renaissance and ought to be considered among the causes of both the Protestant Reformation and the Rise of modern science."

— Eisenstein

another revolution?

Putting the other "Rs" in their place

"The Scientific Revolution outshines everything since the rise of Christianity and reduces the Renaissance and Reformation to the rank of mere episodes, mere internal displacements within the system of medieval Christianity."

— Herbert Butterfield, The Origins of Modern Science, 1300-1800, 1948
not just tech ...
nor just techies ...

Gutenberg, d. 1468
Copernicus, 1473-1543
Tycho Brahe, 1546-1601
Bacon, 1561-1626
Galileo, 1564-1642
Descartes, 1596-1650
Newton, 1642-1727
Today's climb

What came before

Who was involved

Case histories

What happened

Whom to trust

Scientific "revolution"
"Those dreadful revolutions, which cannot be beheld upon Paper, without horror; unless we remember, that they had this one happy effect, to open mens eies to look out for the true Remedy."

--Sprat, History

**English Civil War**, 1642-1649

execution of Charles I

**Commonwealth & Protectorate**, 1649-1659

**Restoration**, 1660

return of Charles II (“since the King’s return”)

**Great Plague**, 1665

**Fire of London**, 1666
print's legacy: almanacks & prophecy

"Sir Thomas Crewe...hath heard at the Committee for examining the burning of the city, ... .that it was done by plots ... it was bragged by several Papists that upon such a day in such a time, we should find the hottest weather that ever was in England; and words of plainer sense ... 

"We talked much of Nostradamus his prophecy of these times, and the burning of the City of London, some of whose verses are put into Booker’s Almanac this year .... My Lady Carteret herself did tell us how abundance of pieces of burnt paper were cast by the wind ... .she took one up ... wheron there remained no more nor less than these words: "Time is, it is done"

— Pepys, Diary November 2, 1666; February 3, 1666/7

late dreadful conflagration, added to the plague and war, the most dismal judgments that could be inflicted; but which indeed we highly deserved for our prodigious ingratitude, burning lusts, dissolute court, profane and abominable lives — John Evelyn

"La sange du juste à Londres fera faute
Bruslez par foudre de vingt trois le six,
La dame antique cherra de place haute
De meme sute plusiers seront occis"

An Almanack for the yeare, M.D. sixty
Composed by M. Michael Nostradamus Doctor in Physicke of Salvin of Creux in Province.

Whata the soule sapist & seist, then shall the monster be scene in the playne day then shall interprete it faire otherwise dereb hath no respect, none shall pro vide for it.
"Sir Thomas Crewe...hath heard at the Committee for examining the burning of the city, ... .that it was done by plots ... it was bragged by several Papists that upon such a day in such a time, we should find the hottest weather that ever was in England; and words of plainer sense ...

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— Pepys, Diary November 2, 1666; February 3, 1666/7
the public sphere?

"I lately dropped into a Coffee-House at Westminster, where I found the Room hung around with ... Elixirs, Tincture, the Anodine Fotus, English Pills, Electuaries, and in short, more remedies than I believe there are diseases."

— Richard Steele, Spectator 1712
I lately dropped into a Coffee-House at Westminster, where I found the Room hung around with ... Elixirs, Tincture, the Anodine Fotus, English Pills, Electuaries, and in

the public sphere?

— Richard Steele, Spectator 1712
facing choices

public sphere/opinion/ ... public good

Trump Taps RFK Jr., Promoter Of Bogus Vaccine-Autism Link, For Review Panel

Meeting with Trump emboldens anti-vaccine activists, who see an ally in the Oval Office
Scientific "revolution"
proto science

scientific rumblings
Roger Bacon *scientia experimentalis*
"disregarding the crowd's approach"

Francis Bacon, *New Atlantis*

- idols of the tribe - collective beliefs
- idols of the cave - individual beliefs
- idols of the market place - misleading words
- idols of the theatre - sophistry

"[FB] sought and gather'd for our use the Tru"
— Cowley "To the Royal Society"
from looking back to looking around

“though I do not deny that moderns can make some discoveries … do not think one will arise who can give us a body of philosophy more complete than [Aristotle]”

—Erasmus

"Why do we not, I say, turn over the living book of the world instead of dead papers."

—John Comenius (1592-1670)
from dead to living

from **Ptolemy** (c. 100-170)
to
**Copernicus, Galileo, Tycho, Kepler, Newton**

from **Hippocrates** (460-375 bce), **Galen** (c. 129-216)
**Ayurveda; Yellow Emperor's Inner Canon**
to
**Paracelsus** (1493-1541) (?taught by Trithemius)
**Harvey** (1578-1657)
too easily overlooked

**al-Khwarizmi** (780-850) - *al-Jabar*

**al-Zahrawi** [Albucasis] (936-1013), *Al-Tasrif*

---surgery, orthopedics, ophthalmology, nutrition

republished over 700 years

(see *Albucasis de Chirurgia*, 1778)

**Ibn al-Haytham** [Alhazen] (965-1040)

---optics; Euclid's Elements, doubts about Ptolemy

influencing Roger Bacon, Kepler

**Ali Qushji** (1403-1474)
"that future times should hear the names of its first Promoters"

Pepys (1633-1703)
Boyle (1627-1691)
Wren (1632-1723)
Locke (1632-1704)
Hooke (1635-1703)
Newton (1642-1727)
Halley (1656-1742)

Evelyn (1620-1701)
Moxon (1627-1691)
Graunt (1620-1674)
Petty (1623-1687) ...
Thomas Bayes (1701?-1761)
Benjamin Franklin (1706-1790)
Charles Babbage (1791-1871)
Alan Turing (1912-1954)
Steven Hawking (1942 -
today's climb

what came before

who was involved

what happened?

case histories

whom to trust
Scientific "revolution"

- what came before
- who was involved
- what happened?
- whom to trust
- case histories
“... is, in short, to make faithful Records, of all the Works of Nature, or Art, which can come within their reach: that so the present Age, and posterity, may be able to put a mark on the Errors, which have been strengthened by long prescription: to restore the Truths, that have lain neglected: ... to separate the knowledge of Nature, from the colours of Rhetorick, the devices of Fancy, or the delightful deceit of Fables.”

— Sprat
new scientists

"Men did generally think, that no man was fit to meddle in matters of this consequence, but he that had bred himself up in a long course of Discipline for that purpose; that had the habit, the gesture, the look of a Philosopher. Whereas experience on the contrary tells us, that greater things are produc'd, by the free way, than the formal."

— Sprat
Sprat's model

**knowledge of Nature**

"They have labor'd to inlarge it, from being confin'd to the custody of a few; or from servitude to private interests.

"They have striven to preserve it from being over-press'd by a confus'd heap of vain, and useless particulars; or from being straitned and bounded too much up by General Doctrines."
**observation & experimentation**

**Hooke & Boyle**

"Trials in Chymistry, or Mechanicks ... the right Art of Experimenting"

— Sprat

**justifying technology**

"I judged that whatever men's eyes were in the younger age of the World, our eyes in this old age of it needed spectacles"

— Hooke
Not so much, by any solemnity of Laws, or ostentation of Ceremonies, as by solid Practice, and examples: not, by a glorious pomp of Words; but by the silent, effectual, and unanswerable Arguments of real Productions.

Members ... different Religions, Countries, and Professions ... not to lay the Foundation of an English, Scotch, Irish, Popish, or Protestant Philosophy; but a Philosophy of Mankind. ... the Church of England ought not to be apprehensive the general Banck, and Free-Port of the world ... receive strangers from all countries, into its number
communication

corresponding secretary

"their intention was more to communicate to each other their discoveries ... some resemblance, to the Academy lately begun at Paris ... to all the learned world they called for aid"

— Sprat

"Pardon ... an unknown person, write to one who is not unknown; for to what man who has heard of the Royal Society can you be unknown? And who has not heard of the Society, if he is in anyway drawn to an interest in learning"

—Leibniz to Oldenburg, 1670

"sacred responsibility" — Erasmus
"publish'd to the world"

"[Publication] is a most heroick Invention: For by such concealments, there may come very much hurt to mankind. If any certain remedy should be found out against an Epidemical disease; if it were suffer'd to be ingross'd by one man, there would be great swarms swept away, which otherwise might be easily sav'd."

-- Sprat

"the noble, positively royal ambitions of my friend Aldus ... labour indeed worthy of Hercules ... a library which knows no walls save those of the world itself"

— Erasmus
what happened?

**Publishing**

**Journal des Scavans, Jan 5th, 1665**

**Philosophical Transactions, March 6th, 1665**
L'IMPRIMEUR
AV LECTEUR.

B dessein de ce Journal est d'en faire savoir ce qui se passe de nouveau dans la République des Lettres, il sera composé,

Premièrement d'un Catalogue exact des principaux livres qui s'imprimeront dans l'Europe. Et on ne se contentera pas de donner les simples titres, comme on en fait jusqu'à présent la plupart des Bibliographes : mais de plus on dira de quoi ils traitent, à quoy ils peuvent être utiles.

Secondement, quand il viendra à mourir quelque personne célèbre par sa doctrine & par ses ouvrages, on en fera l'Éloge, & on donnera un Catalogue de ce qu'il aura mis en jour, avec les principales circonstances de sa vie.

En troisième lieu on fera savoir les expériences de Physique & de Chymie, qui peuvent servir d'expliquer les effets de la Nature : les nouvelles découvertes qui se font dans les Arts & dans les Sciences, comme les méchanismes & les inventions utiles ou curieuses que peuvent fournir les Mathematiques ; les observations du Ciel, celles des Meteores, & ce que l'Anatomie pourra trouver de nouveau dans les animaux.

En quatrième lieu, les principales décisions des Tribunaux Scolaires & Ecclésiastiques, les censures de Sorbonne & des autres Universités, tant de ce Royaume que des Pays étrangers.

Enfin, on tâchera de faire en sorte qu'il ne se passe rien dans l'Europe digné de la curiosité des Gens de lettres, qu'on ne puisse apprendre par ce Journal.

Le seul denombrement des choses qui le composeront pourroit suffire pour en faire connoître l'utilité. Mais l'adoucissement qu'il fera entre-avantages à ceux qui entreprendront quelque ouvrage considérable, puis qu'ils pourront s'en servir pour publier leur dessein, & influer tout le monde à leur, communiquer les manuscrits, & les pieces fugitives qui pourront contribuer à la perfection des choses, qu'ils auront entrepris.
what happened?

PHILOSOPHICAL TRANSACTIONS.

Monday, March 6, 1665.

The Contents.

An Introduction to this Tract. An Accotmt of the Improvement of Optick Glasses at Rome. Of the Observation made in England, of a Spot in one of the Belts of the Planet Jupiter. Of the motion of the late Comet predicted. The Heads of many New Observations and Experiments, in order to an Experimental History of Cold; together with some Thermometrical Discourses and Experiments. A Relation of a very odd Monstrous Calf. Of a peculiar Lead-Ore in Germany, very useful for Essays. Of an Hungarian Boleus, of the same effect with the Bolus Armenus. Of the New American Whale, fishing about the Bermudas. A Narrative concerning the Success of the Pendulum-watches at Sea for the Longitudes; and the Grant of a Patent thereupon. A Catalogue of the Philosophical Books published by Monsieur de Fermat, Counsellour at Tholouse, lately dead.

The Introduction.

Hereas there is nothing more necessary for promoting the improvement of Philosophical Matters, than the communicating to such, as apply their Studies and Endeavours that way, such things as are discovered or put in practice by others; it is therefore thought fit to employ the Press, as the most proper way to gratify those, whose engagement in such Studies, and delight in the advancement of Learning and profitable Discoveries, doth entitle them to the knowledge of what this Kingdom, or other parts of the World, do, from time to time, afford, as well...
what happened?

By the same Noble person was lately communicated to the Royal Society an Account of a very Odd Monstrous Birth, produced at Limmington in Hampshire, where a Butcher, having caused a Cow (which cast her Calf the year before) to be covered, that she might the sooner be fatted, killed her when fat, and opening the Womb, which he found heavy to admiration, saw in it a Calf, which had begun to have hair, whose hinder Legs had no Joynts, and whose Tongue was, Cerberus-like, triple, to each side of his Mouth one, and one in the midst: Between the Fore-leggs and the Hinder-leggs was a great Stone, on which the Calf rid: The Sternum, or that part of the Breast, where the Ribs lye, was also perfect Stone; and the Stone, on which it rid, weighed twenty pounds and a half; the outside of the Stone was of Grenish colour, but some small parts being broken off, it appeared a perfect Free-stone. The Stone, according to the Letter of Mr. David Thomas, who sent this Account to Mr. Boyle, is with Doctor Haughteyn of Salisbury, to whom he also referreth for further Information.
so passé?

Chan Zuckerberg Initiative acquires and will free up science search engine Meta

Posted Jan 23, 2017 by Josh Constine (@joshconstine)

Mark Zuckerberg and Priscilla Chan’s $45 billion philanthropy organization is making its first acquisition in order to make it easier for scientists to search, read and tie together more than 26 million science research papers. The Chan Zuckerberg Initiative is acquiring Meta, an AI-powered research search engine startup, and will make its tool free to all in a few months after enhancing the product.
Scientific "revolution"

- what happened
- who was involved
- what came before
- whom to trust
- case histories
great fears

**the plague**

*bubonic plague*

“Black Death” & the Silk Road

Mongolia, 1330; Europe 1347

**the pox**

*smallpox*

Egypt, 1350 bce

Europe 5th - 6th century
The plague is much in Amsterdam, and we in fears of it here.

Pepys, Dec. 31, 1663

The talk upon the 'Change is, that De Ruyter is dead, with fifty men of his own ship, of the plague, at Cales June 30, 1664

We were told to-day of a Dutch ship ... where all the men were dead of the plague, and the ship cast ashore at Gottenburgh Sept. 24, 1664

Thence to the Coffee-house ... where all the newes is of the Dutch ... and of the plague growing upon us in this towne May 24, 1665
plague — and big data

“The towne grows very sickly, and people to be afeard of it; there dying this last week of the plague 112, from 43 the week before. The Mortality Bill is come to 267”

— Pepys’ Diary, June 29th, 1665

“Above 700 died of the plague this week.”

— July 13, 1665

“The sickness is... almost every where, there dying 1089 of the plague this week.”

— July 19, 1665
PROCLAMATION

"That no hogs dogs, or cats, ... be kept within any part of the city' ..."

"Wherefore were we ordered to kill all the dogs and cats, but because as they were domestic animals, and are apt to run from house to house ...so they are capable of carrying ... infectious streams ... even in their furs and hair ... by the advice of the physician, that all dogs and cats should be immediately killed."

--Defoe, *Journal of the Plague Year*, 1722
“Elixirs .. Pills and Lozenges .. infallible, and never fail of success.”
— Steele

Daniel Defoe
1660?-1731

print: solution or problem?
"Some endeavours were used to suppress the printing of such books as terrified the people... these terrors ... led them into a thousand weak, foolish, and wicked things .. running about to fortune tellers ... streets were plastered over with doctors' bills and papers of ignorant fellows, quacking and tampering in physic, and inviting people to come to them for remedies . 'infallible preventive pills against the plague' ... 'Sovereign cordials against the corruption of the air''

--Defoe, *Journal of the Plague Year*, 1722
smallpox

Queen Anne (1665-1714)
17 pregnancies, 3 still births, 10 miscarriages
3 died in infancy of smallpox

William Duke of Gloucester (1689-1700)

Plains Indians:
perhaps 90% of indigenous population

"P.S. You will Do well to try to Innoculate the Indians by means of Blanketts, as well as to try Every other method that can serve to Extirpate this Execrable Race."
— Lord Amherst, July 16, 1763
Lady Mary Wortley Montagu
1689-1762

**fighting back: inoculation**

**east to west**

“Pylarni, a woman, affirmed that she had inoculated no less than six thousand persons in ... 1713 .. children of English and French Merchants. ... Lady Mary Wortley Montague ...1717 ... her only son, then six years old ... in London experiment was made upon malefactors ... an incision an inch long .. in both arms ... a thread of the same length, impregnated with the matter of a ripe pustule ... removed after forty hours ... the wounds ... usually healed by the twentieth [day]”

—La Condamine, *Discourse on Inoculation*, 1754
case histories

a fight for authority

A SERMON
AGAINST THE
DANGEROUS AND SINFULL PRACTICE
OF INOCULATION.
PREACH'D AT.
St. Andrew's Holborn,
On Sunday, July the 24th, 1722.
By Edmund Massey, M.A. Lecturer of St. Alban Woodstreet.

A LETTER
To the Reverend
Mr. Massey,
Occasion'd by his Late Wonderful
SERMON
AGAINST
INOCULATION.

LONDON:
Printed for J. Roberts, near the Oxford
Arms in Warwick-Lace. M.DCC.LII.
Price Sixpence.

Mr. Maitland's
ACCOUNT
OF
INOCULATING
THE
SMALL POX
Vindicated,
From Dr. Waggstaffe's Misrepresentations of that PRACTICE; with some Remarks on Mr. Massey's Sermon.


To which is added,
His First Account of Inoculating the Small Pox.

LONDON:
Printed and Sold by J. Roberts, at Ibn's
Head in Paternoster-Row. 1722.

by
John Arbuthnot
1667–1735
"It is whispered in Christian Europe that the English are mad and maniacs: mad because they give their children smallpox to prevent their getting it, and maniacs because they cheerfully communicate to their children a certain and terrible illness with the object of preventing an uncertain one. The English on their side say: 'The other Europeans are cowardly and unnatural: cowardly in that they are afraid of giving a little pain to their children, and unnatural because they expose them to death from smallpox some time in the future.' To judge who is right in this dispute, here is the history of this famous inoculation which is spoken of with such horror outside England."

--Voltaire, *Letters on England*
“Cotton Mather, you dog, dam you! I'll inoculate you with this; with a pox to you” [note attached to missile]

crossing the Atlantic

Boston outbreak 1721

“Inquiring of my Negro-man, Onesimus, who is a pretty intelligent fellow, whether he had ever had the smallpox, he answered both yes and no. He told me that he had undergone the operation which had given something of the smallpox and would forever preserve him from it, adding that was often used in West Africa.”

--Cotton Mather, *Vindication*, 1722
"Cotton Mather, you dog, dam you! I'll inoculate you with this; with a pox to you" [note attached to missile]

crossing the Atlantic

**Boston outbreak 1721**

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--Cotton Mather, [Vindication](#)
"at Boston ... the fatal lot having fallen upon some families of distinction, this gave weight to the clamour of prejudice. The civil magistrate interfered, it was made a party affair, and the operation was laid under restraints little less than a prohibition ... A dreadful epidemical small-pox raged in Carolina in 1738."

—La Condamine, *Discourse on Inoculation*, 1754
where was the scientific revolution?

inoculation/variolation
India: 8th century
China: 10th century
Tibet: 11th century
Africa: ?
Turkey: ?16th century
England, France, US: 18th century

Jenner tests smallpox vaccine
May 14, 1796
inoculation/variolation

India: 8th century

China: 10th century

Tibet: 11th century

Africa: ?

Turkey: 16th century

England, France, US: 18th century

Jenner tests smallpox vaccine
May 14, 1796

recurring resistance
18th, 19th, 20th, 21st century
in passing

D.A. Henderson, Doctor Who Helped End Smallpox Scourge, Dies at 87

By DONALD G. McNEIL Jr.  AUG. 21, 2016

Dr. Donald A. Henderson, who led the World Health Organization’s war on smallpox, administering a smallpox vaccination in Ethiopia, around 1972. The last known case was in 1977. World Health Organization
Scientific "revolution"

- what came before
- who was involved
- what happened
- case histories
- whom to trust
“The Mortality Bill is come to 267” —Pepys

big data

1603: regular bills of mortality

1611: incorporation of parish clerks counting by "searchers"

1629: other deaths

1728: age of deceased

1837: last bills
The principal, and most constant of them, were Doctor Seth Ward, the present Lord Bishop of Exeter, Mr. Boyl, Dr. Wilkins, Sir William Petty, Mr. Mathew Wren, Dr. Wallis, Dr. Goddard, Dr. Willis, Dr. Bathurst, Dr. Christopher Wren, Mr. Rook.
The principal, and most constant of them, were Doctor Seth Ward, the present Lord Bishop of Exeter, Mr. Boyl, Dr. Wilkins, Sir William Petty, Mr. Mathew Wren, Dr. Wallis, Dr. Goddard, Dr. Willis, Dr. Bathurst, Mr. Rook.
in a class of his own?

John Graunt, FRS

Natural and Political Observations ... upon the Bills of Mortality

1662

shopkeeper’s math

"His Majesty gave this particular charge to His Society, that if they found any more such Tradesmen, they should be sure to admit them all, without any more ado."

— Sprat
significant developments?
scientific societies

the English gentleman

"Though the Society entertains very many men of particular Professions; yet the farr greater Number are Gentlemen, free, and unconfin'd. ...

"to commit the Work to the care of such men, who, by the freedom of their education the plenty of their estates, and the usual generosity of Noble Bloud, may be well suppos'd to be most averse from such sordid considerations."
whom to trust?

**Cotton Mather**

*Wonders of the Invisible World, 1693*

defense of witch trials:

"An army of devils is horribly broke in upon the place which is the center, and after a sort, the first-born of our English settlements"

**Benjamin Franklin**

Fellow of the Royal Society
"we find many Noble Rarities to be every day given in, not only by the hands of Learned and profess'd Philosophers; but from the Shops of Mechanicks; from the Voyages of Merchants; from the Ploughs of Husbandmen; from the Sports, the Fishponds, the Parks, the Gardens of Gentlemen" -- Sprat
Nullius in Verba?

The Contents.

An Introduction to this Tract. An Account of the Improvement of Optick Glasses at Rome. Of the Observation made in England, of a Spot in one of the Bells of the Planet Jupiter. Of the motion of the late Comet predicted. The Heads of many New Observations and Experiments, in order to an Experimental History of Cold; together with some Thermometrical Discourses and Experiments. A Relation of a very odd Mons trons' calf. Of a peculiar Lead Ore in Germany, very useful for Essays. Of an Hungarian Bolus, of the same effect with the Bolus Armenus. Of the New American Whales, fishing about the Bermudas. A Narrative concerning the Success of the Pendulum-watches at Sea for the Longitudes; and the Grant of a Patent thereupon. A Catalogue of the Philosophical Books publish'd by Monsieur de Fermat, Counsellor at Tholouse, lately dead.
“well constituted government have always made the profession of a physician both honourable and advantageous” —Steele

battling books

A Compleat Treatise of Urines,
Shewing the Right Method of Urinal Prognostication,
For Different From the Common Practice of Quacks and Mountebanks.

By T. H. Pharmacop. Rustican.

“Let us consider the matter in this way: If the wise man or any other man wants to distinguish the true physician from the false, how will he proceed?

.... He will consider whether what [the physician] says is true, and whether what he does is right, in relation to health and disease? ... But can any one attain the knowledge of either unless he have a knowledge of medicine?

... No one at all, it would seem, except the physician can have this knowledge; and therefore not the wise man; he would have to be a physician as well as a wise man.”

--Plato, *Charmides*
questions of information quickly turn into questions of validation, authority, institutions, and reputation

if so, then we need to understand not just the tech, nor just the techies, but also the mechanisms of authority and authenticity
in sum

questions of information quickly turn into questions of validation, authority, institutions, and reputation

if so, then we need to understand not just the tech, nor just the techies, but also the mechanisms of authority and authenticity

Coming up:
Reference books, 2/21
IP, 2/23
Readings for Feb. 21

21 Feb: Reference Books and the Organization of Knowledge

Our notion of "knowledge" really dates from the eighteenth century, marked by the emergence of the encyclopedia, modern libraries and museums and academic disciplines—all of whose traces are still evident today in everything from Wikipedia to a college course catalogue.

Required Readings


Source: Course reader.


[Diderot, Denis] Map of the system of human knowledge. [link] (graphical representation of D's system)

"Encyclopedists." Article in the Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy. [link]

Additional Reading

Assignment for Feb. 21

Pick one of the following definitions from the Encyclopédie and look at the definition of the equivalent term in Wikipedia. How would you explain the differences—what would you ascribe to the the difference in the way the two sources were compiled, the difference in the cultural background, or the different conceptions of “knowledge” (or “information”) that each work embodies?

- adultery
- childhood
- doubt (Diderot)
- elegance (Voltaire)
- man (Diderot) – (see “human” in Wikipedia)
- paternal authority (see “father” in Wikipedia)