



THE IDEA OF PROGRESS AND THE DISCIPLINE OF HISTORY

IHS HISTORY: LECTURE 3



THE TELEOLOGICAL VIEW OF HISTORY

- History is unhistorical and cyclical for ancient civilizations
- The Judeo-Christian approach
- History acquires a meaning in the medieval times (but it loses its secular character)
- It is moving in a certain direction
- Renaissance: A shift from the pessimistic classical view of time to an optimistic one

ENLIGHTENMENT AND TELEOLOGY

- Retained the Judeo-Christian view of teleology
- It now became secularised
- The historical process imbued with rationality
- A cult of progress reached its peak of British prosperity

POST THE 1920S

- A bleaker picture of human destiny prevailed
- The idea of progress still at the centre of Western civilization
- Bleaker for whom?
- Is it inherently Eurocentric?
- Someone's decline could be another's rise

DISCUSSING THREE ASSUMPTIONS ABOUT PROGRESS AND HISTORY

- 1) That natural evolution can be equated to historical progress
- 2) That progress has a finite beginning or end
- 3) That progress is an unbroken straight line

THE CONTENT OF PROGRESS AND THE ROLE OF THE HISTORIAN

- Are the people of an age aware of 'making progress'?

THE END OF HISTORY?

- What if our systems of government are as good as it gets?
- What if human history has peaked?
- What if we are living at the end of history?

WHAT DID FUKUYAMA MEAN BY 'THE END OF HISTORY'?

- The unquestioned triumph of liberal democracy
- Had defeated all of its rivals
- Backed by empirical data

WHAT IS LIBERAL DEMOCRACY?

DEMOCRACY

- Rule by the majority

LIBERAL DEMOCRACY

- Rule of the majority
- Protects individual liberty
- Separation of powers
- Constitutional rights
- free market economies

HUMAN NATURE, PROGRESS AND LIBERAL DEMOCRACY

- A natural synthesis between human nature and liberal democracy
- Influenced by Plato's conception of the tripartite soul
- The Hegelian idea of respect and recognition
- Achievable through the liberal democratic state
- Through the enshrining of human rights

ARE LIBERAL DEMOCRACIES PERFECT?

- They are deeply flawed
- The possible way out?
- Still not as secure as Fukuyama saw it to be
- Seen in the Fascistic shifts across the world
- Does it make us too comfortable?