Jonathan Quang 10/8/2014

Progress? It is an Improvement, Not a Trap

Humanity was once a bunch of people who were hunter-gatherers. In "The Worst Mistake in the History of the Human Race" by Jared Diamond, the author argues that the progress following agricultural civilization is a trap of bad things. Progress is not a trap, but rather a series of gradual improvements. Civilization as it is now, is still better than it was before.  
 Firstly, modern civilization is actually less violent than early hunting-gathering societies. Early hunting-gathering societies required large territories to fuel its growing population. Eventually, hunter-gatherers would engage in many low scale conflicts. In the text, "In Defense of Civilization," Dr. Michael P. Byron states "The probability of violent death for any individual hunter-gatherer, in any given year, is about two percent. If these figures were to be applied to the human population of Earth throughout the entire 20th century, they would result in six billion violent deaths during the century." This number is quite high for the 20th century, which actually contained two world wars. Dr. Byron mentions that humanity was actually less violent per capita than early hunter-gatherers. Less violence is an improvement, not a trap.  
 Secondly, medical treatments have also improved from the time of hunter-gatherers. Before antibiotics and antiseptics were invented, if someone received a leg infection, the leg would most likely have to be sliced off and replaced with a wooden prosthetic. In modern civilization, that person could just purchase an antibiotic cream and apply it to their leg. In the article, "In Defense of Bourgeois Civilization," Jeffery Tucker asks the reader "How many of your children would you like to die in childbirth: zero or six out of nine?" This may be an exaggeration, but the amount of deaths at childbirth are much less today due to advancements in medicine. The author mentions that most people live to about 75 years old. Until the nineteenth century, the average lifespan was between twenty-six and thirty-two years old. The cause of this low average was the high rate of infant death. Saving life and limb is certainly an improvement that came with modern civilization.  
 Thirdly, Diamond argues several problems with society makes progress a trap, but some of these problems are actively being worked on. One of the problems was that farmers lacked a wide variety of food and good nutrition from the wilderness because they farmed a few specific crops. Among first world countries, nutrition is less of a world problem. A variety of food from around the world is available just by visiting a local supermarket. Diamond also argues that agriculture has brought deep class divisions into society. He mentions how oil and minerals must be imported from poorer countries. People are attempting to help the people in the poorer countries. For example, food, water, and general wealth is being sent to certain places in Africa. While this may take some time to transform those countries, as long as they remain open to aid they will eventually see some sort of improvement. Social class divisions between men and women have certainly shrunk in many countries. Women now have the right to vote and get roughly the same jobs as men. Hence, some of Jared Diamond's arguments have solutions that are a work in progress.  
 To conclude, progress is a series of improvements throughout history. Civilization today is still better than before. There is less violence, better healthcare, and the problems that Diamond mentions are actively being worked on to some extent. Progress is something that humans should look forward to and work toward.