

The individual, society and history

IHS History: Lecture 2

The individual and society in history

- What came first: the individual or the society?
- Complementary not opposites
- The interdependence grows with growing complexity
- But it is always a two-way process

The cult of individualism

- Origins traced to the Renaissance
- Later connected with the rise of capitalism and Protestantism
- Formed the basis of the philosophy of 'Utilitarianism'
- Did not necessarily imply a revolt of individuals against society

The discipline of history and the cult of individualism

- Common sense view of history
- History is written by individuals about individuals
- Is this too simplistic a view of history?
- Knowledge of the historian not his individual possession
- The subjects of their histories are not isolated individuals

The historian and/in the march of history

- Both the product and spokesman of his society
- A part of the procession of history
- Their positionality determines their angle of vision of the past
- May change his position along the way

The historian and historiographical trends

- 19th century: history as progress
- Post WW1: from a cyclical theory of history to one in which history displays no patterns at all
- “Before you study history, study the historian.”
- “Before you study the historian, study his historical and social environment”

Understanding the object/s of the historian's enquiry

- The behaviour of individuals?
- The action of social forces?

The great men theory of history

- Is history the stuff of individual genius and follies?
- Is the theory essentially escapist?
- Can the behaviour of men as individuals be separated from their behaviour as members of groups?
- How do we understand the rebels and dissidents in history?
- Do 'great men' lie outside history?

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ky-MKuwaKEo>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Fp2k7m5fej4&t=226s>