

## **With what success have modern political theorists traced a general directionality in the course of history?**

For Kant the central text on history is his essay *Idea for a Universal History from a Cosmopolitan Point of View*(1784). His first thesis is that “all natural capacities of a creature are destined to evolve completely to their natural end” and already he's pointing the course of history in a direction towards the 'natural end of evolution'(Yýldýrým, 2010, p.48). The 5<sup>th</sup>, 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> theses show one of the goals of history as the creation of a “universal civic society” which would ensure the freedom of the individual, and this is extrapolated out to the creation of a “league of nations” which would ensure peace and harmony in the international sphere. Another important element of Kant's historical perspective is its cosmopolitanism, which means it takes into account humanity as a whole and unlike some schools of historical thought it doesn't see states or governments as central actors(Cavallar, 2012, p.99). Kant's 'asocial sociability' and the overcoming of antagonisms in society could also be interpreted as an early understanding of dialectics.

For Hegel the dialectic is central to his understanding of history. The dialectic is progressive because every synthesis is more advanced than the original thesis and antithesis which preceded it(Burrel, 1991). Hegel also argues that the course of history is tied with the development of freedom(1837a, pt.3), however the 'idea of freedom' he refers to is ambiguous, and he admits this(1837b, p. 23). The way in which his freedom is defined leads on to other concepts which better define his 'absolute end of history'. For example Hamilton(1996) points to Hegel's freedom as situated in a social context, in which the freedom of the individual is dependent on identity with a wider collective group. This explains Hegel's deference to the nation and the state and in turn brings up more problematic implications. Hegel's promotion of the national idea was applied to pan-German nationalism and his dialectic of history arose out of a comparison between Oriental despotism and the early forms of Greek and Roman democracy. When taken as an implicit comparison between the 'civilised' Greeks and the 'uncivilised' Asians it shows Hegel's perspective as chauvinist and Eurocentric, a far cry from Kant's universal cosmopolitanism.

Hegel's emphasis on the collective could be taken as an example of modernity. However, this is articulated by Hegel in support of monarchy and a return to the traditional life of a feudal society, so in some ways Hegel is a thinker of pre-modernity and the counter-enlightenment. This could be seen as incompatible with the contemporary definition of freedom and some would see it as a regressive course of history, but it depends on how Hegel defined freedom at the time.

For Marx history is to be understood as the dialectic of class struggle(1848, chap.1). More broadly the balance of class forces determines the mode of production, and this progresses through history from slave-owning societies to feudalism, capitalism, socialism and finally to communism(Engels, 1880, chap. 3; Marx, 1859). This is a materialist understanding of history as advances in science or culture are part of the superstructure which surrounds the economic base of production. In this way all elements of human life are directly or indirectly derived from material production(1845, pt.1a). For Marx the only solution to the dialectical antagonisms of class is a society in which class itself has been abolished, or full communism. This future is inevitable as the contradictions of capitalist society cannot be reconciled. Marx outlines a very clear and scientific course of history, however Marxism is not deterministic, there is room for men to 'make their own history'(Marx, 1852, chap.1). There are conditions in which a new society can emerge before its time. In the words of Che Guevara "The revolution is not an apple that falls when it is ripe. You have to make it fall."(1967) Che applied historical materialism to the specific conditions of Cuba's anti-imperialist national liberation struggle. For example the geopolitical fact Cuba is an island to some extent allowed it to build socialism independently in a historical epoch where capitalism was the dominant mode of production.

Frederick Engels also makes a significant contribution to the understanding of pre-history in *Origins of the Family, Private Property, and the State*. He starts from Lewis Morgan's definition of pre-history as composed of three stages: savagery, barbarism and civilisation(Engels, 1884, chap.1) and uses them to show how class society, and therefore history, first began. Then in chapter 2 he draws the conclusion that

*"The first class opposition that appears in history coincides with the development of the antagonism between man and woman in monogamous marriage, and the first class oppression coincides with that of the female sex by the male."*

This places relations between men and women as the initial foundation upon which all exploitative social structures were built. It explains why feudal and capitalist societies were inherently patriarchal and has this has implications for feminist readings of history such as those provided by Simone de Beauvoir.

There is one caveat that although Marx, Engels and Morgan used scientific method, their philosophy was only as good as the scientific knowledge of the time. Since then we have developed a much more profound understanding of pre-history due to new technologies and discoveries.

There are other thinkers aside from Marx who use the Hegelian philosophy of history to come up with different analyses of our historical development. Fukuyama(1989) for example argued that the global counter-revolution of the late 1980s/early 1990s culminated in the success of the liberal democratic model as the 'end of history'. This end of history was dealt with by new socialist thinkers such as Milne(2012) or Mason(2013; Peters & Butler, 2013) to argue that history has 'returned' in the wake of a global crisis in which new contradictions are starting to manifest themselves.

For Simone de Beauvoir the relationship between men and women hinted at by Engels is the central antagonism. She sees women as playing a passive objective role in history, whereas men play an active subjective role. Women do have a role in history as the Other, the history of the oppressed, but even this is defined in relation to male history and lacks a collective expression(Beauvoir, 1949, p.6). She critiques the assumption made by Engels that the creation of private property in the dawn of history necessarily included the oppression of women. Instead she sees man associated with production and woman associated with her sex(1949, chap.3), and this creates a secondary gender struggle which exists separate from the class struggle. Birth control is as a major pivot of history for de Beauvoir because it allows woman to assert control over her sex.

De Beauvoir draws on Sartre's existential framework. In the existentialist novel *l'Etranger* by Albert Camus time is presented in a compressed stream of events without reference points to anchor it in any specific context(Demetrio, 2008, p.56). This existentialism is seen in history as a need for every person to 'make the most of every moment' in order to fully realise themselves, because history is "always understood in relation to scarcity"(Smidt, 2011, p.79).

For Nietzsche history is seen through a series of moral judgements, and these change over time. For example it would be morally wrong that an energetic such as Raphael died young(Nietzsche, 1874, p.8). The opposite is also true, that a long life spent in a state of idle apathy is no more valuable than a short life spent "living dangerously"(Nietzsche, 1882, p.283). To Nietzsche the quantity of time spent living is irrelevant, what matters is how this time is used to achieve great things, and this has some similarity with Sartre's existentialism. Nietzsche's focus on morality draws upon various periods of history in no particular order and detaches it from chronological progression, and this fits with his nihilist tendencies(Bataille, 2004, p.xx). Despite its non-linear

nature, Nietzsche's history does have a beginning in 'the animal' and a desired end in 'the Übermensch'(1885, p.43), and therefore it has some sense of direction.

In conclusion, of the modern philosophers I've discussed here, Hegel's dialectics show good generally applicable rules but are too vague to trace a clear direction; Marx is more specific and shows the most direction, but is derivative of Hegel; Kant's theory of history seems to have already been vindicated by reality with the creation of the United Nations, the mitigation of humanity's evolutionary weaknesses by science, and the global dominance of the liberal democratic model; de Beauvoir makes a useful contribution to feminist interpretations of history but lacks the universal perspective shown by Kant or Marx; Nietzsche shows the least direction, and he undermines his own argument by suggesting that the 'Last Man' would be a more popular and attractive alternative than the 'Übermensch'. Overall I would say that they have been successful in tracing a directionality in the course of history.

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