

Surmounting history
Editorial by Tobias Harris

In 1989, Francis Fukuyama published an article entitled “The End of History?” in *The National Interest*. Fukuyama discussed the notion that the end of the cold war meant the end of history, that the defeat of the Soviet Union meant the demise of the Soviet model of government as a viable alternative to liberal democracy. With the launch of the war on terrorism and the apparent popularity of fundamentalist Islamic governments ruling by *sharia* throughout the Muslim world, liberalism’s supremacy is by no means unchallenged, especially when considering the demographic advantages currently enjoyed by Islamic civilization. The future is not pre-ordained.

We are living through the forceful retort of History, the reply to those who felt that the 1990s had ushered in a liberal heaven on earth of perpetual peace and prosperity. It turns out to have been merely a brief respite before the inexhaustible engine of History drove forward again. Thus as humanity is once again subject to the relentless ebb and flow of the forces that shape human events, it is important to understand the foundations of modernity, the qualities that mark the world in which we dwell.

Many are familiar with George Santayana’s dictum that “Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it.” This is an important place to start when seeking an answer to the question “Why study history?” But it is only a beginning. Humanity must study history in order to find its place in it, to know what its proper role is in the course of human events. During most of the twentieth century, man was forced to take the role as preserver and defender of history against the forces of evil who sought to transcend history by imposing artificially and ultimately impossible utopias on defenseless populations. Civilized humanity must once again reprise that role in the twenty-first century.

History, however, contains a greater lesson for those who study it, a lesson that transcends time. Man must approach the impersonal and seemingly inexplicable force of history with great humility. History works in mysterious ways, often confounding the human desire for reason and rational answers. Events unfold independent of apparent trends. The will of a determined individual can often do more to alter the plans and expectations of a nation, making it difficult to predict the inevitable triumph of a nation or idea. It is not predestined that Good will always triumph over Evil. The best that people can do is believe in a cause and strive to advance it, while keeping in mind that the machinations of the human ego can topple even the most sincere efforts. Perhaps the only consistent rule in history is that good fortune depends on having the right people in all the right places to make the right decisions. Only time will reveal whether this is the case for our historical moment.

It is with this in mind that we must weather the travails of time. Instead of seeking to transcend history, we must humbly submit to its power and expect the unexpected, approaching decisions with prudence, due deliberation and a finely-tuned moral compass to inform us when and how to act. With these weapons in our arsenal, civilization can

continue to challenge the worst deprivations history can conjure up, whether war or ruthless ideologies, while hoping that Good will indeed vanquish Evil.