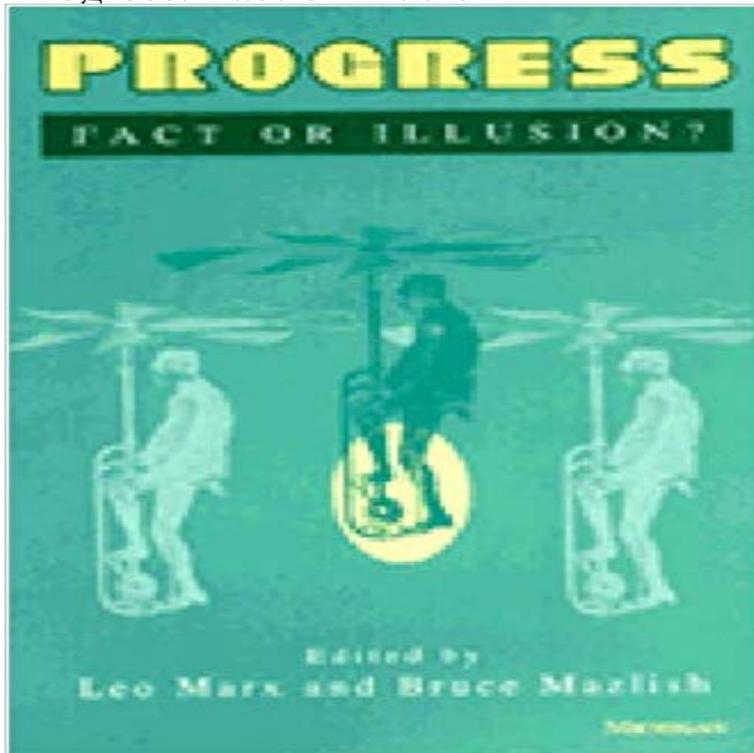


Progress: Fact or Illusion?



Progress, perhaps the fundamental secular belief of modern Western society, has come under heavy fire recently because, after three centuries, advances in science and technology seem increasingly to bring problems in their wake: alienation, environmental degradation, the threat of nuclear destruction. The idea of progress is brought into question by postmodern critique, attacking the notion of science as truth. Yet no other meaningful organization of humankind's sense of time looms on the horizon. This volume seeks to reassess the meaning and prospects of the idea of progress. Looking toward the millennium, the volume seeks to evaluate the ideas worth both in theory--is it intellectually viable and defensible today?--and practice--even if theoretically defensible, is the idea undermined in actual life? Approaching these questions from the perspectives of science, anthropology, economics, religion, political philosophy, feminism, medicine, environmental studies, and the Third World, the contributors, all distinguished scholars, provide a unique and critical balance. Ultimately, the contributors find that progress is both a fact and an illusion: it does occur in certain areas, but it does not sweep all before it as its Enlightenment votaries thought it would. This foundational idea permeates discourse in the natural and social sciences as well as the humanities and will engage historians, students of the history of science and technology, sociologists, political scientists, philosophers, literary scholars, and art critics, as well as those interested in civilization in general. Contributors include: Jill Ker Conway, Zhiyuan Cui, Leon Eisenberg, Robert Heilbroner, Gerald Holton, Leo Marx, Bruce Mazlish, Ali A. Mazrui, Alan Ryan, John M. Staudenmaier, George W. Stocking, Jr., and Richard White. A discerning reconsideration of the idea of progress in a variety of carefully defined

theoretical and empirical-historical contexts. --David Hollinger, University of California, Berkeley
Leo Marx is Professor of American Cultural History, Emeritus, Massachusetts Institute of Technology.
Bruce Mazlish is Professor of History, Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

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