

After the “end of history”

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Francis Fukuyama's "end of history" thesis – proposed in a 1989 essay, elaborated in a 1992 book – was the most influential attempt to make sense of the post-cold-war world. In a new afterword to "The End of History and the Last Man", Fukuyama reflects on how his ideas have survived the tides of criticism and political change.

In the seventeen years that have passed since the original publication of my essay, "The End of History?", my hypothesis has been criticised from every conceivable point of view. Publication of the second paperback edition of the book *The End of History and the Last Man* gives me an opportunity to restate the original argument, to answer what I regard as the most serious objections that were raised to it, and to reflect on some of the developments in world politics that have occurred since the summer of 1989.

Let me begin with the question: what was the "end of history"? The phrase is of course not an original one, but comes from GWF Hegel and, more popularly, from Karl Marx. Hegel was the first historicist philosopher, who understood human history as a coherent, evolutionary process. Hegel saw this evolution as one of the gradual unfolding of human reason, leading eventually to the expansion of freedom in the world. Marx had a more economically grounded theory, which saw the means of production change as human societies evolved from pre-human to hunter-gatherer to agricultural to industrial ones; the end of history was thus a theory of modernisation that raised the question of where that modernisation process would ultimately lead.

Many progressive intellectuals during the period between publication of Marx and Friedrich Engels's *Communist Manifesto* in 1848 and the end of the 20th century believed that there would be an end of history, and that the historical process would terminate in a communist utopia. This was not my assertion, but that of Karl Marx. The simple insight with which I began was that, as of 1989, it didn't look like this was going to happen. To the extent that the human historical process was leading anywhere, it was tending not toward communism, but toward what the Marxists called bourgeois democracy.

There didn't seem to be a higher form of society that would transcend one based on the twin principles of liberty and equality. Alexandre Kojève, the great Russian-French Hegelian, put this rather mischievously when he said that history ended in 1806, the year that Napoleon defeated the Prussian monarchy at the battle of Jena-Auerstadt, thus bringing the principles of the French Revolution to Hegel's corner of Germany. Everything that happened thereafter was just backfilling, as those principles were universalised across the world.

The question

I have been contrasted by many observers to my former teacher Samuel Huntington, who put forward a very different vision of world development in his book *The Clash of Civilisations and the Remaking of World Order*. In certain respects I think it is possible to overestimate the degree to which we differ in our interpretation of the world. For example, I agree with him in his view that culture remains an irreducible component of human societies, and that you cannot understand development and politics without a reference to cultural values.

But there is a fundamental issue that separates us. It is the question of whether the values and institutions developed during the western Enlightenment are *potentially* universal (as Hegel and Marx thought), or bounded within a cultural horizon (consistent with the views of later philosophers like Friedrich Nietzsche and Martin Heidegger). Huntington clearly believes that they are not universal. He argues that the kind of political institutions with which we in the west are familiar are the by-product of a certain kind of western European Christian culture, and will never take root beyond the boundaries of that culture.

So the central question to answer is whether western values and institutions have a universal significance, or whether they represent the temporary success of a presently hegemonic culture.

Huntington is quite correct when he says that the *historical* origin of modern secular liberal democracy lies in Christianity, which is not an original view. Hegel, Alexis de Tocqueville, and Nietzsche, among many other thinkers, have argued that modern democracy is a secular version of the Christian doctrine of the universal dignity of man, and that this is now understood as a non-religious political doctrine of human rights. In my opinion, there is no question that this is the case from a historical point of view.

But while modern liberal democracy has its roots in this particular cultural soil, the issue is whether these ideas may become detached from these particularistic origins and have a significance for people who live in non-Christian cultures. The scientific method, on which our modern technological civilisation rests, also appeared for contingent historical reasons at a certain moment in the history of early modern Europe, based on the thought of philosophers like Francis Bacon and René Descartes. But once the scientific method was

invented, it became a possession for all of mankind, and was usable whether you were Asian, African, or Indian.

The question is, therefore, whether the principles of liberty and equality that we see as the foundation of liberal democracy have a similar universal significance. I believe that this is the case, and I think that there is an overall logic to historical evolution that explains why there should be increasing democracy around the world as our societies evolve. It is not a rigid form of historical determinism like Marxism, but a set of underlying forces that drive human social evolution in a way that tells us that there should be more democracy at the end of this evolutionary process than at the beginning.

The struggle

The origin of "History" in the Marxist-Hegelian sense lies ultimately in science and technology. Science is cumulative: we do not periodically forget scientific discoveries. This is what creates the economic world, since technology constitutes a horizon of economic production possibilities and guarantees that the age of the steam-engine will be different from the age

of the plough, and that the age of the transistor and the computer is going to be different from the age of coal and steel. Scientific development makes possible the enormous increases in productivity that have driven modern capitalism and the liberation of technology and ideas in modern market economies.

Economic development produces increases in living standards that are universally desirable. The proof of this, in my opinion, is simply the way people "vote with their feet." Every year millions of people in poor, less-developed societies seek to move to western Europe, to the United States, to Japan, or to other developed countries, because they see that the possibilities for human happiness are much greater in a wealthy society than in a poor one. Despite a number of Rousseauian dreamers who imagine that they would be happier living in a hunter-gatherer or agrarian society than in, say, contemporary Los Angeles, there are scarcely a handful of people who actually decide to do so.

The desire to live in a liberal democracy is not initially nearly as widespread as the desire for development. In fact, there are many authoritarian regimes like today's China and Singapore, or Chile under General Pinochet, that have been able to develop and modernise quite

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successfully. However, there is a strong correlation between successful economic development and the growth of democratic institutions, something originally noted by the great sociologist Seymour Martin Lipset. There are numerous reasons why this correlation is a strong one. When a country gets past a level of approximately \$6,000 per-capita income, it is no longer an agricultural society. It is likely to have a middle class that owns property, a complex civil society, a higher level of elite and mass education. All of these factors tend to promote the desire for democratic participation, and thus drive, from the bottom up, demand for democratic political institutions.

The final aspect of the modernisation process concerns the area of culture. Everybody wants economic development, and economic development tends to promote democratic political institutions. But at the end of the modernisation process, nobody wants cultural uniformity; in fact, issues of cultural identity come back with a vengeance. Huntington is correct when he says that we will never live in a world in which we have cultural uniformity, the global culture of what he calls "Davos Man". Indeed, we would not *want* to live in a world in which we have the same universal cultural values based on some kind of globalised Americanism. We live for the particular shared historical traditions, religious values, and other aspects of shared memory that constitutes the common life.

Life in contemporary liberal democracies, including the United States, is one in which cultural or group identities are being continually asserted, reasserted, and sometimes invented out of whole cloth. This is an area in which the original theorists of modern liberalism do not provide us with much useful guidance. Thomas Hobbes, John Locke, Baron de Montesquieu, and Jean-Jacques Rousseau all envisioned the central problem of liberal pluralism as one of individuals exercising autonomous choice vis-à-vis the state. But in modern liberal societies, individuals organise themselves into cultural groups that assert group rights against the state and limit the choice of individuals within those groups.

This can take a fairly mild form, as when French Canadians mandate that students in Quebec must be taught in French, or a more serious form when Islamist preachers in Europe argue that *sharia* law should have primacy over French or Dutch law. The choice for the state is whether it interprets the kind of liberal pluralism that it is responsible for protecting as one of individuals, or of groups, and if the latter, what kinds of restrictions of individual rights by groups it is willing to condone.

A fuller examination of this issue is beyond the scope of the present essay. Few liberal societies have been utterly rigid in their defence of individual over group rights; multiculturalism, bilingualism, and other forms of group recognition have become part of public policy in the United States and other western democracies. On the other hand, most liberal societies understand that group recognition can undermine the basic liberal principle of tolerance and the rights of individuals. As Charles Taylor explains, liberalism cannot be completely even-handed toward different cultures, since it itself reflects certain cultural values and must reject alternative cultural groups that are themselves profoundly illiberal.

The basic principle of secular politics has come to be part of the modernisation process for essentially pragmatic reasons. In the history of Christianity, church and state began as separate entities, something that was not the case with Islam. But that separation was never necessary or complete. At the end of the middle ages, every European prince dictated the religious beliefs of his subjects; the sectarian conflicts following the Reformation led to more than a century of bloody warfare.

Modern secular politics thus did not spring automatically from Christian culture, but rather was something that had to be learned through painful historical experience. One of the achievements of early modern liberalism was its success persuading people of the need to exclude discussion of final ends addressed by religion from the realm of politics. This is a struggle the west went through, and I believe it is a struggle the Islamic world is now in the process of going through.

A misunderstanding

The "end of history", as noted at the beginning of this essay, has been attacked from very many points of view since it was first enunciated. Many of those criticisms were based on simple misunderstandings of what I was arguing, for example on the part of those who believed that I thought events would simply stop happening. I do not want to deal here with these kinds of critiques, which for the most part could have been avoided if the person in question had simply read my book.

One misunderstanding I do want to clarify, however, concerns the very widespread misapprehension that I was somehow arguing for a specifically American version of the end of history, what one author called "jingoistic triumphalism." Many have taken the end of history to be a brief for American hegemony over the rest of the world, not just in the realm of ideas and values, but through the actual exercise of American power to order the world according to American interests.

Nothing could be further from the truth. Anyone familiar with Kojève and the intellectual origins of his version of the end of history would understand that the European Union is a much fuller real-world embodiment of the concept than is the contemporary United States. In line with Kojève, I argued that the European project was in fact a house built as a home for the last man who would emerge at the end of history. The European dream – most fully felt in Germany – is to transcend national sovereignty, power politics, and the kinds of struggles that make military power necessary (about this, more later); Americans, by contrast, have a rather traditional understanding of sovereignty, applaud their military, and like their patriotic Fourth of July parades.

Modern liberal democracy is based on twin principles of liberty and equality. The two are in perpetual tension: equality cannot be maximised without the intervention of a powerful state that limits individual liberty; liberty cannot be expanded indefinitely without inviting various pernicious forms of social inequality. Each liberal democracy thus must make tradeoffs between the two. Contemporary Europeans tend to prefer more equality at the expense of liberty, and Americans the reverse, for reasons rooted in their individual histories. These are differences of degree and not principle; while I prefer the American version in some ways over the European one, this is more a matter of pragmatic observation and taste than a matter of principle.

Four challenges

Of the many challenges to the optimistic evolutionary scenario laid out in *The End of History*, correctly understood, there are four that I regard as the most serious. The first is related to Islam as an obstacle to democracy; the second has to do with the problem of democracy at an international level; the third concerns the autonomy of politics; and the last is related to the unanticipated consequences of technology. I will discuss each of these in turn.

Islam

Particularly since the 11 September 2001 attacks, many people have argued that there is a fundamental tension between Islam as a religion and the possibility of the development of modern democracy. There is no question that if you look around the world, there has been a broad Muslim exception to the overall pattern of democratic development that you see in Latin

America, in Europe, in Asia, and even in sub-Saharan Africa. So people argue that there may be things in Islamic doctrine, such as the unity of religion and state, that serve as insuperable cultural barriers to the spread of democracy.

That the problem stems from Islam itself as a religion seems to me extremely unlikely. All of the world's major religious systems are highly complex. Christianity was once (and not that long ago) used to justify slavery and hierarchy; now we see it as supportive of modern democracy. Religious doctrines are subject to political interpretation from one generation to the next. This is no less true of Islam than of Christianity.

There is tremendous variation in the political practices of countries that are culturally Muslim today. There are several reasonably successful democracies in Muslim countries, including Indonesia, which has made a successful transition from authoritarianism after the crisis of 1997; Turkey, which has had two-party democracy on and off since the end of the second world war; Mali, Senegal, and other countries, such as India, that have large Muslim minorities. Furthermore, Malaysia and Indonesia have sustained rapid economic growth, so that the obstacle that Islam poses to development is not a necessary one either.

Alfred Stepan points out that the real exception to the broad pattern of democratisation during what Samuel Huntington labeled the "third wave" of democratic transitions from the 1970s to the 1990s is actually not a Muslim exception, but more of an Arab exception; it would appear that there is something in Arab political culture that has been more resistant. What that could be is subject to debate, but it might well be a cultural obstacle that is not related to religion, such as the survival of tribalism. And the contemporary challenge that the world faces in the form of radical Islamism or *jihadism* is much more political than religious, cultural, or civilisational.

As Olivier Roy and Roya and Ladan Boroumand have argued, radical Islamism is best understood as a political ideology. The writings of Sayyid Qutb, the founder of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, or Osama bin Laden and his ideologues within al-Qaida, make use of political ideas about the state, revolution, and the aesthetisation of violence that do not come out of any genuine Islamic tradition, but out of the radical

ideologies of the extreme left and right – that is to say, fascism and communism – from 20th-century Europe.

These doctrines, which are extremely dangerous, do not reflect any core teachings of Islam, but make use of Islam for political purposes. They have become popular in many Arab countries and among Muslims in Europe because of the deep alienation that exists in these communities. Radical Islamism is thus not the reassertion of some traditional Islamic cultural practice, but should be seen in the context of modern identity politics. It emerges precisely when traditional cultural identities are disrupted by modernisation and a pluralistic democratic order that creates a disjuncture between one's inner self and external social practice.

This is why so many violent *jihadists* like Mohammed Atta, organiser of the 11 September attacks, or Mohammed Bouyeri, murderer of the Dutch filmmaker Theo van Gogh, were radicalised in western Europe. Modernisation has from the beginning created alienation and thus opposition to itself, and in this respect contemporary *jihadists* are following in the footsteps of anarchists, Bolsheviks, fascists, and members of the Baader-Meinhof gang in earlier generations.

The question is whether intensely radicalised and alienated Muslims are potentially powerful enough to threaten liberal democracy itself. Clearly, modern technology gives them a shortcut in the form of weapons of mass destruction, which were not available to earlier generations of terrorists. But political Islam has not had a strong territorial base up to now, and in those countries like Iran, Saudi Arabia, Afghanistan, or Sudan where it has come to power, it has not had an attractive economic or social record.

There are other interpretations of Islam vying for primacy, moreover, in a way that guarantees that much of the struggle will be internal to the Muslim world. As an external threat, then, it would seem that the challenge is less severe than that mounted by communism, which was both globally appealing and linked to a powerful modern state.

The bigger problem for the future of liberal democracy will be the one internal to democratic societies, particularly on the part of countries like France or the Netherlands that have large Muslim minorities. Europe by and large has been less successful in integrating culturally distinct minorities than the United States, and growing violence on the part of second- and third-generation European Muslims points to a far darker side of identity politics than the

demands made by, for example, the Quebec or Scottish nationalists.

Angry, unassimilated cultural minorities produce backlash on the part of the majority community, which then retreats into its own cultural and religious identity. Preventing this from spiralling into something that looks like a "clash of civilisation" will require moderation and good judgment on the part of political leaders, something not automatically guaranteed by the modernisation process itself.

Democracy

The second important critique of my "end of history" hypothesis concerns the question of democracy at an international level. When I wrote about liberal democracy constituting the final form of government, I was speaking about democracy at a nation-state level. I did not envision the possibility of creating a global democracy that would somehow transcend the sovereign nation-state through international law.

Yet this is precisely the kind of concern that has been raised with particular intensity since the 2003 Iraq war, and underlies to some degree the split that has emerged between the United States and Europe since then. This issue has also been raised over the past decade by critics of globalisation, who have argued that a democratic deficit has emerged between the degree of interactions that takes place between people living in different national jurisdictions, and the institutionalised mechanisms of accountability across national borders. This problem is particularly exacerbated by the very size and dominance of the United States in the contemporary global system; the United States is able to reach out and affect people around the globe in a variety of ways, without there being reciprocal sources of influence.

Part of the European project has been to transcend the nation-state. Americans, on the other hand, have tended to believe that the source of legitimacy or legitimate action resides in a sovereign constitutional democracy. These European and American views flow from their respective histories. Europeans have seen the sovereign nation-state as a source of collective selfishness and nationalism that was at the root of the two world wars in the 20th century; the European project has sought to replace power politics with a system of norms, laws, and organisations. Americans, by contrast, have had a happier experience with their nation-state's use of legitimate violence.

This began with the American Revolution against the British monarchy, continued through the very bloody American civil war that killed 600,000 Americans but

led to the abolition of slavery and the uniting of the United States, through the second world war and finally the cold war, which were seen as moral crusades liberating Europe on two occasions from two different forms of tyranny.

The European view of the need for norms that transcend the nation-state is indubitably correct on a theoretical level. There is no reason to think that sovereign liberal democracies cannot commit terrible abuses in their dealings with other nations, or even with respect to their own citizens. The United States itself was born with the birth defect of slavery, which was approved by democratic majorities and enshrined in its constitution. Abraham Lincoln, in his 1858 debates with Stephen Douglas, had to refer to a principle of equality that lay beyond the American constitution in order to argue against slavery.

But while it is possible to make a theoretical case for some form of democracy that will transcend the nation-state, there are in my view insuperable practical obstacles to the realisation of this project. Successful democracy depends in large measure on the existence of a genuine political community that agrees on certain basic shared values and institutions. Shared cultural values build trust and lubricate, so to speak, the interaction of citizens with one another. Democracy at an international level becomes nearly impossible to imagine given the actual diversity of peoples and cultures involved. The jaundiced view that many Americans have of international institutions like the United Nations reflects in part the slowness and inefficiency of collective action on an international level, among diverse societies seeking collective action based on political consensus.

To fix the efficiency problem would require delegation of authority and enforcement powers to a more decisive executive. To whom would the world agree to give such authority? And how could it be exercised safely in the absence of all of those balancing institutions that divide and limit power on a nation-state level? Even Europe, which shares a common culture and historical experience, is having serious second thoughts about the project to create, in effect, a single European nation-state that would seriously undercut the sovereignty of its member-states.

It would therefore appear that we will not get beyond the nation-state any time soon as the fundamental source of legitimate democratic authority. In place of global government, we will have to be satisfied with global governance, that is, partial international institutions that promote collective action among nations and that create some degree of accountability among them. A liberal world order that is both just and feasible would have to be based not on a single, overarching global institution, but rather on a diversity of international institutions that could organise themselves around functional issues, regions, or specific problems. This kind of world order is in the process of being created, but there is still a great deal of productive work that can be done in this area.

Political authority

The third issue that remains as a problem in the "end of history" concerns what I would call the autonomy of politics. As indicated above, there is a linkage between economic development and liberal democracy insofar as democratic consolidation becomes much easier at relatively high levels of per-capita GDP. The problem, however, is getting economic development

started in the first place, something that has eluded many developing countries in sub-Saharan Africa, in South Asia, in the middle east, and in Latin America.

Economic development is not driven simply by good economic policies; you need to have a state for people to live in that can guarantee law and order, property rights, a rule of law, and political stability before you can have investment, growth, commerce, international trade, and the like. Taking advantage of globalisation, as India and China have done in recent years, requires above all having a competent state that can carefully set the conditions for exposure to the global economy.

The existence of competent states is not something that can be taken for granted in the developing world. Many of the problems we are experiencing in 21st-century politics are related to the absence of strong state institutions in poor countries, rather than to the old 20th-century agenda of excessively strong states. The 20th century was dominated by great powers, by states like Nazi Germany, imperial Japan, or the former Soviet Union, that were too large and powerful. In the 21st century, the more typical problems come from places like Somalia, Afghanistan, and Haiti:

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countries that do not have government institutions that can guarantee the basic rule of law necessary for development or for the creation of democratic institutions.

There is thus a twofold agenda that faces us. In the developed world, Europe faces a major crisis in its welfare state over the coming generations of declining population and unaffordable entitlements and regulation. But in the developing world, there is an absence of state-ness that prevents economic development and that serves as a breeding-ground for a host of problems such as refugees, disease, and terrorism. Consequently, there are very different agendas in the two parts of the world: to cut back the scope of the state in the developed world, but to strengthen the state in many parts of the developing world.

The particular challenge we face is that we know relatively little of how to build strong political institutions in poor countries. Part of the conundrum is that development, whether economic or political, is never “done” by outsiders; it is a process that inevitably has to be driven by people within the society itself who know its habits and traditions, and who can take long-term responsibility for the development process. Outsiders simply assist in this effort. Political development is a process that is in many respects autonomous from economic development, though the two, as noted earlier, do interact in certain ways.

What we need, then, and what *The End of History and the Last Man* did not supply, is a theory of political development that is independent of economics. State formation and state-building, how this happened historically, the role of violence, military competition, religion, and ideas more broadly, the effects of physical geography and resource endowments, why it happened first in some parts of the world and not in others – these are all components of a larger theory that has yet to be elaborated. Samuel Huntington in his book *Political Order in Changing Societies* helped to undermine the original version of modernisation theory by positing a theory of political decay and arguing that decay was just as likely as development. There has been a great deal of political decay in the past generation, and its sources need to be explored systematically.

The final objection to the “end-of-history” hypothesis, which has been made in a variety of forms, concerns technology, and the possibility that the historical process that is driven by technological advance will ultimately be consumed by it. There are an endless

variety of scenarios by which this could happen. The one that has been present to many Americans since 11 September 2001, is the possibility of nuclear or biological terrorism, though nuclear annihilation has of course always been a prospect since Hiroshima. What is different today is the democratisation of the means of violence, whereby very small, stateless groups have the possibility of acquiring weapons of vast destructive power.

A second possible scenario is environmental. If some of the more dire predictions about global warming are correct, it may already be too late to make the sorts of adjustments in hydrocarbon use that will prevent massive climate change, or else the adjustment process will itself be so disruptive that it will kill the economic goose that is laying our technological golden eggs.

Technology

The fourth challenge is the one I wrote about in my book *Our Posthuman Future: Consequences of the Biotechnology Revolution* (2002), which is that our ability to manipulate ourselves biologically, whether through control over the genome or through psychotropic drugs, or through a future cognitive neuroscience, or through some form of life extension, will provide us with new approaches to social engineering that will raise the possibility of new forms of politics.

I chose to write about this particular technological future because the threat is much more subtle than the one posed by nuclear weapons or climate change. Here the potentially bad or dehumanising consequences of technological advance are tied up with things like freedom from disease or longevity that people universally want, and will therefore be much more difficult to prevent.

I have nothing useful to say about the likelihood of any of these technological futures; I am not a prophet or a “futurologist.” I would observe that in the past, technological advance has created new possibilities for abating the negative consequences created by technology itself, but there is no necessary reason why this will always be the case.

More broadly, my historicist view of human development has always been only weakly deterministic, unlike the strong determinism of Marxism-Leninism. I believe that there is a broad historical trend toward liberal democracy, and I think that there are a number of foreseeable challenges. The four that I have laid out are the ones that I believe are most urgent in the coming years. Weak determinism

means that in the face of broad historical trends, statesmanship, politics, leadership, and individual choice remain absolutely critical to the actual course of historical development.

The opportunities and risks that are posed by modern technology, for example, must be taken up as challenges by societies and dealt with through policies and institutions. Thus the future is really much more open than its economic, technological, or social

preconditions may suggest. The political choices that are made by populations that vote and by the leaders of our different democracies will have large effects on the strength and quality of liberal democracy in the future.

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