

The trouble with Islam, the European Union (and Francis Fukuyama)

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Francis Fukuyama's historicism fails to accommodate two contemporary political realities and in the process misunderstands history itself, says Roger Scruton.

Francis Fukuyama has the gift of shining a cheerful American light on the mystical visions of the German romantics. He takes Hegel's apocalyptic idea of the end of history and, instead of standing it on its head as Marx did, strips off its funereal clothes and gives it a carnival suit of democratic values.

In *The End of History and the Last Man*, Fukuyama takes his thesis that history has worked towards its end from Alexandre Kojève, who also associated it with a gesture of sarcastic welcome towards Nietzsche's "last man". Kojève influenced a whole generation of French post-war intellectuals with his lectures on Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*, in which he injected into the bloated Hegelian body some strong shots of Nietzsche and Heidegger, making the moribund organism writhe in interesting torment.

The fact that he was a life-hating Russian at heart, a self-declared Stalinist, and a civil servant who played a leading behind-the-scenes role in establishing both the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade and the European Economic Community, should be borne in mind by all who wish to understand what Kojève was really up to in declaring the end of history.

This man was, in my view, a dangerous psychopath, who brought with him from Russia the same kind of

nihilistic fervour that had inspired the Bolsheviks, and who took an exhilarated joy in the thought that everything around him was doomed. He could not set eyes on any human achievement without relishing its future ruin. He lived in a *Götterdämmerung* of his own imagination, wishing meanwhile to create the kind of post-historical, universal and bureaucratic form of government that would extinguish all real human attachments and produce the only thing he really cared for: the last man, the loveless and lifeless *homunculus* which he knew in intimate detail since he knew it in himself.

The Atlantic difference

It was thanks largely to Kojève and Jean Monnet that the European project took on its current form, of a rigid and unreformable bureaucracy, dedicated to extinguishing not only the national loyalties of the European people, but also the Christian culture and democratic institutions that had thrived in them. The European Union ought surely to show to everybody – to those who endorse it as much as those who view it with alarm – that the "end of history" is not a prediction but a project, and one which may very well go wrong. It is a project that is as disconnected from democracy as that other "end of history" project in

which Kojève was raised, the project of communist revolution in which "the government of men gives way to the administration of things". Friedrich Engels's prediction was the only Marxist prediction that ever came true: under communism the government of men really did give way to the administration of things, since men became things.

Now it seems to me, reading between the lines of Fukuyama's afterword, that he has woken up to the fact that the European Union is not proceeding in a democratic direction, that its increasing tendency to prefer "group rights" over individual rights is setting it on a collision course with the Enlightenment (just the same collision course, in fact, that was taken by communism and fascism), and that the kind of bland but unaccountable bureaucracy which the EU seeks to install across the continent is the antithesis of the ideals enshrined in the United States constitution.

Europe may very well be heading towards the "end of history", since it involves a conscious repudiation of its own historical identity. But the country where Fukuyama lives, and on which he tested – with a few first-hand observations – the thesis that he inherited from Kojève, is moving in another direction, which is not a direction at all, but the day-to-day perambulation of a living organism, held together by national identity, historical allegiance and a Judaeo-Christian culture irritated by its symbiotic liberal parasites.

Set Europe and America side by side, as Fukuyama now does, and you will surely see a striking difference, between a place that has consciously espoused the "end of history" and a place which has consciously espoused nothing except itself. And in both places history goes on as "just one damn thing after another".

A problem for universalism

Fukuyama likens the Islamist terrorists to those already seen in our midst: Bolsheviks, extreme nationalists, Baader-Meinhof nihilists. All are in reaction against the modern world, in search of a pure and unalienated society – the society which, according to Sayyid Qutb, grows only "in the shade of the Qur'an". My response to this is: yes and no. Fukuyama attributes to Samuel Huntington the thesis that liberal democracy is downstream from Christianity, and that there is therefore no universal law of history according to which human societies everywhere tend, with growing economic mastery, in a liberal-democratic direction.

"Identity politics" explains nothing: it all depends on the identity.

Fukuyama's grounds for resisting that thesis are not entirely persuasive. Radical Islamism, according to Fukuyama, is a version of "modern identity politics". But that is not a sufficient explanation of its posture. English Toryism is also a version of "modern identity politics". But by and large it accepts the Enlightenment vision of the divide between public and private life; it is founded in a love of the secular law and free institutions, and it has never produced a terrorist – I am the furthest it goes in that direction. "Identity politics" explains nothing: it all depends on the identity.

You can squeeze Islam into the process of universal history only if you overlook such facts as these: that the *sharia* does not recognise secular law; that it punishes apostasy with death; that it accords only "treaty" rights to Christians and Jews and no rights at all to pagans. Moreover it contains no intrinsic principle of reform, since "the gate of *ijtihad* (creative jurisprudence) is closed". For these reasons, it seems to me, Islamism is not merely a vast and growing problem for western democracies; it is also an insuperable problem for the universalist view of human history.

Fukuyama is wrong to believe that Hegel was the first historicist philosopher. He was preceded by Ibn Khaldun (1332-1406) and Giambattista Vico (1668-1744). Ibn Khaldun made the useful point that historical processes are not governed by culture and knowledge only, but also by the will to reproduce. This will, he believed, dwindles as people become habituated to luxury, and dynasties therefore rise and fall according to a quasi-biological logic.

That, clearly, is far too simple an hypothesis. But it adds something that is missing from most historicist theses, and especially from those German theories that appeal to Kojève and Fukuyama, namely the permanent legacy of human biology. Much that we attribute to history we ought rather to attribute to biology – including aggression, territorial expansion and maybe even scapegoating, racism and the all-pervading emotion that Nietzsche called *ressentiment*.

Christ taught us to overcome those things, and paid the price for doing so. Maybe it is the long-term effect of his sacrifice that so much of European history looks like a process of steady emancipation from the grim realities of species life. But that only tends to confirm the thesis that Fukuyama attributes to Huntington: that the march of history towards liberal democracy is a local achievement of Christian culture.

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