

- *The End of History and the Last Man*

Francis Fukuyama

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The immediate fascination of Fukuyama's book lies in its title. We find ourselves transported into the atmosphere of Apocalypse whether we like it or not, and here the fascination begins. Are we, perhaps, at the 'end of the Age' and soon to witness the denouement of History as Scripture predicts? Many seem to think so.

Likewise with the expression 'The Last Man': a hint of something familiar perhaps? Of course, The Lord Jesus Himself, the Last Man of 1 Corinthians 15!

But what can a contemporary secular writer, what's more a political analyst from the American State Department, be doing with such biblical concepts in an international best-seller? Ostensibly very little - but appearances can be misleading.

Apart from the title, however, there lies a deeper fascination. In stark contrast to the almost universal pessimism of Western thought during the past century, Fukuyama finds grounds for optimism. Things may seem bad, he says, but the all too apparent troubles - the Balkan crisis for example or the resurgent nationalism of the post-communist world, are, in fact, merely 'blips' within a general political improvement.

His central thesis is this: 'As mankind approaches the end of the millennium, the twin crises of authoritarianism and socialist central planning have left only one competitor standing in the ring as an ideology of potentially universal validity: liberal democracy, the doctrine of individual freedom and popular sovereignty.'¹ Put bluntly, his message is that the whole world is moving inexorably towards the 'high point' of the West's present achievements, both economically and politically.

The trigger for this analysis is the collapse of Communism. But other parts of the world have seen significant political development towards liberal democracy also - most notably Spain and Portugal; also Greece, Turkey, certain Latin American nations e.g. Peru, Argentina, Nicaragua etc; and in East Asia - South Korea, the Philippines and Taiwan; and then most recently South Africa.

Why an inexorable movement, however? First, because of SCIENCE.

'...we have demonstrated that the progressive unfolding of modern natural science produces a directional history and certain uniform social changes across different nations and cultures. Technology and the rational organisation of labour are the preconditions for industrialisation, which in turn engenders such

¹ Fukuyama, F., *The End of History and the Last Man*, (London), 1992, p. 42.

social phenomena as urbanisation, bureaucratisation, the breakdown of extended family and tribal ties, increasing levels of education.’²

What was true in England in the 18th and 19th centuries, in other words, has become true of societies throughout the world - the growth of new industries near sources of energy and hence urbanisation etc. This is the central theme of John Robert's excellent book and accompanying television series in 1985 entitled 'The Triumph of the West'. Robert's final sentences are these: "What seems to be clear is that the story of western civilization is now the story of mankind, its influence so diffused that old oppositions and antitheses are now meaningless. 'The West' is hardly now a meaningful term, except to historians."³ What worked for us in the West has worked for the world. In this sense at least we now live in a 'new world order'. It is a global village. The West has triumphed through its technological superiority.

Through more than technology and science, however, through its unique political experiment also; thereby becoming, in its combination of economic success and political freedom, the ideal of all societies. Today's political axiom, whether justified or not, presupposes that all nations should operate 'democratically'.

To Fukuyama, however, this is more than an ideal; it is an unfolding reality - now more than ever with the demise of communism. Steadily, nation by nation, like individual wagons within a long wagon-trail (the analogy with which the book closes) the world begins to arrive at its much longed-for and pre-ordained destination.. LIBERAL DEMOCRACY. Why? Because a universal force propels it irresistibly towards this end; a force so powerful that before it all others, whether autocratic or totalitarian, must succumb.

Such inexorability, however, issues SECONDLY from a deeper source even than technology/science and modern politics, for it springs from the very nature of HUMAN experience. Which brings us, somewhat surprisingly, to Hegel. Surprisingly, of course, because not only did Hegel propound such a view of the inexorable development of human history, Marx did also - and look what became of that!

This uncomfortable parallel notwithstanding, Fukuyama insists upon the correctness of Hegel's historical analysis (as mediated by one of Hegel's 20th century interpreters, Alexandre KojBve), in particular that history is the outworking of human consciousness. What distinguishes humans from animals, Hegel argues, is their desire for recognition. That is, their willingness to live not merely on the level of physical needs but on the level of 'spiritual' needs. "Not only is man not determined by his physical or animal nature, but his very humanity consists in his ability to overcome or negate that animal nature. How?...he is free...in the metaphysical sense of being radically undetermined by nature.. He is, in short, capable of true moral choice."⁴ This is best evidenced, Hegel claims, by man's willingness to risk his life in a battle for pure prestige.

'Original Sin' within such a view consists not, as in the Bible, of an act of pride over against God, but of pride over against- man. Compelled by a longing for 'recognition', Hegel's 'first man' (within history's primeval experience - whatever that may mean to Hegel) finds himself in conflict with his neighbour. He desires not material possessions merely, but the recognition by others of his freedom.

² Ibid, p. 89.

³ Roberts, J.M, *The Triumph of the West*, (London), 1985, p. 431.

⁴ Fukuyama, *The End of History*, pp. 149, 150.

In pursuit of this he shows himself, if necessary, indifferent to the 'things of the world'. He is even prepared to risk his life to demonstrate his power to act freely.⁵ Hence the unending tussle of history - arrogant subjugation of others by the Master, and on the other side docile submission by the Slave. This is the engine driving the course of history: on one side megalothumia, the desire (thumiain Greek) to dominate, and on the other isothumia, the desire on the part of those subjugated for a more equal disposition of society.

All history, Hegel then argues, is the working out of this conflict arising from 'desire for recognition'. Each step encouraging its opposite by way of reaction, leading on to a compromise of sorts, which in turn leads to reaction, and so on. A progression, in other words, dialectically - thesis .. antithesis .. synthesis. 'History is a dialectical movement, almost a series of revolutions, in which people after people, and genius after genius, becomes the instrument of the Absolute.' (Durant p.323) An Absolute, however, decidedly NOT the Christian God; rather, the self-realisation of human consciousness, the culmination of the process of dialectic which overcomes human diversity and conflict within a satisfying unity. But a process entirely social and horizontal, without reference vertically, as in Christianity, to an objectively existing God.

Which brings us to the 'End of History'; the end of the process of conflict with all its separate dialectical resolutions - the longed for End. Where? Within the political system devised in the West and ushered in first by the French Revolution. Why? Because liberal democracy perfectly balances the conflicting poles of thumia. "Popular self-government abolished the distinction between masters and slaves (sic); everyone is entitled to at least some share in the role of master. Mastery now takes the form of the promulgation of democratically determined laws, that is sets of rules by which man self-consciously masters himself."⁶

Christianity within this view is seen as an important step towards the realisation of the End, rightly emphasising the universal equality of all mankind. 'Christianity's contribution., to the historical process was to make clear to the slave this vision of human freedom.. The Christian God recognises all human beings universally, recognises their individual human worth and dignity.. The problem with Christianity, however, is that it remains another slave ideology.. (because it) posits the realisation of human freedom not here on earth but only in the kingdom of Heaven.. According to Hegel, the Christian did not realise that God did not create man but rather that man created 'God.'⁷

It is a completely HUMANISTIC development Hegel has in mind. As non-Christian in its basic premise as its most powerful progeny, Communism.

What are we to make of all this? With regard to Fukuyama's Hegelianism, of course, the verdict is clear: It is untrue. Man's problem does indeed spring from pride, but pride not against man but against God. Hegel's world, the Christian would say, does not exist - even though Hegel may identify aspects of the human drama accurately. The world that actually exists is a world in relation to the objective and personal God of the Bible. But God does not exist as far as Hegel is concerned. Hence his explanation of human experience within an exclusively natural universe, with problems requiring purely human solutions (rather than divine salvation) - political and economic solutions; in short, liberal democracy.

⁵ Ibid, p. 159.

⁶ Fukuyama, p. 203.

⁷ Ibid, p. 197.

It would be a mistake, however, to dismiss Fukuyama out of hand either for his Hegelianism or his optimism, though superficially (at this moment in time especially) he warrants it. Can he seriously think the world is moving towards liberal democracy - in the Balkans perhaps, or Muslim Pakistan, Sudan or South Arabia, or almost anywhere in Africa? The idea seems preposterous and hardly worth consideration.

Fukuyama's prognosis may be invalid. Its sheer audacity and optimism, however, one could say its message of 'peace, peace, when then is no peace', masks an ominous undercurrent hinted at by Paul Johnson: 'The only trouble is that (Fukuyama's) assumption of the imminent triumph of liberalism was a 19th century commonplace shared alike by John Stuart Mill and Woodrow Wilson, Mazzini and Kossuth, Gladstone and Thiers; indeed, it was pretty generally held, among 'enlightened' people, as late as the Versailles Conference in 1918-19. Unfortunately, such complacency was succeeded by the Totalitarian Era, from which we are only just beginning, rather tentatively I would say, to emerge. Even in its watered down form, Fukuyama's optimism appears presumptuous'.

No! The idea of a wagon-train of independent states arriving in the Eldorado of a liberal democratic Utopia seems implausible to say the least. Interestingly enough, however, it is Fukuyama himself who identifies the central weakness of his position, namely RELATIVISM. In so doing he rings the bells for those with ears to hear and indicates the continuing threat of another Totalitarian Era - and for the same reasons!

Two centuries after the French Revolution, the liberal democracies of the world exist within a moral vacuum. "Democratic societies... tend to promote a belief in the equality of all lifestyles and values. They do not tell their citizens how they should live, or what will make them happy, virtuous or great. Instead, they cultivate the virtue of toleration which becomes the chief virtue..."⁸ Which sounds good enough in principle but turns out to be lethal in practice - contemporary pluralism eroding rapidly into relativism, and hence into the social confusion of the late 20th century.

Fukuyama identifies two MAJOR PROBLEMS here. First, that contemporary democracies in the West lack the necessary philosophical base upon which to rest their all-important concept of HUMAN RIGHTS, the linchpin, of course, of any society claiming to be a liberal democracy and, we would say, irremediable outside the Christian worldview of a personal Creator. Fukuyama seems to understand this better than many evangelicals.

"The incoherence in our current discourse on the nature of rights springs from a deeper philosophical crisis concerning the rational understanding of man. Rights spring directly from an understanding of what man is, but if there is no agreement on the nature of man... then any attempt to define rights or to prevent the creation of new and possibly spurious ones will be unavailing... Today everybody talks about human dignity, but there is no consensus as to why people possess it... The entire thrust of modern natural science and philosophy since the time of Kant and Hegel has been to deny the possibility of autonomous moral choice, and to understand human behaviour entirely in terms of sub-human and sub-rational impulses... (but) if there is no basis for saying that man has a superior dignity to nature, then the justification for man's dominion over nature ends. The egalitarian passion that denies the existence of significant differences between human beings can be extended to a denial of significant differences between man and the higher animals... But the argument will not stop there... why should the ability to experience pain, or the possession of higher intelligence, become a title to superior worth? In the end, why does man have more dignity than any part of the natural world, from the most humble rocks to the most distant stars?... The

⁸ Fukuyama, p. 305.

intellectual impasse in which modern relativism has left us does not permit us to answer these attacks definitively, and therefore does not permit defense of liberal rights traditionally understood.”⁹

How can liberal democracy survive, let alone increase, within such hesitation and confusion intellectually?

The second problem is internal to Fukuyama's Hegelianism and brings him to Nietzsche and the second aspect of his title - the 'Last Man'.

Nietzsche's critique of Hegel is that liberal democracy fails because it empties man of his essential manliness. According to Hegel, what makes man 'man' is his ability to act freely and to risk everything, even his own life, for the sake of prestige, of 'recognition'. Hence society's evolution into Masters and Slaves, Aristocracy and Proletariat. Within a technologically 'liberated' liberal democracy, however, the urge to find recognition cannot be satisfied. Man returns to the experience of the animal. Physical needs are cared for. No one 'rules' for all are equal. 'A dog is content to sleep in the sun all day provided he is fed because he is not dissatisfied with what he is.'¹⁰ In Nietzsche's words: 'No shepherd and one herd! Everybody wants the same, everybody is the same: whoever feels different goes voluntarily into a madhouse.' And again: 'Real are we entirely, and without belief or superstition. Thus you stick out your chests - but alas, they are hollow!'¹¹

This is the second of Fukuyama's dilemmas. In an increasingly homogenised society (homogenised technically within what Neil Postman calls a Technopoly and homogenised politically by the fact that no values are worth fighting for except the value of physical survival) the basis of historicism is undermined. Mankind has lost the defining characteristic of humanity and been reduced to animality, to the dog lying in the sun.

Physical needs have been provided for but at the cost of meaningful existence. 19th century pride (Nietzsche's puffed out chest) concludes in emptiness, in hollowness:

“We are the hollow men

We are the stuffed men

Leaning together

Headpiece filled with straw. Alas!

...This is the way the world ends

This is the way the world ends

This is the way the world ends

Not with a bang but a whimper”¹²

This says it all and contemporary Post-Modernism merely echoes the refrain!

⁹ Ibid, pp. 296- 298.

¹⁰ Fukuyama, p. 305.

¹¹ Ibid, p. 307.

¹² Scofield, M., *T.S.Eliot the poems*, 1988, p. 137- 'The Hollow men', 1925.

Nietzsche's 'last man' is, of course, modelled on Christ, for Christ introduced an ethic of self-surrender, of service, of submission-to-another. All of which involves the unmaning of man, for man is constituted by the search for recognition. Fukuyama is aware of this contradiction with Hegel's analysis but has no adequate response. In addition, however, he senses that more than a theoretical contradiction is involved... '...to the extent that liberal democracy is successful at purging megalothumia from life and substituting for it rational consumption, we will become last men. But human beings will rebel at this thought. That is, they will rebel at the idea of being undifferentiated members of a universal and homogenous state, each the same as the other no matter where on the globe one goes. They will want to be citizens rather than bourgeois, finding the life of masterless slavery - the life of rational consumption - in the end boring. They will want to have ideals by which to live and die... This is the 'contradiction' that liberal democracy has not yet solved'.¹³

Interestingly enough (and here Fukuyama deserves commendation) he recognises that while contemporary liberal societies undermine values, those within which liberal democracy came into being, by contrast, were not so handicapped. Why? Because they had a clear belief in God, hence absolute moral values and a purpose for life. Not everything was equal in other words, for Truth was real and determinative for individual and social behaviour.

"Families don't really work if they are based on liberal principles, that is, if their members regard them as they would a joint stock company, formed for their utility rather than being based on ties of duty and love.. Many of the problems of the contemporary American family - the high divorce rate, the lack of parental authority, alienation of children, and so on - arise precisely from the fact that it is approached by its members on strictly liberal grounds' ... (and then the contrast) ... 'the strongest forms of community life in the United States had their origins in shared religious values rather than in rational self-interest. The Pilgrims and other Puritan communities that settled New England were all bound together by a common interest not in their material well-being, but in the glorification of God... Liberal democracies... are not self-sufficient: the community life on which they depend must ultimately come from a source different from liberalism itself. The men and women who made up the American society at the time of the founding of the United States were not isolated, rational individuals calculating their self-interest. Rather they were for the most part members of religious communities held together by a common moral code and belief in God. The rational liberalism that they came to embrace was not a projection of that pre-existing culture, but existed in some tension with it... in the long run those liberal principles (which appeared later) had a corrosive effect on the values pre-dating liberalism necessary to sustain strong communities, and thereby on a liberal society's ability to be self-sustaining."¹⁴

To summarise: Fukuyama is attracted by Hegel's analysis of history. In such a view history is going somewhere, it is directed; and its end is liberal democracy worldwide. This is the political system made possible by the outworking of mankind's peculiar endowments, which, while unresolved in the past, have now achieved equilibrium as a result of modern science and technology.

He is honest enough to admit, however, that there are two fundamental problems:

(a) That liberal democracies lack an adequate philosophical base and (b) that liberal democracies themselves emerged from a belief in God - and specifically the Christian God! (see pp.228, 231, 236, 238)

¹³ Fukuyama, p. 315

¹⁴ Ibid, p. 324-326.

These are the weaknesses of Fukuyama's analysis. How secure his hope of a liberal democratic utopia can be remains unclear, for the commendable reason that he is honest about the problems.

Nevertheless, enough in his analysis is right to make one hesitate. The ideologies of the 20th century have in fact collapsed. In their demise, furthermore, they have radiated renewed appreciation for, and interest in, the achievements of Western liberal democracy. In addition, the homogenising aspects of modern technological society are a reality.

Hence, much as one sympathises with those who draw attention to the illiberal tendencies within the international community today, something about Fukuyama's thesis refuses to go away; the fascination of the title remains.

Why? Unquestionably his Hegelian historicism is mistaken. But is historicism per se not a biblical concept, in the carefully defined sense that Scripture points to an end to history, to the eschaton, the unveiling of the Last Man, who returns in glory to judge the living and the dead? An end to history, however, not outside the ordinary developments of space and time, of political revolutions and social distress, of polls and Presidents etc, but within the course of ordinary life, of 'marrying and giving in marriage' and so on.

In which context, Paul Johnson's mention of 19th century parallels to Fukuyama's liberal utopianism are both interesting and alarming. Liberalism, he points out, actually preceded the Totalitarian Era. But did it merely precede? Was it not a principal cause of 20th century totalitarianism, of Nazism and Communism, particularly through its moral relativism? In other words, since 19th century liberalism (like its 20th century counterpart) lacked a viable philosophic foundation for its ideals of human equality and justice, did it not provide thereby the necessary seedbed, which, in the aftermath of war and the dramatic economic distress which resulted, made possible the impossible?

Is it inconceivable, therefore, that a similar future awaits contemporary liberalism? We think not.