

## The End of What?

### Fukuyama's 'History' and a 'Necessary Adjustment to Reality'

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#### The End of History and the Last Man (new edition)

by Francis Fukuyama;  
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Francis Fukuyama, one of a class of people styled political pundits by the American media, has long imagined himself as a writer in the prophetic vein, though apparently he did not prophesise his own alleged conversion to a more humane politics. It is not surprising that, with a title such as *The End of History and* – well, something, though no one seemed to remember or care for the latter half of the title, Fukuyama's book, first published in 1992, should have been the subject of much, mostly trite, commentary. Its origins lay in an article published, under the title of 'The End of History?' in the journal *The National Interest* in 1989 – and though, as Fukuyama now rather unpersuasively asserts in the afterword to the book's second edition, he may not have been endorsing a "specifically American version of the end of the history", the triumphalist note in which he celebrated "the total exhaustion of viable systematic alternatives to western liberalism" was all too self-evident to most readers. By the time the book appeared, without the interrogative in the title, the Berlin Wall had fallen, the Soviet Union had disintegrated, and the US, reaping the benefits of the end of the cold war and standing unopposed in the exercise of its military might, had inflicted a crushing defeat on Iraq, moreover, countries were rapidly succumbing to the ideology of the free market. Thus, notwithstanding Fukuyama's interest in advancing a specifically Kojevian reading of Hegel, and the idea that the ideals of liberty and

bourgeois democracy are best encountered in unfettered economic activity, it is not difficult to see how his endorsement of western liberal democracy "as the final form of human government" was viewed by many observers as having something of an American inflection.

#### Benign Reading of Europe

It is Fukuyama's submission that, in keeping with Kojève's version of the "end of history" argument, the "European project was in fact a house built as a home for the last man who would emerge at the end of history" (p 346). In this, the second edition of *The End of History*, it becomes clear through the author's new afterword that he wishes to read "Europe" narrowly, as continental Europe rather than as "Euro-America" or as the west. In Fukuyama's present narrative, Europe comes across as a more enlightened place than the contemporary US. Europeans, he suggests, dare to dream of transcending national sovereignty, and they are much less likely to invoke military solutions to political problems. The European opposition to the Iraq war might appear to strengthen this impression. Before we dismantle Fukuyama's benign reading of "Europe", it may be worthwhile to consider his withdrawal of support for the war in Iraq. In a piece he penned for the *Los Angeles Times*, 'Why Shouldn't I Change My Mind?' (April 9, 2006), Fukuyama insists, contrary to his critics on the right, that he realised the wisdom of parting company from his fellow neoconservatives before it had become apparent that the US was pursuing a "failed policy" in Iraq. It is true that, some months before the invasion, Fukuyama had expressed some doubt that the use of military power to defeat Iraq was calculated to bring American foreign policy objectives to fruition, and he had stated that the war should only be launched with UN Security Council authorisation.

Only to an unrepentant conservative does this sound anything like a moral shift of position, and thus it is not surprising that in an article ostensibly about how he has changed his mind Fukuyama asserts that "no one should be required to apologise for having supported intervention in Iraq before the war". The debate over the war, Fukuyama assures us, should only have been on "whether it was prudent to do so [i.e., invade Iraq] given the possible costs and potential consequences of intervention and whether it was legitimate for the US to invade in the unilateral way that it did". Thus does Fukuyama pride himself on a "a necessary adjustment to reality". It is, needless to say, these necessary adjustments that have long guided American policy: as Henry Kissinger put it in his own inimitable way, when asked about the Iran-Iraq war of the 1980s, "A pity they both can't lose". When one adjusts to the "reality", one discovers that some dead Muslims are better than no dead Muslims at all.

In Fukuyama's universe, American shortsightedness shows humankind the door to Europe. If *The End of History* displayed an amnesia about Europe's torrid adventures with colonialism, which are no doubt salubrious examples of "multiculturalism" – the meeting of the east and the west, of white and black, of reason and mysticism, of the city and the jungle – and the transcendence of national sovereignty, it is perfectly apposite that Europe should, in the second edition, be cast in the avuncular idiom. From the point of view of those who come from the formerly colonised states of the global south, there is absolutely nothing to choose between the Europeans and the Americans. The eagerness with which British, French, German, and Italian businesses rushed to pick up contracts for Iraq's reconstruction tells its own tale of European self-aggrandisement and supineness, but even more telling is the French incapacity, most recently on display in the widespread violence that rocked France in 2005, to deal with its colonial past. When Maurice Papon was put on trial in 1999, it was for his role in sending Jews to gas chambers, not for his role in engineering assassinations of Algerians in 1961 as the Paris police chief. Indeed, the arrogance and sanctimonious

conduct of the French is nowhere better gauged than in the fact that on February 23, 2005, the French National Assembly passed a law requiring school children to be taught “the positive role of the French presence overseas, notably in north Africa”.

### Intellectual Insularity

One of the most remarkable aspects of western intellectual life, particularly in the Anglo-American world, is its extraordinary insularity, and it is not at all uncommon to find public intellectuals on the left (for instance, Raymond Williams and Eric Hobsbawm) as much as those on the right (for instance, Fukuyama, Gertrude Himmelfarb, Bernard Lewis and Ernest Gellner) purporting to write about human liberty, democracy, and the like while confining themselves entirely to the Judeo-Christian world and (increasingly, from necessity) Islam. It is always European events that furnish the bookmarks to historical inquiry in such narratives and colonialism seldom enters into these accounts. Though Fukuyama, in the afterword to the second edition, addresses what he views as the major challenges posed to the arguments of *The End of History*, there are many more phenomena, some of them of greater significance, of which he shows little or no recognition. Apart from the occlusion of the narrative of colonialism, one should also point to decolonisation, the definitive political experience for most of humankind in the 20th century. If violence filled the 20th century, it also provoked the most creative responses that history has witnessed, such as the forging of nonviolent resistance as a mass movement at the hands of Mohandas Gandhi and Martin Luther King. It is the same Gandhi who was a relentless critic of western modernity, and could even gently, in response to a query on what he thought of “western civilisation”, aver that “it would be a good idea”; and it is the same King who unequivocally described the US as the greatest purveyor of violence in the world. Does Fukuyama’s thesis about the “end of history” have room for any of these nuances? And when he states that the people voting with their feet are the best proof of the universal desire for increased standards of living that come about with “economic development”, has he considered that millions of people have been sacrificed at the altar of “development”? No ideology has become more suspect among dissenting intellectuals than that of

development: as Shiv Visvanathan put it cryptically in *A Carnival for Science* (Oxford 1997), “Soviets + electricity = genocide” (p 11). All over the world, trade unionists, anti-development activists, and leaders of ecological movements have been convicted under laws, such as India’s Prevention of Terrorism Act (POTA), supposedly intended to thwart terrorist activity or defend the national security state. Fukuyama, one hopes, will reconsider his reverence for development.

There are still more significant considerations than the ones upon which Fukuyama lavishes his attention. In the present prolific commentary on the nearly worldwide ascendancy of free-market ideology, the elimination of trade barriers, the globalisation of goods and services, and the universalisation of various forms of popular culture, what has seldom been noted is that nothing has been more effectively globalised than western knowledge systems and the categories that they have produced. It is extraordinary that Paul Samuelson’s economics textbook, first published in 1948 and since translated into 41 languages, has been used widely in as many as 100 countries, running the full spectrum from western democracies to totalitarian states. How modern economics, truly the “dismal science”, has come to be constituted as a “universalism” is at least as important a story for those who wish to fight oppression as fraudulent wars waged in search of weapons of mass destruction. Or, to furnish another example, whatever difficulties Americans might be encountering in foisting their ideas of freedom and democracy upon others, American-style business schools have proven to be immensely popular and the American MBA is the most coveted degree around the world. Gujarati merchants for centuries plied the oceans and were a ubiquitous presence in the far-flung entrepôts of the vast Indian Ocean trading system, and their business networks have been legendary. But evidently we are now at the point where Gujaratis will have to be certified from an American business school or one of its clones, such as the Indian Institute of Management (Ahmedabad) before they can be viewed as good and proper businesspersons.

### At the Beginning of a History

As I have argued in my book, *The History of History: Politics and Scholarship in Modern India* (Oxford 2003), few categories of knowledge have so forcibly inserted

themselves into the modern sensibility as has “history”. Though the professionalisation of the disciplines commenced in most cases in the 19th century, history came to acquire special resonance as a form of knowledge which most vividly embodied the aspirations of a nation state. Interestingly, the numerous theoretical innovations – deconstruction and post-modernism, among them – of the previous three decades which are mistakenly supposed, by commentators on both the right and the left, to have eroded the entire edifice of western philosophy and Enlightenment rationality never really posed any fundamental challenge to the idea of history. They put the dominant narratives of history into question, only to put into their place the histories of marginalised people, subaltern histories, and “history from below”. The deleterious consequences of the ascendancy of historical thinking can be witnessed, for example, in Hindu nationalism’s love affair with history, and especially with the ruins of the Hindu past, and in the attempted transformation of Hinduism, at the hands of history-besotted modernist Hindus, from a religion largely of mythos into a religion of history. Fukuyama’s work is so heavily committed to a modernist framework of knowledge that he never questions history as a category of knowledge: he thus fails to recognise that there have been many ways of apprehending the past, and some civilisations have even chosen the path of a deliberate forgetfulness. Now, of course, it is agreed from all sides of the political spectrum that every people must be endowed with a history – albeit in the lower case, or in the idioms of small voices: that is, apparently, the only way of being civilised. In this domain, as in all others, whatever the virtues of transnational forms of consumption of art, music, literature, food, and fashions, our political and intellectual choices have considerably narrowed. Though Fukuyama asserts “the end of history”, one should say rather that we are at “the beginning of a history”, at the beginning of a time when, in the midst of seeming riches, apparently infinite choices, plurality of lifestyles, and the compression of time and space, our options for creative living, emancipation from the tried cliché of modernity, and most significantly for the expression of dissent have dramatically shrunk. **FW**

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