gains and fringe benefits) and regressive (lower taxes for high income earners) features. He’s won the admiration of good, solid Left ministers such as Brian Howe.

Biography is a difficult art, and Edna Carew’s is the best one of Keating we have. Her task has been made doubly difficult by having someone as complex and elusive as Paul John to deal with. She doesn’t seem to have had much direct access to the man himself. What we are left with is a cautious, impersonal report—at a distance, as it were—of one of the most dazzling figures in contemporary Australian politics. Whether he is as capable of dazzling the Australian electorate as he has the media we will know next year.

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Ole Man History


Are we witnessing a "worldwide liberal revolution"? Are we living in the "old age of mankind"? Indeed, has History with a capital ‘H’ really ended? Francis Fukuyama thinks so—but, in the words of Mandy Rice-Davies, "He would say that, wouldn’t he".

Educated at the University of Chicago where one of his professors was Allan Bloom, author of The Closing of the American Mind, Fukuyama is a former deputy director of the US State Department’s Policy Planning Staff, the intellectual powerhouse of American foreign policy since its establishment in 1948. He even wrote The End of History under the auspices of the RAND Corporation, a private enterprise equivalent of the Policy Planning Staff. In 1990 Fukuyama published The End of History?’, the essay which led to this book, in The National Interest, an influential US neo-conservative journal. The End of History?’ of course, spawned an extensive intellectual debate throughout the Anglophone world.

Yet besides its tasty ‘sound bite’ of a title, how do we explain the success of Fukuyama’s work? The End of History is a confused book, but it is a telling confusion. It captures the ambivalent mental state of America’s conservative intelligentsia as it assesses the post-Cold War era. The End of History manages to be simultaneously triumphalist and pessimistic. No mean feat, but everyone admires a skilled acrobat.

If the revolutions in Eastern Europe and the recent break-up of the Soviet Empire have only been greeted with two cheers in the United States, it is because the Reagan-Bush years look more like the fin-de-siècle of the American century, and less like its zenith every day. In this sense Fukuyama’s book is the first major neo-conservative response to Paul Kennedy’s The Rise and Fall of Great Powers and the debate it spawned.

In the post-Cold War world geoeconomics is replacing geopolitics as the dominant feature of international relations. Like a champion past its prime, the United States seems ill-equipped to win this new game. The United States, as we are constantly reminded, has ‘won’ the Cold War, only to find itself losing the economic peace’.

This is the dilemma of American neoconservatism that Fukuyama tries to confront. As the taste of victory turns to ashes in their mouths, American conservatives want to be reassured that the two great tenets of their faith—liberal democracy and economic liberalism—have fulfilled their Manifest Destiny. They don’t want to hear about the problems of actually existing liberal democracy—budget deficits, the need to raise taxes, the costs of imperial over-reach and the riots in LA. They want to hear about the inevitability of their creed’s success.

This triumphalist reading of Fukuyama is simply stated:

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. Two hundred years after they first animated the French and American revolutions, the principles of liberty and equality have proven not just durable but resurgent.

Fukuyama chooses to support this claim with an eccentric thesis based upon the works of Hegel or, more exactly, upon the interpretation of Hegel of early 20th century French philosopher Alexandre Kojeve. According to Hegel-Kojeve-Fukuyama, History is one-directional, eschatological and susceptible to Universal laws. In a throwback to the ‘modernisation’ theories popular within American political science in the 1960s, The End of History argues that “the logic of modern natural science” ensures that all societies will eventually have access to the same level of technology, and hence the same level of economic development. In the wake of communism’s collapse, all nations will therefore follow the most efficient path to economic success—economic liberalism.

In the book’s major Hegelian twist, Fukuyama argues that human beings are driven by a “desire for recognition”, what the Greeks called thymos. According to this view, “human beings seek recognition of their worth, or of their people, things or principles that they invest with worth”. Thymos explains the urge of slaves to be free and consumers to spend. At the international level, thymos—or megalothymia, as Fukuyama
describes it—is the driving force behind war.

For Fukuyama, “recognition is the central problem of politics because it is the origin of tyranny, imperialism and the desire to dominate”. And it can only ever be tamed by liberal democracy, the one system capable of satisfying this desire without self-destructing, because it confers upon each individual a sense of dignity. Further, in a world of interlocking liberal democracies Kant’s ideal of a perpetual peace would finally come into being because liberal democracies do not go to war with each other.

Yet Fukuyama’s whole enterprise stands on two, equally unstable supports: one theoretical, the other empirical. First, his arguments are based on a wilful misinterpretation of Hegelian philosophy. As Alan Ryan noted recently in the New York Review of Books:

Anyone who has read any Hegel knows that Hegel did not think that liberal democracy was where history would end. Hegel thought that the ultimate form of political association was a rational legal state, but it would be explicitly anti-democratic, and liberal only in its attachment to the rule of law. Crucially, Hegel had no time for the individualism that Americans regard as the very heart of liberalism.

Instead, a traditional reading of Hegel would seem to predict a bright future for the corporatist states of North East Asia. Maybe Fukuyama has never read his fellow American, Chalmers Johnson, on the operation of Japan’s political economy. Johnson coined the phrase ‘capitalist development model’ to describe Japan and its fellow economic travellers—a model which sets economic liberalism on its head.

Fukuyama does muster the courage to argue, against the general thrust of his thesis, that the political economies of Asia are often authoritarian, despite being what he describes as “formally democratic”. He squibs it entirely, though, when he explains their laudable economic success by singling out the ‘Confucian work ethic’ as the source of their dynamism.

Fukuyama has an admirable respect for the benefits of liberal democracy and a naive view of the efficacy of economic liberalism. For Fukuyama all liberal democracies must be capitalist economies, and all capitalist economies are free market economies. He never coherently explains the basis of Japan’s economic success. Nor does he acknowledge the importance of social democratic ideas and policies in making the liberal democracies of the advanced industrial nations so stable.

In the opening stages of his book Fukuyama comes out swinging, but by its final round the champ is exhausted. After proclaiming boldly for most of the book that he has seen the future and it is liberal democratic, towards the end Fukuyama begins to equivocate. The second half of Fukuyama’s title is lifted from Nietzsche. History has ended and there they are—the last men: pampered, bourgeois, scions of a prosperous, stable liberal democracy, yet bored and dissatisfied.

Much like the bond traders in Tom Wolfe’s The Bonfire of the Vanities, argues Fukuyama:

as they sink into the soft leather of their BMWs, they will know somewhere in the back of their minds that there have been real gunslingers and masters in the world, who would feel contempt for the petty virtues required to become rich or famous in modern America. How long megalomaniacs will be satisfied with metaphorical wars and symbolic victories is an open question.

The book ends with a quaint metaphor. The flow of History is like a wagon train, Fukuyama says, struggling across the Rockies towards some west coast nirvana. Eventually, “enough wagons would pull into a town such that any reasonable person looking at the situation would be forced to agree that there had only been one journey and one destination”. But who can tell, he asks, whether the town’s “occupants, having looked around a bit at their new surroundings, will not find them inadequate and set their eyes on a new and more distant journey”. History kicked off again by a descendant of John Wayne?

BRETT EVANS works for the Evatt Foundation.

List

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