

COMMENTARY

Endgame

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Every now and then an event occurs which brings a shift of perspective on the intellectual scene, relating familiar components in new ways and by its oblique light revealing the contents of dark corners and alleys. Such an event is the publication of Francis Fukuyama's *The End of History and the Last Man*. Even the verdicts on its intellectual stature, the strength of its claim on our attention, have been instructively and entertainingly diverse. Connoisseurs of academic bile should turn first to John Dunn's *TLS* review (24.4.92). In its opening sentences the book is described as 'dire', a work of 'palpable mediocrity' and an 'unenticing and puerile volume'. Much of it, Dunn asserts, is 'cast at the level (and in the accents) of the worst kind of American undergraduate term-paper'. The 'blame' for the widespread public attention it has secured lies largely, he believes, with the publishers who committed so much energy and capital to its launch. Although cast at the level and in the accents we have come to associate with Cambridge, England, these opinions are surely too wildly over the top to be persuasive. Yet they exemplify a strong tendency in establishment responses to the book in Britain, one of brutal dismissal laced with snobbery and envy. In sharp contrast Perry Anderson hails it in *A Zone of Engagement* as a work of 'conviction and elegance', of 'graceful fluency' and 'original argument', a 'remarkable feat of composition' in which 'for the first time, the philosophical discourse of the end of history has found a commanding political expression'. 'It is safe to say,' he adds, 'that no one has ever attempted a comparable synthesis – at once so deep in ontological premise and so close to the surface of global politics.' These generous words may also be taken as illustrating a larger tendency. Clearly, the reception of Fukuyama's book offers a rich field of inquiry.

It becomes richer still when one turns to more overtly political responses. The most obvious feature is the way the book has cut across and shaken up conventional Left-Right divisions. Its 'official' thesis, as it may be called, is that history has now come to an end with the triumph of capitalism and liberal democracy. This might be expected to be music to the ears of the Right. Yet in the range of commentary from, say, *The Daily Telegraph* to *The National Interest* one finds little enthusiasm but rather lukewarm, largely formal, acceptance, mingled with downright

hostility. The reasons for this are no doubt complex. Yet it surely has something to do with the fact that Fukuyama's project of a 'Universal History' has come to have an ineradicably bad smell for the traditional Right, however fragrantly it seeks to present itself. The point may be put more concretely in terms of the details of his procedure. He relies on two kinds of regulative mechanism to carry history forward and ensure a happy ending. The first is the logic of modern natural science as embodied in the productive forces and, hence, bringing the possibility of indefinite economic growth. This is, as Fukuyama acknowledges, essentially an economic interpretation of history, indeed a kind of Marxist interpretation that leads, he insists, to 'a completely non-Marxist conclusion'. It may well be that many on the Right will be sceptical of his, or anyone's, ability to pull off this feat of supping with the devil. Such doubts find clear-cut expression in some comments by Samuel Huntingdon, a name well-known to older *RP* readers, on the essay which was the germ of the present book: 'Fukuyama's thesis itself reflects not the disappearance of Marxism but its pervasiveness. ... Marxist ideology is alive and well in Fukuyama's arguments to refute it.' This hits the authentically paranoid note of the old-style Cold Warriors. Yet the underlying attitudes will surely have a wider currency, even today.

The situation on the Left is a kind of distorted reflection of all this. The most prominent tendency has been to see Fukuyama's work as expressing the triumphalism of the capitalist world over victory in the Cold War and the death of communism. Moreover, as the contribution of a former State Department official now with the RAND Corporation, it seems to emerge quasi-officially from the very entrails of the beast. There have, however, been exceptions to the trend. Perry Anderson gives the principle of them in remarking that the Right's charge of 'inverted Marxism' is grounds for tribute on the Left. His own tribute is delivered in *A Zone of Engagement* with an intellectual force and authority that risks incongruously overshadowing its subject. Other dissenting voices have been raised in Britain, and indeed a pattern is discernible in them. For they include a significant number of those who came in personal contact with Fukuyama during his visit here in Spring 1992 to publicise the book. It seems to have been his prime concern

on public occasions to correct his image as the complacent apostle of the new and everlasting gospel of the American way of life, the prophet of the global shopping mall. Instead he sought to convey his actual doubts and reservations concerning the present world order. This was done with impressive seriousness, modesty and willingness to entertain criticism and self-criticism. In addition it was difficult in human terms not to sympathise with his dignity and restraint under often severe provocation. He seemed to have the better of things intellectually and morally on several such occasions and many who witnessed or participated in them must have had their perceptions altered as a result.

Fred Halliday's report in *New Left Review* 193 on 'An Encounter with Fukuyama' is the product of one of those unsatisfactory confrontations. This was a television discussion which was, as Halliday says, 'somewhat deviated by the interventions of a bibulous Labour dignitary'. Hence, it did not even begin to get the measure of Fukuyama's ideas and Halliday now seeks to make amends on his own account. He does this by graphically outlining some of the 'many questions of interest and challenge to historical materialism' raised by Fukuyama's work. For present purposes, however, it may be enough to note his conclusion in which, echoing the 'inverted Marxism' theme, he suggests that the 'problem with Fukuyama's theory' might be solved by doing to him 'what Feuerbach did to Hegel, namely turn him on his head'. Halliday takes it to be a measure of Fukuyama's breadth of reading and tolerance of his critics that he did not seem 'too perturbed' by the suggestion. Such equanimity deserves to be probed further. But first one should take account of the record of a meeting with a representative of historical materialism that is even warmer in tone and undeviated in its significance. This is Andrew Chitty's interview in the second issue of *Analysis*, by far the most revealing document for Fukuyama's thinking to have emerged from his British visit. In it Chitty refers to the vitriolic tone of much right-wing and establishment comment on the book, contrasting it with his own view as a Marxist that it is 'one of the most developed expressions' of bourgeois thought in the last twenty or thirty years. For the most striking vignette of Fukuyama's encounter with the British Left one has, however, to look to the occasion of his debate with Terry Eagleton. It came at question time when a speaker from the floor asked whether Fukuyama realised that the only friends he had in the world were orthodox Marxists like himself. Once again Fukuyama did not seem too perturbed. He seemed rather to endorse the suggestion in a complex reaction which united insight, resignation and humour. In the interview with Chitty he had declared himself proud to be an exemplar of bourgeois thought. Yet the responses to Halliday and to his anonymous questioner hint at levels of self-consciousness not adequately captured in that description, at a sensibility less flatly bourgeois than he likes to profess to the world.

A Dual Inheritance

To pursue this idea one has to consider the intellectual background to Fukuyama's book. The most prominent figure there is the Russian émigré, Alexandre Kojève, best

known for his seminar in 1930s' Paris on the *Phenomenology of Spirit*. This was attended by Bataille, Breton, Lacan, Merleau-Ponty and Eric Weil, among others, and played a key role in the Hegel revival in France. After the war Kojève joined the Ministry for Economic Affairs, becoming a major influence on the French side in the negotiations leading to the GATT Treaty and the formation of the European Economic Community and in the shaping of policy towards the 'Third World'. As a student in Germany in the 1920s he had made the acquaintance of Leo Strauss, a relationship renewed a decade later in Paris. It resulted in an important correspondence, extending over 33 years, which has recently been published in the new edition of Strauss's *On Tyranny*. Strauss, for most of this period a professor at the University of Chicago, was in his own way as extraordinary a figure as Kojève. This fact gets a back-handed acknowledgement in Stanley Rosen's considered verdict that he was 'one of the most hated men in the English-speaking academic world'. Rosen hints rather touchingly at part of the reason for this when he adds that 'the sweetness of his nature was seldom visible to any but his circle of students and close friends'. In addition to Rosen himself this circle included Allan Bloom, editor of the English version of the work that emerged from Kojève's seminar, *An Introduction to the Reading of Hegel*, and Fukuyama's teacher at the University of Chicago. Strauss's influence on Fukuyama, mediated by Bloom, is less obvious than that of Kojève, surfacing only in copious footnotes. Yet, one may argue, it is no less significant. Indeed Fukuyama's book can plausibly be read as the record of a struggle for his soul between Kojève and Strauss. This unacknowledged and unresolved drama may go some way to account for the impression of generalised ambiguity the work has made on many readers.

Much of the interest of the Strauss/Kojève correspondence lies in its combination of mutual respect, lavishly expressed, and the most unyielding conflict of views. Strauss speaks for both in saying 'we are poles apart', adding that 'the root of the question is that you are convinced of the truth of Hegel (Marx) and I am not.' For all that, there is at another level, not of substantive theses but of general conceptions of what is involved in putting any such theses forward, a curious affinity, even agreement. The common element is the conviction that philosophy cannot present its truths to the world in direct and literal terms. In Strauss's case this was the basis for a theory that became his distinctive, indeed notorious, hallmark. Some at least of his unpopularity in the academic world derived from his insistence that philosophers of the past spoke and wrote 'exoterically' as a cover for their true, 'esoteric' doctrine. This state of affairs reflected, in his view, a basic and permanent tension between philosophy and the city, as the ancient world, though not our shallow post-Enlightenment times, understood very well. A number of factors combine to point Kojève in what is for practical purposes the same direction. There is his habitual recourse, especially in later years, to irony, a habit that, as Fukuyama observes, makes it difficult 'to uncover his true intent'. It can, of course, claim to have deep roots in dialectical thought, given that any version of 'the cunning of reason' must tend to imply that irony is the proper,

indispensable mode of historical understanding. More specifically, there is Kojève's belief that in our time the Hegelian philosophy is less the revelation of a reality than an ideal, a project, to be realised. Hence any serious interpretation of Hegel must be 'political propaganda', a kind of work in which, for instance, 'it is perfectly legitimate to employ certain artifices, while at the same time reproaching one's adversaries for making use of them.'

It appears that Fukuyama is heir to an intellectual legacy at once liberating and burdensome. It is liberating just in virtue of the range of voices it makes available as a tradition not of plain dealing, but of deviousness and dissimulation. That it brings responsibilities as well as freedom is sufficiently shown by the Strauss-Kojève debate. They speak as champions of the 'ancients' and the 'moderns' respectively, of Plato and Hegel, of eternal order and historicist circularity. The point that concerns us here may be approached by noting that neither speaks even in the most distantly prefigurative way for postmodernity. It is true that for both philosophy is the love that dare not speak its name, but it is still incontestably the love of wisdom. If their procedure sometimes takes on the aspect of a game, it is always one whose underlying purpose is deadly serious. Thus, they remain incorrigibly metaphysicians of appearance and reality, not would-be virtuosos of mere appearances that are not appearances of anything. Even the playfulness of the later Kojève is, in its self-conception, that of a 'sage', or, as he sometimes prefers, a mortal 'god' ('I tell my secretary I am a god, but she laughs'). It is a world away from postmodernist whimsy, from all those invitations to be ludic that chill the blood with their promise of tedium and inanity. Complex patterns of thought and expression were forced on Strauss and Kojève just in virtue of their deep seriousness, their felt need to convey vital truths against the pressures of the city and the age. It seems all too easy to suppose that Fukuyama may be subject to similar pressures. Earlier it was suggested that he is equipped with a self-consciousness of himself and his project several degrees richer than his public persona, his cover, as one might call it, of scholar bureaucrat strictly requires. It is now natural to wonder whether he may not have assumed the Strauss-Kojève inheritance in its full range and depth, its cult of irony and the hidden as well as its external forms. Such a hypothesis has, like any other, to be tested by its fruitfulness. To discover this one has to ask what is the esoteric meaning of *The End of History and the Last Man*.

Can't Get No Satisfaction

If there is such a meaning it seems likely to be bound up with Fukuyama's chief item of borrowing from Kojève, the concept of recognition. Its significance derives from the fact that the logic of natural science merely ensures that we arrive at capitalism as the only satisfactory vehicle of economic growth. What takes us on to liberal democracy is a second regulative mechanism, the age-old struggle of human beings for recognition of their worth and dignity. The classic statement of the theme, according to Kojève, is the Master-Slave dialectic of the *Phenomenology*, an episode that is for him the key to Hegel's entire philosophy of

history. The unavailing struggles for recognition of fighting masters and toiling slaves that comprise the substance of history are in the end dialectically overcome through the agency of the French Revolution. Mastery and slavery are alike swallowed up in what Kojève calls the 'universal and homogeneous state' whose prototype is the Napoleonic Empire. This brings history to an end because it provides a fully satisfying form of recognition, universal recognition by the state of the individual 'as a citizen enjoying all political rights and as a "juridical person" of the civil law'. It is a conception which will not, in Strauss's view, bear the theoretical weight laid on it, and his objections have set the pattern of much subsequent comment. They are in essence an attempt to persuade Kojève of the significance of qualitative differences between kinds of recognition. True satisfaction cannot, Strauss believes, consist in abstract, formal recognition of equal citizenship by the state. It needs a recognition geared to the specificity of individuals, to their own sense of self-worth and self-identity, having in some sense to be earned, not simply a right of birth. It is an argument which Kojève never seriously tries to address. He will neither fill out nor deviate from his schematic vision of the end-state in terms of what the universal, homogeneous state universally and homogeneously affords its individual citizens.

For much of the time Fukuyama seems simply to have taken over Kojève's position. The universal, homogeneous state can, he suggests, be understood as liberal democracy, and its mode of operation is wholly Kojévian: 'modern liberal democracy recognises all human beings universally ... by granting and protecting their rights.' In defending this form of recognition he sometimes out-does Kojève, as in the preposterous claim that 'the liberal democratic state values us at our own sense of self-worth'. But doubts of a Straussian kind also begin to surface ever more pressingly as the discussion proceeds. They are crystallised in his citing of Nietzsche's description of the state as 'the coldest of all cold monsters'. Eventually they lead him to speak of the 'inherent contradictions' in the concept of universal recognition arising precisely from its inability to deal with the question of quality. Still more revealingly, he comes to acknowledge that 'private associational life is much more immediately satisfying than mere citizenship in a large modern democracy'. For recognition by the state is 'necessarily impersonal' and for 'a much more individual' sort of recognition, based not on universal 'personness' but on 'a host of particular qualities that together make up one's being', one has to turn to 'community life'. It seems here that Kojève's abstract statism is being decisively abandoned.

This turn in the argument brings, however, problems of its own. A strong community life is, Fukuyama realises, 'constantly threatened' in contemporary societies and specifically in those within the ambit of Anglo-Saxon liberalism. There all forms of community figure merely as contractual devices to minister to the self-interest of individuals. The principles of liberty and equality fundamental to such societies are themselves conceived in individualistic terms that undermine the possibility of 'meaningful community'. This possibility is further attacked by liberal economic principles which 'tend to atomise and separate

people'. Hence it is that all communal forms from the family to the country as a whole come to have a precarious existence. The situation is quite different in the countries of East Asian capitalism. There, under the watchful eye of the state, the blessings of the market-place are enjoyed together with those of traditional social life. Thus, the most significant challenge to liberal universalism today is, Fukuyama believes, posed by those societies in Asia which 'combine liberal economies with a kind of paternalistic authoritarianism'. The viability of this model is, one might suggest, the spectre which increasingly haunts the pages of his book and which he knows no effective way to exorcise.

The outlook so far as world history is concerned is, in Fukuyama's view, crucially dependent on the role of Japan. That country now stands at a critical turning point, poised either to go further down the Anglo-Saxon road or to take the very different one best exemplified at present by Singapore. Although Fukuyama seeks officially, as it were, to treat the options as genuinely open, the tone and drift of the discussion are markedly pessimistic. Thus, he believes that the beginnings of a systematic Asian, and specifically Japanese, rejection of liberal democracy as a 'Western imposition' can already be heard. In an interview during his British visit he suggested that in ten or fifteen years time 'we may see in Japan an explicit rejection of the constitutional trappings of the post-war period'. These speculations reveal an unease which has deep theoretical roots. Indeed, if one consults the inner logic of Fukuyama's argument a more decisive, and decisively gloomy, verdict will be found to emerge.

That logic rests on two pillars, the twin mechanisms of economics and recognition. The second of these is, so far as appearances go, subject to conflicting claims and counter-claims. A closer look reveals, however, only one line of thought that is developed with any conviction and vitality. It tells us that a humanly satisfying recognition is in principle not to be obtained from the state and is not available in Western civil society either, corroded as that is by economic and political liberalism. To this may now be added the weight of the other historical mechanism. For Fukuyama quite consistently maintains the view that liberal democracy is economically dysfunctional. It is so partly for the familiar reason that democratic politics tends to indulge in growth-restricting, inflationary policies that favour redistribution and current consumption. Moreover, the 'highly atomistic economic liberalism' of the United States and Britain becomes counterproductive at a certain point. This happens because the individual self-interest that is at its heart is destructive of the work ethic on which economic success ultimately depends. Thus, both of the mechanisms at the heart of Fukuyama's philosophy of history point away from liberal democracy towards the system he calls 'market-oriented authoritarianism'. If history is now ending, the logic of his argument requires that it end in something like Lee Kuan Yew's 'East Asian Confucian capitalism'. The radical individualism of Western societies serves by contrast to undermine the possibility both of meaningful recognition and of continued economic progress. These societies cannot represent an end-state but are instead transitory historical forms. They are just as doomed as communism,

and for essentially the same reasons. For they contain fundamental contradictions, the contradictions which activate and sustain the dynamics of the historical process. So, far from being a celebration of the American way of life, Fukuyama's book is actually a long good-bye to it, an assiduous painting of grey on the grey of its decrepitude. This will not be welcome news at the State Department or the RAND Corporation and may well be regarded as a poor return on their investment in Fukuyama. They will just have to console themselves by reflecting on the dialectical uses of irony and the inescapable tension between the philosopher and the city. But the irony here has a still deeper layer and the tension is not simply external but is active within the philosopher also.

This is so because the esoteric message of Fukuyama's book is not at all personally congenial to him as a patriotic American liberal. His problem is that he lacks the theoretical resources to put up any serious resistance to it. Yet such resources are available in the tradition from which he claims indirect descent. For Hegel history is emphatically not to be characterised as essentially a struggle for recognition. It is rather 'the progress of the consciousness of freedom'. A proper articulation of this view would surely enable one to see why the end of history is not, in principle, on offer from any kind of collectivist authoritarianism. That this is not clear to Fukuyama should be put down to the fact that, as various commentators have noted, the idea of freedom has no significant role in his theoretical scheme. The occasional references to it are the merest lip-service without any sense of intellectual or normative pressure behind them. This is perhaps not too surprising in view of the immediate provenance of his work, as outlined here. A living concern with freedom is scarcely to be acquired from a conservative élitist such as Strauss. On the other hand, an interest in it as an ideal is, notoriously, not to be found in Kojève either, 'un Stalinién de stricte observance', as he described himself. Nothing could better illustrate Fukuyama's own distinctive brand of irony than his deadpan attempt to explain the problems in seeing Kojève 'as a liberal'. For Fukuyama to escape from his dilemma here he would need direct access to Hegel, unmediated by such an interpreter. An important lesson of his book is that his critics and admirers on the Left need this access too, now more than ever. As Kojève's pupil, Lacan, remarked, it is just when we think we may be moving further away from Hegel that he may be sneaking up behind us. His understanding of how individual freedom may be concretely realised in a rationally-ordered community is still an indispensable starting point, indeed an as yet untranscended horizon of thought. The case for a welcome for Fukuyama from the Left rests on the assumption that his project and some of his methodology can be adapted in the service of quite other conclusions. From this standpoint it appears that the Right shows a sound instinct in being suspicious of him. The philosophy of history is *our* subject, and, now that Fukuyama has helped to put it back on the agenda, we have to take it over and revivify it. Our entire intellectual tradition rests on the belief that the truth of Hegel's dialectic is socialism. This truth urgently needs to be demonstrated once again in the accents of our time.