

Insofar as globalisation results in the 'end of history' (Fukuyama), what are the prospects for social and political change in contemporary society?

Introduction to 'The End of History Thesis'

In Fukuyama's views, globalisation is still a superficial subject. The global economy is limited, and the issue of globalisation is restricted to the capital markets.

Communism has fallen to Capitalism, and the spread of capitalism has led to the globalisation of the world and its cultures. Globalisation aims to make us all the same, a homogeneous society. The affirmation of distinctive cultural identities and homogenisation according to Fukuyama will occur simultaneously, for in terms of large political and economical institutions, cultures are becoming more homogeneous. To be an advanced society, a country has to be a democracy, and it has to be connected to the global marketplace. In such a respect, there is a greater homogenisation of institutions and ideologies. There is no evidence that homogenisation is proceeding as rapidly on a cultural level, however to a certain extent there is a real resistance to cultural homogenisation. Companies such as McDonald's and Coca-Cola spread a global consumer culture, however, a culture really consists of deeper moral norms that affect how people link together. When people examine a culture, they pay too much attention to aspects like the kinds of consumer goods that people buy which is the most superficial aspect of culture.

Recent years have witnessed dramatic changes in Eastern Europe. The dismantling of the Berlin Wall in 1989 signalled the general collapse of the socialist regimes. The 'satellite' states (e.g. East Germany) have won their political freedom from Soviet Union control, and the old USSR itself has fragmented and splintered into breakaway republics. The economic and political crisis in these countries has resulted in a move away from centrally planned economies towards Western Style free markets. Many commentators after the collapse of such regimes had predicted an increasing convergence between East and West in the following few decades. Fukuyama claims we have reached the 'end of history' or, more precisely, the end of major ideological conflicts. In his highly controversial opinion, the collapse of Soviet style communism signals the death of socialism and the permanent victory of Western style liberal democracy.

Fukuyama's theory of the 'End of History' originated from a controversial article entitled "The End of History?" written for the journal 'The National Interest' in 1989, in which he argued that 'a remarkable consensus concerning the legitimacy of liberal democracy as a system of government had emerged throughout the world over the past few years, as it conquered rival ideologies like hereditary monarchy, fascism, and most recently communism.' (Fukuyama 1989) On top of this, Fukuyama argues that liberal democracy might amount to the "end point of mankind's ideological evolution" and the "final form of human government," and as such constituted the "end of history." While earlier forms of government were characterised by severe

defects and irrationalities that led to their eventual collapse, liberal democracy was arguably free from such deep-seated internal contradictions.

Following the tragedy of September 11th, where anti-capitalist terrorists executed an attack on sites around America, the 'heart' of capitalist globalisation, many critics have claimed that Fukuyama was wrong to declare we had reached the end of history over a decade ago. However, Fukuyama referred to 'history' as being the progress over the centuries toward modernity, characterised by institutions like democracy and capitalism. Fukuyama and Samuel Huntington make the two strongest cases for the emergence of a single political culture. Huntington argued that rather than progressing toward a single global system, the world remained mired in a "clash of civilizations" in which six or seven major cultural groups would co-exist without converging and constitute the new fracture lines of global conflict. Since Islamic extremists unhappy with the existence of Western civilization evidently committed the successful attack on the centre of global capitalism, and observers have been handicapping with the Huntington "clash" view over Fukuyama's "end of history" hypothesis. Fukuyama's version of Hegelian essentialism asserts that the human desire for individual 'recognition' drives a universal history in the direction of such a singularity. His argument, like Huntington's, is that the national societies of the world have moved or are moving towards a political culture of liberal democracy. Contentiously, Fukuyama is quite clear that liberal democracy implies a commitment to market capitalism because these guarantee individual rights in the economic sphere. It is the culture rather than the practice of liberal democracy that is critical. "What is emerging victorious...is not so much liberal practice, as the liberal *idea*. That is to say, for a very large part of the world, there is now no ideology with pretensions to universality that is in a position to challenge liberal democracy" (1992:45, original italics).

There is a set of cultural attributes that must accompany economic modernization. These include a greater degree of individualism, understood as people being evaluated based on their achievement rather than in terms of inherited status. According to Fukuyama, recent discussions of globalisation seem to assume that globalisation is going to be much more homogenising than it really is. However, Fukuyama believes that that it will have the opposite effect, stressing that the de facto free trade regime and economic interdependence actually allows people to stress cultural differences in ways that they could not have done before. The prosperity brought about by globalisation permits cultures to really assert their own uniqueness.

In the Post-Cold War world, there is a growing awareness of the phenomenon widely described as 'Globalisation': the speeding up of global communications, travel and the transnationalisation of political and economic institutions. Globalisation is a complex contradictory process involving both growing localism and regionalism as well as globalism, increased diversity as well as homogenisation, fragmentation as well as integration.

Some sociologists question the idea that globalisation is part of a long historical process which began with human evolution; linked to modernity – the emergence of science and technology, the nation state, capitalism – all global processes which have sped up recently. Has globalisation always been part of human culture, or is it a relatively new phenomenon which supersedes the first phase of modernity?

A striking characteristic of the 1980's and 1990's has been the spread of democracy. New democratic regimes have emerged in Latin America, Africa, Asia and Eastern Europe. It may be argued that these countries are 'catching up' with more advanced countries. The dictatorial regimes in these states were toppled by a crisis of legitimacy, their governments were no longer seen as representing their society as a whole. This critical weakness, the failure of legitimacy - a crisis on the level of ideas is not justice or right in an absolute sense; it is a relative concept that exists in people's subjective perceptions. All regimes capable of effective action must be based on some principle of legitimacy. The end of history thesis implies a teleological process of human evolution in which the conclusion is liberal democracy and a market economy.

However, Giddens, and many other sociologists think differently. He believes in reflexive modernisation, that modernity is an endless process. This idea would suggest that we have not in fact reached the end of history. Giddens' work links the process of globalisation with the development of modern societies. Giddens' main message is that a modern society is not defined entirely by its economic base but by the fact it is a nation state. Fukuyama's celebration of the success of liberalism is problematic, according to Giddens, and merely a 'mirage'. Society must continue to progress, the idea of the end of history is premature; our utopia is not in sight as yet.

"Modernity has a cultural basis. Liberal democracy and free markets do not work everywhere. They work best in societies with certain values whose origins may not be entirely rational. It is not an accident that modern liberal democracy emerged first in the Christian west, since the universalism of democratic rights can be seen as a secular form of Christian universalism."
(Fukuyama, 2003)¹

Neo-Marxists argue that the culture industry blindfolds Western society away from the rest of the world, which is suffering from poverty, disease and famine. Fukuyama's idea that society as a whole is getting better is therefore merely deceptive. However, a society which lacks the political wool drawn over their eyes to an extent in order to maintain civilised day-to-day actions would be a society surviving on turmoil. One must possess optimism in order to survive an existence in such cultures. The idea of the end of history may be premature, but it still gives us the hope that our own individual existences lead to something more ultimate.

¹ From www.guardianunlimited.com, Francis Fukuyama's piece on Iraq affairs, May 2003.