

REFLECTIONS ON *THE END OF HISTORY*, FIVE YEARS LATER¹

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ABSTRACT

The argument contained in *The End of History and the Last Man* (New York, 1992) consists of an empirical part and a normative part: critics have confused the two and their proper relationship. The assertion that we have reached the "end of history" is not a statement about the empirical condition of the world, but a normative argument concerning the justice or adequacy of liberal democratic political institutions. The normative judgment is critically dependent on empirical evidence concerning, for example, the workability of capitalist and socialist economic systems, but ultimately rests on supra-empirical grounds. The empirical part queries whether there is something like the Hegelian-Marxist concept of History as a coherent, directional evolution of human societies taken as a whole. The answer to this is yes, and lies in the phenomenon of economic modernization based on the directional unfolding of modern natural science. The latter has unified mankind to an unprecedented degree, and gives us a basis for believing that there will be a gradual spread of democratic capitalist institutions over time. This empirical conclusion, however, does no more than give us *hope* that there is a progressive character to world history, and does not prove the normative case. The normative grounding of modern liberal democracy has indeed been put in jeopardy by the philosophical "crisis of modernity" inaugurated by Nietzsche and Heidegger. Contemporary postmodernist critiques of the possibility of such a grounding have not, however, adequately come to terms with the destructive consequences of their views for liberal democratic societies. This *aporia*, discussed most seriously in the Strauss-Kojève debate, is the central intellectual issue of our age.

I. INTRODUCTION

When I showed a draft of my original article "The End of History?" to a political theorist friend in early 1989 and asked for his opinion, he said: "You will be misunderstood." This judgment proved quite prophetic: after its publication in *The National Interest* that summer, it elicited a flurry of misinterpretations, many related to its supposed relevance to American foreign policy (it had none). Part of the reason that I enlarged the article into *The End of History and the Last Man* was to correct these misinterpretations by presenting the argument at much greater length. Surely, I thought, a 400-page book would go a long

1. This article was originally published as a chapter in *After History? Francis Fukuyama and His Critics*, ed. Timothy Burns (Lanham, Md., 1994) and is reproduced here by permission.

way to setting the record straight. I should have known better, of course; what you are is what you are *recognized* as being, to use one of the book's central concepts. We exist not "in ourselves," but only in an intersubjective social context; and in that context, what I said was that events would somehow stop happening, or there would be perpetual peace.

Nonetheless, I have been asked to look again at my arguments in 1994, in light of both the significant events that have taken place in the real world since 1989, and in light of the criticisms that have been made of my article and book. While I have little confidence that a third attempt to clarify will actually serve that purpose, I will nonetheless try.

My book consisted of two distinct parts, the first an empirical investigation of various events, both contemporary and historical, and the second a "normative" or theoretical one that sought to evaluate contemporary liberal democracy.² The empirical part has been attacked the most relentlessly. Virtually every week I read a story in the papers that contains some variant on the words, "As we can see, history has not ended but is only now beginning. . . ." (This phrase has now been used by Margaret Thatcher, Mikhail Gorbachev, George Bush, Hosni Mubarak, Anthony Lake, and a host of lesser lights; I propose a moratorium as it now represents the total bankruptcy of the speechwriter's art.) The normative or theoretical part has been attacked also, usually by a different and more serious group of readers, who argue that I got Hegel wrong, or Kojève, or Nietzsche, or one of the other philosophers mentioned in the book. And finally, as Greg Smith points out, there is a major question as to the way that the two parts of the book relate to one another.³ The normative part of the book has been criticized for being based on "mere" empiricism and vulnerable to changes in a turbulent world scene. Alternatively, I been charged with moving to inadmissible normative arguments when the empirical analysis failed.

I will take on each of these groups of criticisms, beginning with the relationship of the empirical to the normative argument, then moving to the empirical argument itself, and finally to the most difficult issue, the normative or theoretical question.

II. THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE EMPIRICAL AND NORMATIVE ARGUMENTS

Perhaps the most common misunderstanding of my argument (of which I am sure none of the readers of the current essay are guilty) is that the phrase, "the end of history," is a simple empirical statement describing the current condition

2. I do not like the word "normative" because it implies that there is a multiplicity of "norms" or "values" among different societies, or within the same society, about which there can be no rational consensus and no rational discourse, as opposed to "empirical" facts, about which consensus can, through application of the proper method, be reached. However, my meaning will probably be clearer, particularly to social scientists, if I use the term "normative" rather than, for example, "theoretical."

3. Gregory B. Smith, "The End of History or a Portal to the Future: Does Anything Lie Beyond Late Modernity?" in *After History?*, 1-21.

of the world. These critics believe I was asserting that there would be no more war, struggle, or conflict, and their criticism takes the form: "As we can see, history has not ended because X happened," where X is something they regard as bad: the Gulf War, the Yugoslav conflict, famine in Somalia, a coup in Moscow, the LA riots, poverty, drug use, you name it. A colleague of mine who is working for the Agency for International Development in Bangladesh sent me what is probably the ultimate of this form of critique: a local Dhakka columnist denounced the idea of the end of history because a Bangladeshi had been bumped off a British Airways flight (this evidently showed that racism still existed in the world).

A somewhat more sophisticated version of this criticism asserts that the reality of the post-Cold War world is not democracy, but virulent nationalism. By this account, everyone was euphoric in 1989 after the fall of the Berlin Wall thinking that the world was turning democratic and capitalist, but in fact it was returning to a premodern world of tribalism and ethnic passion run amok. Bosnia proved that modernity was a thin veneer; even in Western Europe, the upsurge in anti-foreigner violence showed that liberal democracy rested on very weak foundations. The institutions of world order like the UN, EC, or NATO proved to be woefully inadequate in maintaining a common level of civilized behavior, and the future was likely to look much uglier than the past.

These sorts of issues are not irrelevant to the argument (and will be dealt with at greater length in the following section), but they fundamentally miss the point of the phrase "the end of history." The latter is not a statement about the *is*, but about the *ought*: for a variety of *theoretical* reasons, liberal democracy and free markets constitute the best regime, or more precisely the best of the available alternative ways of organizing human societies (or again, if one prefers Churchill's formulation, the least bad way of doing so). It most fully (though not completely) satisfies the most basic human longings, and therefore can be expected to be more universal and more durable than other regimes or other principles of political organization. It does not *completely* satisfy them, however, which means that the resolution of the historical problem cannot be brought to a close.

This is a normative, not an empirical statement, but it is a normative statement based in crucial ways on empirical evidence. It is of course possible to construct a best regime "in speech," as Socrates did in the *Republic*, that has no chance of ever being realized on earth. Most college students (at least, before they became so earnestly careerist) have sat around their dorm rooms late at night imagining a perfectly just society that would be just as perfectly impossible to bring into being, for reasons they will come to understand in another ten or fifteen years. No one likes the moral implications of capitalism, or imagines that the way it distributes gains is perfectly just. Socialist schemes of distribution are arguably fairer in a moral sense.⁴ Their chief problem is that they don't work. The latter is not something one can determine theoretically or on *a priori*

4. That they are arguably fairer does not mean they are actually fairer; equal distribution of economic gains would be fair only if people were equally deserving of them.

grounds. When writing *Capitalism, Socialism, and Democracy* in 1943, Joseph Schumpeter argued that there was no reason why socialist economic organization should not be as efficient as capitalism. He dismissed the warnings of Hayek and von Mises that centralized planning boards would face problems of "unmanageable complication," gravely underestimated the importance of incentives in motivating people to produce and innovate, and falsely predicted that centralized planning would reduce economic uncertainty.⁵ None of this could have been known without the experience of real-world socialist societies trying to organize their economies according to socialist principles and failing. If the Soviet Union had entered on an era of explosive double-digit growth in the 1970s and 1980s while Europe and the United States stagnated, our view of the respective normative merits of capitalism and socialism would be very different. The normative argument, therefore, is crucially and obviously dependent on empirical evidence.

The normative assertion that liberal democracy is the best available regime depends, then, not simply on a theoretical view of the adequacy of its moral and political arrangements, but also on empirical verification of its workability. If liberal democracies all failed shortly after being established (as European conservatives like Joseph Demaistre believed the American experiment would fail), or if liberal democracy proved successful only on Kiribati or Vanuatu but nowhere else, we would not take it seriously as a moral alternative. On the other hand, its moral adequacy is not simply dependent on its workability, durability, or power: there have been a variety of bad regimes (or at least, regimes constructed on principles diametrically opposed to those of liberal democracy) that have been very successful as historical enterprises. Might does not make right, though might may be a *condition* for right.

The assertion, then, that liberal democracy constitutes the "end of history" does not depend on the short-term advances or setbacks to democracy worldwide in 1994 (or 1989, or 1939, or 1806, for that matter). It is a normative statement about the principles of freedom and equality that underlay the French and American revolutions, to the effect that they stand at the end of a long process of ideological evolution, and that there is not a higher set of alternative principles that will in time replace them. This normative statement, to repeat, cannot be divorced from empirical fact. Empirical fact alone cannot prove or disprove its validity, except perhaps at the very unlikely extremes (that is, the complete disappearance of liberal democracy, or the total universalization of it, or the appearance of an angel announcing the millennium). Empirical fact does not and cannot arm us with a deterministic methodology for predicting the future. What empirical fact can do, on the other hand, is to give us a greater or lesser degree of *hope* that the normative statement is true. In this respect, empirical fact plays the same role that Kant's proposed "universal history" does in his essay of the same name. As Susan Shell points out, the purpose of this

5. For a more extended analysis of *Capitalism, Socialism, and Democracy*, see Francis Fukuyama, "Capitalism and Democracy: The Missing Link," *Journal of Democracy* 3 (July, 1992), 100-110.

reading of history for Kant is to give us hope, and therefore perhaps to assist in the accomplishment of moral and political progress in the world. I have been accused, particularly in France, of being the "last Marxist"; of having a linear, deterministic, or mechanical understanding of history; or generally of espousing some "strong" version of historicism. If one goes back to *The End of History and the Last Man*, however, it should be clear that I was proposing a very *weak* version. I asked whether "it makes sense for us once again to speak of a coherent and directional History of mankind that will eventually lead the greater part of humanity to liberal democracy." To "speak of History" is only to say that the question is once again meaningful, and not that it is possible to answer the question with a strong version of historical progress.

Thus the truth of the assertion of the "end of history" did not in any way depend on the events of 1989. It could have been asserted with equal validity 10 years earlier, at the height of the Brezhnev era; it was asserted in the late 1930s on the eve of World War II (by Alexandre Kojève); and in the aftermath of the Battle of Jena in 1807 (by Hegel himself). The statement was not absurd in any of these cases, despite the turbulent and bloody "history" (in the conventional sense of the word) that took place before and after each was enunciated, for in each case it signified that the principles of the French revolution were normatively the best available principles of political organization. Indeed, the flow of empirical events has given us greater *hope* that it is true with each repetition: in 1807, there were only three working democracies; in 1939, there were 13; while in 1989 there were over 60. Thus, if the question is asked "Have the events of the past few years (the Gulf War, Bosnia, Somalia, and so on) made you rethink the hypothesis?" the answer is obviously no. There may be somewhat less hope, but the normative argument concerning liberal democracy is not affected by the short-term flow of empirical events, but rests on other, broader grounds. Nor is there empirical evidence that an alternative set of normative principles is taking hold: fascism may be winning politically in Serbia, but no one (even, I would guess, in Belgrade) sees Serbia as an attractive generalizable model for the future.

There is, of course, a higher level question to be answered concerning the relationship of the empirical to the normative question, namely, how does one arrive at normative statements at all? The whole thrust of modern thought teaches us that there can be no such thing as a rational derivation of values from facts, or of values grounded on a concept like nature. How one resolves this conundrum is of course the essence of the Strauss-Kojève debate, which will be taken up in part IV below.

III. THE EMPIRICAL ARGUMENT

The empirical case that there is such a thing as "History" in the Marxist-Hegelian sense is perhaps the easiest to demonstrate of the various points made in *The End of History and the Last Man*. It is of course not fashionable to speak of History in this sense, particularly among professional historians who are trained to be narrowly empirical. But I would argue that virtually everyone believes

in the existence of a directional history (though not necessarily in an "end" of history) on some level, and that the burden of proof is in fact on those who argue that history in this sense does not exist.

First, to define our terms, by "History" or "universal history" we mean a coherent and directional transformation of human societies that affects the whole, or nearly the whole, of mankind.

The starting point for a discussion of whether History in this sense exists is emphatically *not* in the events of the past few years, but in the concept of economic modernization. Prior to the scientific revolution of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries in Europe, there could be a high degree of continuity in history: Chinese civilization, whether one looks at political organization, family life, or economic production, did not look terribly different in the Han dynasty than it did in the Sung or even Ch'ing periods. But with the development of the scientific method, a process of economic development began that has encompassed virtually the whole of humanity.

The logic of this development process is determined by the progressive nature of scientific knowledge and its embodiment in technology through research and development. Science unfolds, once the scientific method is discovered, out of what is at least a twofold process: on the one hand, there is something like the desire for "utility maximization" described by neoclassical economists, and on the other a desire for recognition that leads human beings to seek mastery over nature. But while this process serves human ends and occurs through human agency, the internal logic of the process is determined ultimately by the laws of nature, which impose upon it a certain regularity. The second law of thermodynamics is not culturally determined; it is no different in Japan or Rwanda than it is in the United States. Technology provides a uniform horizon of production possibilities at any given level of scientific knowledge, and forces all societies employing technology to organize themselves in certain ways. It is now clear, forty years after the elaboration of "modernization theory," that there are a variety of paths to modernity, and that all societies will not necessarily resemble England or the United States in their development histories (indeed, in certain respects England's and the United States' differed considerably from one another). Late developers do things differently from early ones; there are cultural aspects to economic organization; the state can play varying roles in promoting or retarding the process. But the broad outlines of the process—urbanization, rational authority, bureaucratization, an ever-ramified and complex division of labor—can be found in all developing cultures.

What is remarkable about the process of economic modernization is its universality as a goal. For a while, Burma was the only nation that explicitly stated that it did not want to modernize, but now even "Myanmar" has gotten on the treadmill. The only parts of humanity not aspiring to economic modernization are a few isolated tribes in the jungles of Brazil or Papua New Guinea, and they don't aspire to it because they don't know about it. Societies that at one point did not want to modernize or rejected further social change (for example,

Japanese renunciation of certain types of new weapons in the Tokugawa period) were eventually forced to adopt technology with all it implied because of the decisive military advantage that technology conferred. There are of course small communities in the developed West like the Amish who keep alive an earlier level of technology (not, I would note, neolithic but nineteenth-century), and ideologically committed environmentalists who want to reverse the process of industrialization. But the aspiration to economic modernization is one of the most universal characteristics of human societies one can imagine.

Though the tendency toward capitalism has historically been much less universal than the desire for economic modernization *per se*, I argued in *The End of History and the Last Man* that technology necessarily points toward market-oriented forms of economic decision-making. What is even less universal than capitalism is the preference for liberal democracy. Nonetheless, as a purely empirical matter, there is an extraordinarily strong correlation between high levels of industrial development and stable democracy.⁶ With modernization, there has been a corresponding growth in the legitimacy of the idea of human equality, the phenomenon noted by Tocqueville at the beginning of *Democracy in America*. There has been considerable argument as to why this correlation exists: at one extreme, the case has been made that democracy is culturally determined; it flows in some sense from Christian cultural systems and it is merely an accident that the world's earliest developed countries were also Christian nations.⁷ On the other hand, it can be argued that there is a certain hierarchy of goals, with the satisfaction of economic needs preceding in some sense the need for recognition. With advancing socioeconomic status comes an increasing demand for recognition in the form of political participation. As an empirical matter, the most interesting test cases are now in Asia: Japan, Korea, Taiwan, and other Asian countries are not culturally Christian, and yet there has been a distinct correlation between level of economic development and stable democracy there as well. This suggests that while there may be cultural elements to the correlation, the correlation itself is not ultimately culturally determined but applies universally.

As noted earlier, the argument for the existence of a universal history would have to be made in a relatively weak form. That is to say, there is nothing necessarily linear, rigid, or deterministic about saying that the progressive unfolding of modern natural science determines in broad outline the economic modernization process, which in turn creates a predisposition toward liberal democracy. Marxists tended to state their theories of history in a very strong form: feudalism *inevitably* gives way to capitalism, which *inevitably* collapses from its own internal contradictions and gives way to socialism, and so on. The misuse of such deterministic theories to legitimize political terror by Lenin

6. For a review of the extensive social science literature that confirms this point, see Larry Diamond, "Economic Development and Democracy Reconsidered," *American Behavioral Scientist* 15 (March-June 1992), 450-499.

7. See, for example, Samuel Huntington, *The Third Wave* (Lexington, Ky, 1992).

and Stalin have justifiably given them a bad name. On the other hand, many people who reject Marxism would accept a weak form of this theory, for example that put forth by Max Weber, which accepted the fact that history had a directionality but which allowed for vast discontinuities like the Reformation not explainable by any unitary theory.

A universal history understood as modernization can and has been attacked from a postmodernist perspective. Why "privilege" the story of economic development, or identify it with History itself? Is this not a Euro-, phallo-, or whatnot-centric story? Why not tell another story, say, the story of indigenous peoples crushed by modernization, or the story of women, or the story of family life, each of which would follow a very different trajectory? What about the story of all those years prior to the invention of the scientific method; were these not worthy of being called history? Who is the teller of the Universal History, and what are his interests in telling the story in this manner?

Modernization theory collapsed in the 1970s under the weight of such attacks, but it should not have. The transition from a premodern to an industrial society is one that affects virtually every other "story" in a fundamental way, and it affects virtually all societies in some manner, whether or not they have modernized successfully. The postmodernist professor who asserts that there is no coherent direction to history would most likely never contemplate leaving his comfortable surroundings in Paris, New Haven, or Irvine, and move to Somalia, or raise his children under the hygienic conditions prevailing in Burundi, or teach postmodernist philosophy in Teheran.

While there is a reasonable empirical basis for constructing a directional universal history, the empirical grounds for arguing that the historical process has an end or goal are much weaker. To begin with, the phenomenon of modern natural science is open-ended; it does not, as far as we know, have an end point where we will know everything there is to know about the physical universe. And if our lives and our forms of social organization are governed by the inner logic of the development of science, we cannot know with finality what social arrangements will be dictated by a given level of scientific knowledge in the future.

Moreover, while it might be possible to assert that something broad like economic modernization is a virtually universal goal, any particular set of political arrangements like liberal democracy is rather unlikely to emerge out of the merely empirical data as the immanent goal of the historical process. The present confusion over the nature of the post-Communist world order is testimony to the lack of consensus on how to interpret the data. Some will deny that there has been any particular trend toward democracy. Others, like G. M. Tamàs, will assert that what Western liberals have identified as democracy in contemporary Eastern Europe is actually a de-politicized version of democracy that rests on very different normative roots. Others will assert that individualistic democracy has been stripped of any real meaning in Japan and other places in Asia where the form of democracy has been observed. And finally, there will always be

reasonable doubts about the cohesiveness and irreversibility of democracy in places, such as Western Europe or even the United States, where it already exists by common consensus.

Thus, empirical fact can lead us to assert that there is such a thing as History. Empirical fact can probably also falsify the notion of liberal democracy as an "end of history" under several conditions: if liberal democracies around the world collapsed as communist systems did in the late 1980s; if a society based on genuinely different principles arose somewhere in the world and looked like it was a going concern over a long period of time (my candidate is an Asian "soft authoritarian" state); or if some earlier non-liberal principle returned and gained widespread legitimacy (for example, if American women lost the right to vote or slavery became legal once again). Empirical fact by itself, however, does not provide us a basis for talking about an end of history. As stated above, all it can do is give us a certain basis for hope.

IV. THE NORMATIVE ARGUMENT

The first question that arises is how, at the end of the twentieth century, anyone can put forward a serious "normative" argument concerning the goodness (or badness) of liberal democracy. God having been killed off in the nineteenth century, the entire thrust of twentieth century philosophy from Heidegger to the postmodernists has been to kill God's secular replacement, enlightenment rationalism, as well. Modern thought has sought to undermine the very notions of metaphysics, nature, natural right, and the like, on which any philosophical concept of "the good" could be built. This, I take it, is the reason for Peter Fenves' unhappiness with my "forays into the problem of 'man as man'" or the "doses of metaphysics" that appear in the book⁸: I use them, in his view, as illegitimate buttresses to an empirical argument, as if I hadn't heard the news that metaphysics is no longer permissible—somewhat like a modern social scientist using biblical authority to cover a gap in his survey data.

It is not my purpose here, nor was it my purpose in *The End of History and the Last Man*, to defend traditional metaphysics against its modern critics. This is certainly well beyond my abilities. I find, however, that many of the epigones of Nietzsche and Heidegger themselves assume the impossibility or falsity of traditional metaphysics and spend their careers playfully deconstructing the Western philosophical tradition, without thinking through the disastrous consequences of their actions. Richard Rorty is a telling case in point. Anyone listening to Rorty understands that he is very committed to a certain set of rather conventional liberal values: he does not like what Ronald Reagan did to the poor, he does not favor totalitarian regimes, he is against "ethnic cleansing" and other atrocities in Yugoslavia. Yet he is equally if not more committed to demonstrating that there is no philosophical basis for these commitments: they are just a matter of sentiment, of the surrounding moral climate, of education,

8. Peter Fenves, "The Tower of Babel Rebuilt," in *After History?*, 226.

of pragmatic adjustment to experience. Fortunately, his surrounding moral climate is the relatively benign one of Charlottesville. The country in which he lives is a liberal democracy; the politics, for all its problems, are moderate, and a Jamesian pragmatism may indeed be sound moral and political advice. But what if one were growing up not in Charlottesville, but in Novotny's post-1968 Prague? While Rorty claims Vaclav Havel as a "postmodern" politician, his own advice would have led the young Havel not to jail and dissidence, but to a career as a reform Communist. For an individual living in the even less benign environments of Hitler's Germany or the Serbia of 1993, the "sentimental education" provided by the local environment might have led to even less palatable moral choices. They would be unpalatable from Rorty's own point of view, yet Rorty's attack on the possibility of philosophy and moral knowledge leaves him no ground on which he can criticize a phenomenon like "ethnic cleansing."⁹

Many postmodernists seem to think that their critique of traditional philosophy leads to a kind of de-politicized, de-ideologized *faut de mieux* liberalism. A postmodernist liberalism would rest not, like the American Declaration of Independence, on the "self-evident" truths of human equality or natural rights, but rather on the mutual exhaustion of all other fundamentalisms, ideologies, or philosophies, and would do no more than give free play to the individual's self-creation (or in the case of Havel, his moral being). This, and not a universalist enlightenment doctrine, seems to be what G. M. Tamás argues was the meaning of democracy for his generation of Eastern European dissidents. Their common cause with traditional American liberals on a human rights agenda during the days of communist tyranny, he argues, was more an accident than a real convergence of thought. This also seems to be the meaning of Peter Fenves' "tower of Babel": contemporary liberal democracy is actually a cacophony of different languages, but since the "language of liberal democracy" is the only one left standing in the ring, it has convinced itself that it is a universal language.

This line of argument seems to me to be very problematic insofar as its proponents do not have the courage or the resolution of either Nietzsche or Heidegger in seeing this line of thought to its logical conclusions. For any doctrine that undermines the "ideologized" version of liberalism undermines the egalitarian principles on which that liberalism rests, as well. A postmodernist liberalism may remain safe from external threat in a world populated exclusively by other such liberal states — in other words, if postmodernists knew they were living at the end of history. But by their own premises they do not and cannot know this. They have no reason in principle not to expect the rise of new "fundamentalisms" (whether traditional or modern, at home or abroad), and have only the very weak armor of their own intellectual premises to protect them once they do. The denial that there can be any knowable concept of "man

9. The principle's inability to make rational moral distinctions makes it therefore perhaps not surprising that Rorty compares the Serbs to Thomas Jefferson. See his "Human Rights, Rationality, and Sentimentality," in *On Human Rights: The Oxford Amnesty Lectures 1993*, ed. Stephen Shute and Susan Hurley (New York, 1993), 111–134.

as man," no consensus on the question of human nature or the basis of human dignity, means that any discussion of liberal rights will simply amount to "rights talk," with no principled way of adjudicating the conflicts and contradictions that will inevitably arise.¹⁰ While such a society will continue to thrive for a time on the basis of pre-postmodernist habits, I do not understand how it could defend itself from external enemies in the short run or sustain either polity or community over the long run.

The "crisis of modernity" then is a very real one. Both Leo Strauss and Alexandre Kojève were both aware of the *aporia* of modern thought, and both believed that a way out was the most urgent of problems. This is why I believe the Strauss-Kojève debate was one of the most important of twentieth-century discussions, because these two thinkers tried to address this problem from diametrically opposite positions, those of history and of nature.

Without reviewing that very complicated discussion in detail, it seems to me that Strauss shows quite convincingly that history does not in the end provide a way out. As pointed out in section III above, the empirical facts of history provide us with nothing more than a *hope* that it is directional and purposeful. While Hegel asserts that history is radically different from nature, the product of free human self-creation, we cannot know whether this history is unique without a larger teleological theory of nature: perhaps there is another universe or another time in which our history has unfolded in an identical manner, not the product of free human creation but of a natural process of which we are simply not cognizant.

Moreover, we have a major problem with the knowability of "the end of history." As Tom Darby points out, the end of history for Hegel lies not in the appearance of Napoleon as such, but in the appearance of the dyad Napoleon-Hegel.¹¹ That is, Hegel is the philosopher who truly understands Napoleon's significance; he is not speculating about "imaginary kingdoms" but understands the underlying rationality of the world's seemingly meaningless flow of events. He understands that Napoleon is not just another ambitious adventurer, but is ushering in the universal homogeneous state that will realize the possibility of universal recognition. In doing so, human beings as such achieve a self-knowledge that they are beings that seek recognition and are satisfied by universal recognition. And Napoleon becomes something more than an adventurer by the fact of his having been "interpreted" by Hegel.

But how do we know that Hegel was right about Napoleon? The end of history is not immanent in the empirical facts of history, as noted above. Hegel would argue (with considerable empirical justification, even with the hindsight of nearly two hundred years) that the French Revolution and Napoleon ushered in the principle of universal recognition. But how, then, does one know that human beings seek recognition, and are satisfied by universal recognition? It

10. This problem I alluded to in *The End of History and the Last Man*, 296.

11. Tom Darby, "Technology, Christianity, and the Universal and Homogeneous State," in *After History?*, chapter 11.

is possible to regard universal recognition as a kind of Kantian rule of transcendental reason (or, in the language of a contemporary Kantian like Rawls, something like the rule that arises out of the "original position") that would be valid regardless of our knowledge of empirical facts about the world, and would apply to rational beings whether they were human or not. For Hegel to represent much of an advance over Kant in this regard, we would have to understand and accept much of the argument of the *Science of Logic* and the critique it contains of Kantian metaphysics, a task that seems at once formidable and dubious. It is dubious not simply because I have never succeeded in working my way through this book, but because it seems to me very unlikely that humanity's final knowledge of itself should rest on a book so obscure, and about which there is so little consensus even among Hegel specialists.

It seems to me that one of the sources of Kojève's great appeal is that he offers a highly anthropologized reading of Hegel, in which our understanding of the role of recognition in history does not depend on our knowledge and acceptance of the *Science of Logic*, but rather on the degree to which Kojève's anthropology corresponds with our own observation or intuition of "man as man." That is, its appeal lies in the plausibility of his explanation of man as a being that works and struggles over pure prestige, and in the degree to which this explanation is revealing of a deeper level of motivation when we view the empirical facts of history. The adequacy of this highly anthropologized Hegel stands or falls on the basis of what amounts to an account of human nature, that is, the transhistorical concept of man as a being that seeks and is satisfied by recognition. This, in the end, is why I was driven back to Plato and his tripartite account of the soul, because Plato's account of *thymos* seemed to provide an alternative language in which we could discuss recognition as an *anthropological* phenomenon.

Victor Gourevitch and other critics are undoubtedly right that one cannot reconcile unreconcilables: Plato and Hegel, nature and history. Orthodox Hegelians will argue, doubtless correctly, that this highly anthropologized version of Hegel is not, in fact, Hegel. They may further argue that it is not Kojève either, and therefore could not be the synthetic philosopher Hegel-Kojève. The charge that I am not seeking to understand Hegel as Hegel understood himself, that I am using bits and pieces of this most systematic of philosophers, is doubtless true, and is one that I accepted in the book itself. But one can still make an argument about a universal history without use of the concept of history in the Hegelian sense (that is, of the human being's free self-creation in opposition to nature). I would argue that this procedure is implicit to some degree in Kojève's work itself, when it calls on us to understand man as a being for whom recognition is primary. Whatever Hegel's self-understanding, it is both an interesting and an important question to uncover the degree to which the historical process can be properly understood as the result of an "anthropologized" struggle for recognition.

A much more central criticism of this argument is the one made in the essays by Tim Burns, Victor Gourevitch, and in a somewhat different framework,

Peter Lawler.¹² The question can be put simply: how is it possible to have *recognition* without a prior *cognition*?¹³ That is to say, what is the value of the universal recognition underlying liberal democracy that is not based on a knowledge of what it means to be a good or excellent human being? Recognition as it appears in Hegel or Kojève is a purely formal matter. One is recognized equally and universally for being a human being, that is, a free being undetermined by nature and therefore capable of moral choice. There can be no other formal solution to the problem of recognition, because no other form of recognition can be universalized and therefore made rational. One might wish to say that being a brilliant physicist or concert pianist or even a devoted father is a worthy way of life deserving of recognition; but recognition of such qualities cannot be universalized because all human beings are not brilliant physicists or pianists or fathers. To recognize those qualities means to denigrate those who do not possess them. All forms of *megalothymia* are hostile, ultimately, to the *isothymia* on which liberal democracy is based. One is reduced, then, to recognizing a kind of moral lowest common denominator, a free being that can negate nature. By this Hegelian scheme, one can distinguish between a human being and a rock, a hungry bear, and a clever monkey, but one cannot distinguish between the first man who kills his fellow human being in a battle for pure prestige, and a Mother Teresa who sacrifices her worldly happiness to follow the dictates of God.

Tim Burns and Victor Gourevitch make similar points about my comparison of Hobbes and Hegel. In *The End of History and the Last Man*, I argued that Hegel provides a broader and deeper understanding of human motivation, not because Hobbes does not understand the desire for recognition, but because he seeks to subordinate it to rational desire. Hegel, I argued, understood that in modern polities men did not live for the rational pursuit of bread alone, but sought recognition, and that the Hegelian universal homogeneous state honored this honor-seeking side of modernity by making universal recognition the basis of all rights. Both Burns and Gourevitch argue, properly, that in this respect both Hobbes and Hegel share the narrowing of perspective characteristic of modern thought. Hobbes and Hegel deny the possibility of an original cognition, that is, they both deny the existence of cognizable human goodnesses or excellences, goodnesses or excellences that exist "by nature," that are inherently worthy of recognition. While Hegel's point of view may be broader than Hobbes' in the sense that he understands the irreducibility of *isothymia*, and honors it politically, he shares with Hobbes the principle that rights must be formal and not substantive. The state, in other words, can only recognize the right to *free* speech, not good or excellent speech.

While I accept this criticism (and indeed anticipated much of it in *The End of History and the Last Man*), I still believe that the distinction between Hobbes

12. Timothy Burns, "Modernity's Irrationalism"; Victor Gourevitch, "The End of History?"; and Peter Augustine Lawler, "Fukuyama versus the End of History," in *After History?*.

13. I owe this formulation to Charles Griswold.

and Hegel is crucial in one key respect. Tocqueville in *Democracy in America* talks about the American “passion for equality”: how equality is the founding principle of democracy, how the passion has spread ineluctably over the centuries, and how it comes to affect all aspects of the social life of a democracy over time. Yet he never really explains what is meant by the “passion for equality.” Surely it does not mean a passion for physical equality: Americans do not aspire to be equally strong or tall or handsome. It does not refer exclusively to equal political or legal rights, since these were *in principle* established with the founding of the country (with the well-known and ever-narrowing circle of exceptions: the propertyless, racial minorities, women, tomorrow perhaps homosexuals). Nor does it refer to an equality of economic station: Lockean principles of property have been widely accepted, and therefore Americans have accepted a fair degree of economic inequality throughout their history. The “passion for equality” refers, above all, to a passion for equal recognition, that is, an equality of respect and dignity. I believe that the major currents of contemporary American politics—feminism, gay rights, the rights of the handicapped or of native Americans—are merely the logical present-day manifestations of the same *isothymia* that Tocqueville described in the 1830s. Contrary to most economists and rational-choice theorists, this desire for equal recognition cannot be reduced to economic motives; instead, much of what passes as economic motivation has to be understood in terms of the struggle for equal recognition. In this respect alone, Hegel is a better guide for understanding our politics than is Hobbes.

None of this, however, speaks to the legitimate question of what the original cognition is that underlies recognition. Is not “man as man” something more than a being capable of negating nature? And if this is indeed the central question, should not the faculty of cognition have been emphasized to a much greater extent relative to the desire for recognition?

The centrality of the issue of cognition underlies, I assume, Peter Lawler's repeated question of whether it is possible to have a sense of human dignity without God, or without making the distinction between man and God. His own answer to his rhetorical question is, I assume, no: only God can provide us with the original cognition to know what is truly worthy in His sight, and therefore only God can open the way for our moral beings to express themselves in something other than the blind fury of Hegel's “first man” and his struggle for pure prestige.

My answer to Lawler's question is: if the question of man's dependence on God is meant in a practical sense, that is, if he is asking whether a liberal society is conceivable without religion and other premodern sources of constraint and community, the answer is probably no. If his question is meant in a theoretical sense (that is, are there other sources of cognition besides God?), the answer is, I don't know. In answering the latter question, it may be that God is the only possible source for such knowledge; if that is true, and if God has indeed died, then we are in a lot of trouble and need desperately to find another source

on which to base our belief that human beings have dignity. Enlightenment rationalism is not the solution, it is part of the problem: Hobbes and Hegel are constitutive thinkers in that tradition, but the self-undermining character of their thought is what has landed us in this predicament in the first place. Tim Burns, following Leo Strauss, suggests another approach which some have labeled "zetetic": to start as Socrates did not with abstractions like the first man, or man in the state of nature, but to engage in a reasonable dialogue with human beings engaged in political life on questions like the nature of justice or the nature of the good, and from there to lead them to understand the problems and self-contradictions of their positions. It is certainly the case that while postmodernists believe that there is no rational systematic philosophical view of the whole that would allow us to come to a consensus on what constitutes specific human excellences, virtually everyone (postmodernists included) has opinions as to what those excellences are. We live in a world dedicated to *isothymia*, and yet see evidence of *megalothymia* all around us: while all of us believe we are entitled to equal respect, no one in their heart of hearts believes equal respect is all there is to life, or thinks that life would be worth living if there was no room for unequal respect based on some degree of excellence or achievement. And since, in Peter Fennes' words, the content of that respect is constituted by *logos*, there remains the possibility that *logos* can be subject to rational discussion and ultimately some measure of consensus.

Let me turn for a moment to a different question. I am accused by both Theodore von Laue and Peter Fennes of, as odd as it may seem, being insufficiently reductionist in my analysis of the underlying forces of history on the one hand and the nature of desire on the other. These critiques are quite different. Von Laue asserts that "The most crucial flaw is Fukuyama's blindness to the centrality of power," which he notes is "a common failure among Americans." He then goes on to draw up his own thumbnail "universal history," in which all the varied phenomena of history, from power politics to economics to religious enthusiasm to family relations can be seen as manifestations of an underlying struggle for power.¹⁴ Fennes, on the other hand, takes me to task for distinguishing between simple desire, which I portray as something like the "utility maximization" of traditional "economic man," and the desire for recognition, which is attached not to material but to ideal objects. Fennes' point, as I understand it, is that all desire is constituted by language, and all desire therefore partakes of a "nonmaterial" quality, even those desires that are conventionally thought of as material or economic in nature.

Any attempt to construct a universal history necessarily involves a high degree of abstraction and simplification from the enormous mass of empirical historical fact, and therefore will always be open to the charge of reductionism. Much of my book was implicitly an attack on the economic reductionism of Marxism and an attempt to recover the greater richness of human motivation embodied

14. See Theodore von Laue, "From Fukuyama to Reality: A Critical Essay," in *After History?*, 23-37.

in the concept of the struggle for recognition. It seems to me that in constructing any kind of universal history, one should as a matter of course prefer less reductionist to more reductionist theories, consistent of course with the need to construct a general theory in the first place. In this respect, trying to reduce the larger patterns of history to a simple struggle for power seems to me a step backwards rather than a step forwards, one that I criticized at some length in my discussion of power politics. Those who seek to reduce everything to power forget to ask the question, power for what? Is it desired for its own sake, or is it a fungible commodity to be converted into other goods? I doubt seriously that it is the former: can one understand Luther's motives in launching the Protestant Reformation, or those of the American founding fathers, without reference to the ends that they sought to achieve, and for which power was only a means? If, alternatively, power is simply a fungible commodity sought as a means to other ends, then one hasn't advanced a theory of history by saying that everyone seeks power. In the absence of a discussion of ends, the statement becomes tautological, just like those of economists who define "utility" so broadly that it includes any end actually pursued by human beings.

Fenves' critique is considerably more subtle. I had tried to decompose economic motivation into what was truly economic in a conventional sense (that is, the satisfaction of basic needs like food and drink), and an ideal dimension in which people sought recognition of their dignity through the acquisition of material goods. I thought this added a layer of nuance to our understanding of desire. Fenves seems to be arguing that I didn't go far enough: economic motivation in the former sense doesn't exist at all — as he says, "remaining alive, keeping one's body in motion, may very well be a matter of pride — and nothing else."¹⁵ I doubt it — at least, the "and nothing else" clause, which makes things a bit too subtle. While there is potentially a thymotic dimension to virtually everything, sometimes one eats because one is hungry.

I would like to conclude with the question raised by Peter Fenves, as to why I raised the question of the end of history at this particular juncture in history.¹⁶ He (and a legion of others, including Theodore von Laue) asserts that I am an "optimist," and tries to uncover the position from which an optimist might understand his own activity. If history is indeed over, there is no historical necessity for optimism: the proclamation of an optimistic point of view becomes a matter of vanity, of one's reputation as a historiographer. I do not have the serious purpose or self-understanding of Kant, who by raising the question of progress in history hoped to contribute to the end of progress.

The problem with this analysis is that it begins with the assumption that I am fundamentally optimistic. In fact, Susan Shell is much more correct in characterizing *The End of History and the Last Man* as a "most pessimistic of optimistic books."¹⁷ As noted earlier, one can be optimistic in the sense of being

15. Fenves, 229.

16. In his formulation, I "proclaimed the end of history"; in fact, I never proclaimed anything but merely raised the *question* of the end of history.

17. Susan Shell, "Fukuyama and the End of History," in *After History?*, 45.

able to discern a “universal history” in the mass of empirical data, and one can be optimistic concerning the long-term prospects for liberal democracy. But to be optimistic in any philosophical sense requires that one know that liberal democracy is a good thing. This, as I stated at several points in the book, is not something we can take for granted. One can conclude, provisionally, that liberal democracy satisfies the different parts of the soul more completely than its competitors, but one has to know whether the soul exists, and if so, of what it consists. The question that is prior to the empirical one is an epistemological one. There has to be a ground for the “original cognition,” and one can at least begin the search by revisiting the debate between Strauss and Kojève.

The present *aporia* brings me to the larger reasons for writing the book. We are at a unique juncture in history when, most people would admit, liberalism does not have many serious competitors. There is only “one language,” that of liberal democracy. But our preference for liberal democracy was conditioned for many years by the enemies of liberal democracy. We knew that liberal democracy was better than communism or fascism, but we deferred addressing the question of whether liberal democracy was choiceworthy in itself, or whether we could conceive of preferable arrangements, if not among actual regimes, then among some that could only now be imagined. The time for that discussion has come, and it seems to me that our initial attempts to address the question show the nakedness of our position. It is clear to me that the postmodernist answer, that no ground exists, either for an original cognition or for liberal democracy itself, is politically, morally, and humanly intolerable. And in this respect, it is impossible to be anything but pessimistic.

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