Review of Francis Fukuyama,

The End of History and the Last Man,

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The Enlightenment view of history is the triumph of the rule of Reason, which operates in the realm of ideas. Hegel produced a dynamic and material version of Enlightenment history by stressing the dialectic between ideas and materiality, whereby each stage in the development of Reason is instantiated and codified in a concrete social formation in which the reigning ideal Zeitgeist is the motive force driving history forward. Marx accepted Hegel's view of history (actually he "turned Hegel on his head," but Hegel upside down is still just Hegel), and located the motive force in class struggle. Many European intellectuals saw clearly that Marx's communism was just one peculiar moment in the general move from autocracy to democracy, by which they meant not a schema of majority rule and political freedom, but rather rule by and for the masses. This was the end of history.

Nietzsche saw and lamented this turn of history in Marx's time, and Heidegger and many others followed in Nietzsche's path in the twentieth century. Others, like the brilliant Russian-French philosopher Alexandre Kojève, saw clearly and triumphantly that Marx was indeed a footnote to Hegel, and in the long run the end of history would culminate in a general emancipation of the masses.

Fukuyama is a student and admirer of Kojève. The collapse of the Soviet Union became for him the occasion for writing this energetic and apocalyptic defense of modern liberal democratic capitalism, as well as some warnings concerning the implication of the `end of history.' The collapse of the Soviet empire, the transformation of Chinese Communism into a capitalist system with an authoritarian state, the withering away of socialist and trade union forces in Europe and America, and the success of Pacific Basin capitalism all solidified liberal democratic capitalism as they only viable emancipatory wealth-generating social form. Fukuyama carries this train of thought deep into the future by claiming that modern technology is uniquely suited for liberal democracy, obviating any possibility of an alternative system arising in the foreseeable future. He recognizes that there will be all sorts of rear-guard actions, such as unstable dictatorships backed by military force and religious ideology, but these must eventually give way to liberal democracy.

The cautionary dimension in Fukuyama's argument is indicated by the "Last Man" notion present in the book's title. Fukuyama is sympathetic to the Nietzsche-Heidegger argument that true individuality and creativity is incompatible with mass democracy. Here Fukuyama expresses a key worry of mid-twentieth century American intellectuals, such as Daniel Bell (The End of Ideology, 1960), Sloan Wilson (The Man in the Grey Flannel Suit), and Herbert Marcuse (One-Dimensional Man), who were reviled by the shallowness and vapidity of popular culture, and longed for a return to the high culture of Voltaire's salon and the Wiener Kreis coffeehouse ruminations.

I often find Fukuyama a pedestrian writer, but this book is inspired, and Fukuyama's energy spills out onto the pages in into the reader's heart. I would love it if his argument about liberal democracy were correct, although I don't believe the one-dimensional man argument at all. However, there is one major and one minor problem with his analysis. The minor problem is that technological change in the future could either destroy civilization altogether or render capitalism anachronistic for one reason or another (e.g., intelligent robots take over the role of innovation and entrepreneurship, or people tire of more and more material goods). This possibility is remote at the present time, of course.

The major problem is simply that Hegel's theory of history is only a half-truth, and a misplaced half-truth at that. History is indeed an interplay between human aspirations and human technology, but human aspirations are not based on Reason but rather upon a human nature that is the product of gene-culture coevolution, and as such, is imbued with certain preternatural values. Most important is that humans desire freedom, dignity, and the capacity to control their social world through association with others as co-equals. To appreciate the centrality of evolved human nature, suppose some termite species (order isoptera) had evolved large brains and complex societies as opposed to Homo sapiens (subtribe Hominina). Termite nature being inherently eusocial and hierarchical, the ideal yearnings of the mass of intelligent termites would include no element of social equality, personal dignity, or self-determination, but would likely center around the sublimely harmonious and completely ordered group mind and flawless bureaucratic structure. "Reason," Hume once famously noted, "is, and ought only to be the slave of the passions." It is the human passion for freedom and dignity that determines the thrust of emancipatory history, not the dictates of abstract Reason.

I do not consider this a major problem with Fukuyama's argument. Evolutionary biology gives the truth to Hegel, but this turning of Hegel on his head is no more revolutionary that Marx's, although obviously more descriptive of human reality (E. O. Wilson, when induced to read Marx to help understand the Marxist hostility to sociobiology, wrote in the margin of the Communist Manifesto "terrific theory, wrong species"). Much more important is that human technology, rather than being an unambiguous emancipatory force, is a seriously two-edged sword, in some eras liberating, and others enslaving, the human passions. Let me explain.

It is well known that the hunter-gatherer societies that defined human existence until some 10,000 years ago were extremely egalitarian, involving widespread sharing both communal child rearing (Sarah Blaffer Hrdy, Mother Nature: Maternal Instincts and How They Shape the Human Species, Ballantine, 2000; and Mothers and Others: The Evolutionary Origins of Mutual Understanding, Belknap, 2009) and hunting (Christopher Boehm, Hierarchy in the Forest: The Evolution of Egalitarian Behavior, Harvard University Press, 2000; and Samuel Bowles and Herbert Gintis, A Cooperative Species: Human Reciprocity and its Evolution (Princeton University Press, 2011). It is the human nature that emerged from this nexus of social institutions that defines contemporary human passions for emancipatory social institutions, of which liberal democratic capitalism is the contemporary most advanced form.

Why did hominids develop egalitarian societies while the other social primates, especially chimpanzees, gorillas, and bonobos retained hierarchical political structures based on personal power (bonobos appears to have a less linear hierarchy that the other social primates, but there is still a hierarchy based on physical strength of males and the coalitional capacities of females)? The answer is probably technological. Hominids developed lethal weapons at least 400,000 years ago, in the Middle Pleistocene (Harmut Thieme, "Lower Paleolithic Hunting Spears from Germany", Nature 385,27 (1997):807-810). Most important were sharpened wooden thrusting and throwing spears developed for hunting, but quite effective in killing or maiming the strongest male while asleep or otherwise inattentive. Because of these lethal weapons, there was no possibility of maintaining a political hierarchy based on physical prowess alone. By contrast, non-human primates never developed weapons capable of controlling a dominant male. Even when sound asleep, an accosted male reacts to hostile onslaughts by awakening and engaging in a physical battle, basically unharmed by surprise attack.

The reaction of hominid political structure to the emergence of lethal weapons was, logically, either to sustain leaderless social coalitions, or to find some other basis for leadership. The superior survival value of groups with leadership doubtless led to the demise of leaderless hominid social formations, and the consolidation of new hominid social relations based on novel forms of leadership. What might these may be? Clearly, if on cannot lead by force, one must lead by persuasion. Thus successful hominid social bands came to value individuals who could command prestige by virtue of their persuasive capacities. Persuasion depends on clear logic, analytical abilities, a high degree of social cognition (knowing how to form coalitions and curry the favor of others), and linguistic facility. For this reason, the social structure of hunter-gatherer life favored progressive encephalization and the evolution of the physical and mental prerequisites of effective linguistic and facial communication. In short, 400,000 years of evolution in the presence of lethal weapons gave rise to Homo sapiens.

If this argument is correct, it explains the huge cognitive and linguistic advantage of humans over other species not as some quirk of sexual selection (the favorite theory through the ages of Charles Darwin, Ronald Fisher, Geoffrey Miller and many others), but rather as directly fitness enhancing, despite the extreme energy costs of the brain: increased cognitive and linguistic ability entailed heightened leadership capacities, which fellow group members were very willing to trade for enhanced mating and provisioning privileges.

With the development of settled trade, agriculture, and private property some 10,000 years ago, it became possible for a Big Man to gather around him a relatively small group of subordinates and consorts that would protect him from the lethal revenge of a dominated populace, whence the slow and virtually inexorable rise of the state both as a instrument for exploiting direct produces and for protecting them against the exploitation of external states and bands of private and semi-state-sanctioned marauders. The hegemonic aspirations of states peaked in the thirteenth century, only be driven back by the serious of European population-decimating plagues of the fourteenth century. The period of state consolidation resumed in the fifteenth century, based on a new technology: the heavily armed cavalry. In this case, as in some other prominent cases, technology becomes the handmaiden to oppression rather than emancipation.

In Politics VII, Aristotle writes "there are four kinds of military forces---the cavalry, the heavy infantry, the light armed troops, the navy. When the country is adapted for cavalry, then a strong oligarchy is likely to be established [because] only rich men can afford to keep horses. The second form of oligarchy prevails when the country is adapted to heavy infantry; for this service is better suited to the rich than to the poor. But the light-armed and the naval elements are wholly democratic...An oligarchy which raises such a force out of the lower classes raises a power against itself."

The use of cavalry became dominant in Europe through the success of the Parthians in the Roman-Persian wars that lasted from the late Hellenistic period until the Middle Ages. The Romans armored infantry could not stand up to the Parthian cavalry and the Romans adjusted by adopting the practices of their enemies. The increased strategic role of cavalry was enhanced by the emergence of new breeds of horses engineered for the battlefield, and deployed adeptly by the Germanic invaders and the Islamic warriors. From this, enhanced by the development of the wraparound saddle, stirrup, and spurs, the preeminence of cavalry in the Middle Ages was assured, whence the oligarchic character of European feudalism, which centered around a knightly cavalry.

The history of warfare from the Late Middle Ages to the First World War was the saga of the gradual increase in the strategic military value of infantry armed with longbow, crossbow, hand cannon, and pike, which marked the recurring victories of the English and Swiss over French and Spanish cavalry in the twelfth to fifteenth centuries. Cavalries responded by developing dismounted tactics when encountering infantry, using heavy hand weapons such as two-handed swords and poleaxes. These practices extended the viability of cavalry to the sixteenth century in the French and Spanish armies, but gradually through the Renaissance, and with the rise of Atlantic trade, the feudal knightly warlords gave way to the urban landed aristocracy and warfare turned to the interplay of mercenary armies consisting of unskilled foot soldiers wielding cannon and other weapons based on gunpowder. Cavalry remained important in this era, but even in the eighteenth and nineteenth century, cavalry was used to execute the coup de grace on seriously weakened infantry.

The true hegemony of the foot soldier, and hence the origins of modern democracy, began with the perfection of the hand gun, with its improved accuracy and greater firing rate than the pistols of a previous era. Until that point, infantry was highly vulnerable to attack from heavy artillery. By the early twentieth century, the superiority of unskilled foot soldiers armed with rifles was assured. World War I opened in 1914 with substantial cavalry on all sides, but mounted troops were soundly defeated by men with rifles and machine guns, and thus were abandoned in later stages of the war. As Samuel Bowles and I showed in Democracy and Capitalism (Basic Books, 1985), the strength of the political forces agitating for political democracy in Twentieth Century Europe was predicated on the strategic role of the foot soldier in waging war and defending the peace.

It is clear today that the material basis for liberal democracy is no longer the armed infantry but rather a combination of the willingness of ordinary people to rise up, fight, and die for freedom, together with modern communications and transport technologies that are virtually impossible to suppress, especially if authoritarian states have an interest in promoting economic development. Fukuyama is wholly correct on this point. An oil-rich outlier state like Saudi Arabia is not constrained by goals of economic development, but their security extends only as far as oil remains in high demand, which will not be for long. For the most part, modern technology is highly emancipatory.

Where his wrong, however, is in not contemplating the possibility of new technologies capable of controlling masses of people by a powerful few, as envisioned by the apocalyptic anti-Communist writers Aldous Huxley (Brave New World), 1984 (George Orwell), Darkness at Noon (Arthur Koestler), and cinematographers like Jean-Luc Godard (Alphaville). The totalitarian ambitions of the Soviet state foundered on the new technologies that were too synergistic with modern industrial life and private incentives, but there is no reason that a progressive economic system like that of the Chinese might not find new technological means of controlling masses of affluent workers and even middle-class entrepreneurs over the long run. There is no extant technology that would facilitate this control, and those of us who value freedom and democracy must struggle to promote emancipatory over enslaving technologies in coming decades. Even should we survive nuclear Armageddon, global warming, and other byproducts of emancipatory, it is not at all the "end of history."