

THE END OF HISTORY AND DEMOCRACY TODAY: AN ANALYSIS

Stephen Chijioke Nwinya PhD

Department of Philosophy, Religion and Peace Studies

Ebonyi State University, Abakaliki

nwinya.stephen@ebsu-edu.ng

Abstract

The Question as to whether democracy has actually marked the end of history is still reverberating. The beauty of liberal democracy is highly appreciated especially in comparison with other political systems that stood as rivals before the evolution of liberal democracy to its current state. Arguably, democracy has displaced most of its rivals. Hence, Francis Fukuyama was moved to conclude that evolution of liberal democracy and its displacement of rival political systems are enough indication that liberal democracy has sated the desire of the human nature and therefore brought the world history to abrupt termination. This text analyses Fukuyama's proposition to ascertain the veracity of his claim. To achieve this, an exposition of the views of the precursors of speculative world history was necessary. The investigation revealed that inasmuch as the beauty of liberal democracy is not in doubt, its current status cannot be said to have satisfied the yearning of the human nature and called for caution in the propagation of the system as championed by the West. Democracy cannot be said to have taken root in Africa despite many years fruitless attempts. Even Fukuyama has admitted in his recent work that there is democratic recession. Thus evolution of ideology which speculative world history represents is still open-ended.

Keywords: Fukuyama, Democracy, World history, End of History

Introduction

Right from the ancient time, philosophers have occupied themselves with working out world history. History, properly so called, indicates not just independent events of the past but a kind of pattern in which individual events of the world in the past, present and future can fit in. Simply put, it represents a kind of background on which individual events, such as the rise and fall of great men and societies, wars, and so on, find their place. World history, though speculative, is very essential, in that it provides the theoretical framework for comprehension of the trend of events in the existential world

and constitutes blue print for the type of political system that best suits the nature of man. Thus world history is largely the history of world politics from the metaphysical point of view. It is the history of the evolution of human societies.

Agitating the mind as regards history properly so called is the question of whether it is cyclic or linear; but more importantly of the actual force behind the perceived progressive process of history. Most philosophers subscribe to the idea that history is not just linear but also eschatological. Commenting on this issue Fukuyama writes:

Both Hegel and Marx believe that the evolution of human societies was not open-ended, but would end when mankind had achieved a form of society that satisfied its deepest and most fundamental longings. Both thinkers thus posited an “end of history”: for Hegel this was the liberal state, while for Marx it was a communist society. (Fukuyama, 1992, p.xii)

It is from the above that Fukuyama, convinced that liberal democracy is a perfect state that sated the yearning of the human nature, declares that the emergence of liberal democracy has marked the end of history and the liberal democrat the last man of the world history.

This Fukuyama’s audacious declaration of the end of history is the real concern of this write-up. The main thrust of this engagement is therefore to ascertain if democracy has truly satisfied the desires of the nature of man and halted the dialectical movement which philosophers of history hold accountable for the world history. The imperative of the exposition of some of the precursors of speculative world history is therefore non-negotiable in this exercise so as to illuminate Fukuyama’s postulation of democracy as the end of world history and provide a vantage for appraisal of the claim. This exercise is necessitated by the palpable democracy issues bedeviling the entire world polity currently and raising questions as to whether democracy is up to its promises.

The World History

Most philosophers posit that there is world history which is tending towards a particular end. However, there are divergent views on what the end of, and the force behind, this metaphysical history is. Regarding the primordial force behind independent events of

history most philosophers opine that conflicts resulting from contradictions inherent in the nature of things, man and his society are the beginning and the sustenance of the progress of the process of history. However, what they take the nature of these oppositions to be and how they bring about progress in history are as divergent as there are philosophers of history.

Heraclitus, in Omoregbe (1991) sees conflict as the origin and unity of things and events of history. For him “all things are in flux” and accounting for this flux is the conflict, clash of opposites of which the universe is made. The presence of opposites in the universe is all pervasive but these form a kind of unity in diversity as the opposites complement each other such that the conflict between them forms the condition of life and progress of existents.

The implication of this position is that conflicts and clashes of opposition groups are not only necessary but also good as they spur the society into the next and presumed high level of existence. So the society grows as it moves from thesis to antithesis and to synthesis, which form a new thesis and the process continues (More & Bruder, 2002, p.22)

This philosophy of unity in diversity becomes the fulcrum of philosophy of history as it reverberates in philosophies of Plato and the Stoics and deeply admired by Hegel and Nietzsche. This metaphysical proposal that conflict is the drive of history as such forms the basis of the claim of Huntington’s (1993 and 1996) *Clash of Civilizations*.

For Plato (1941), the world history was tending towards the development of a just state ruled by a philosopher-king. He argues that the state is man writ large because the nature of the state mirrors the nature of the soul of man and whatever happens in the state is the result of the activities in man’s soul. But in man’s soul is a fundamental conflict emanating from the opposition of the three parts of human soul.

Omoregbe (1991) posits that Plato’s conception of tripartite soul is consequent upon people’s internal conflict which indicates different springs of actions at work. The same different springs of action at work in people are also at work in the society. In a person it is the onus of reason to bring normalcy by regulating the desire of the appetitive part and the excessive courage that drives the spirited part of the soul. That explains his

choice of philosopher-king to rule the state so as to resolve the conflict in the state arising from different springs of actions present.

The rise of science and the incursion of the principles of the same in the philosophical thoughts in modern time gave a boost to independent speculations on world history and its end. Thousands of thought flourished on how the society originates and progresses. Interestingly most of them are set on conflict. For Hobbes (1990) it is ‘War of all against all’ which terminates in a social contract which hands over government powers to an absolute sovereign and for Locke (1993) it is conflict over the ownership of property gravitating towards a civil society where life and property of the individual are well protected.

However it was Immanuel Kant (1784) first presented a foundation on which future philosophies of history are built. For Kant, history is the movement of nature as it works out its plan. Nature, he avers, has plan in human history, which is to develop man’s ability to reason and to be reasoned with and other powers dependent on it. In line with this thought he opines that the philosopher of history

Must endeavour to detect some natural purpose in such a senseless current of human actions, by means of which a history of creatures that pursue no plan of their own may yet admit a systematic form as the history of creatures that are blindly pursuing a plan of nature. (Kant, 1784: 4th Thesis)

But although nature is leading man to blindly accomplish its purpose in history; this can only be achieved in the life of the species and not that of any individual or generation. To achieve its purpose, nature adopted a plan namely: man shall owe to himself alone everything beyond physical processes and material environment and find satisfaction and perfection only in what he produces by his own rational powers (Kant, 1784, 4th Thesis).

Nature being aware that man’s ability to reason and to be reasoned with could hamper its plan in human history made man so much dependent on his fellows which results in antagonism in some cases. Thus man becomes a social being with antisocial tendencies (Kant, 1784, 5th Thesis). When man’s social tendencies threaten to frustrate nature’s plan and bring abrupt end to historical processes, his antisocial tendencies introduce another crises whose resolution brings man to the next and probable higher level in the

world history. Man being a rational animal, capable of action based on the power to choose, who is also dependent on his fellows but inveterately antisocial, will be driven finally to the legislative way of life, to the enforced regulation of some human behaviour by man-made laws. This, according to Kant calls for political organization and promises freedom under law. These are the human bases of civilization. As history proceeds, men become increasingly dependent on laws and human life becomes less regulated by personal habit and group customs. This massive transformation of the lives of political animals is according to Kant 1784, 4th Thesis), the highest task that nature sets for humanity.

The exploitation of man's ability to reason and desire for freedom leads to the establishment of political society for the enactment of laws to regulate man's antisocial tendencies. There is irony in all this – Nature threatened with frustration and defeat by the success of its plans for goading man into carrying out her purpose and plans. To overcome this, nature instituted the antisocial tendencies in man defeated by the establishment of political society at the community level. Thus, as individuals succeed in creating strong and well-order communities, they succeed only in reinstating at the political, community level the “[...] war of all against all” (Kant, 1784, 7th Thesis). Kant, therefore affirms that the survival of man as a political animal depends on his ability to create, preserve, and increase an international political order: for “[...] the supreme purpose of nature will be accomplished in the establishment of an international state as the bosom in which all the original tendencies of the human species are to be developed” (9th Thesis).

In a similar vein, the entire philosophy of Hegel is set around the Absolute Spirit which undergoes a dialectical process to attain self consciousness in and through human consciousness. Accordingly, Hegel sees the whole universe as the summation of the Spirit's self manifestation and self actualization. No doubt, his philosophy of history mirrors this line of thought. He maintains that the World-history is the history of the progressive self-consciousness of the World-Spirit (der Weltgeist). In history, Spirit is engaged in working out the form and substance of freedom; for the essence of Spirit is freedom. Spirit, and the course of its development, is the substantial object of the philosophy of history.

The nature of spirit may be understood by a glance at its direct opposite – matter. As the essence of matter is gravity, ... the essence of spirit is freedom. Matter possesses gravity in virtue of its tendency toward a central point. It is essentially composite; consisting of parts that exclude each other. Spirit, on the contrary, may be defined as that which has its centre in itself. It has not a unity outside, but has already found it; it exists in and with itself. Matter has its essence out of itself; spirit is self-contained existence. (Hegel, 1982 p. 160)

Hence, world-history is progress in the consciousness of freedom but this consciousness is attainable and attained only in and through the mind of man as man. To achieve this spirit needs to extricate itself from the entanglement of the materialism of body and this brings violence and conflict.

Violence and conflicts, Hegel says, are the hallmark of the career of spirit, namely, working out its essence which is freedom. They are therefore, the necessary conditions under which freedom comes into being. They spur the world-history – the development of freedom – into a higher stage (p.161). The pains and miseries of war are therefore inevitable for the process of world-spirit is a blind process. The spirit takes hold of an individual in the form of national spirit and inspires him to carry out great actions such as revolutions and wars. Hence, national and historical figures such as Napoleon and Alexander the Great in Hegel's view are beyond moral probity as they are helpless instruments in the hand of the all cunning absolute spirit as it achieves its aim in history (Copleston, 1994, p.218).

If the entire project of the world-history is, according to Hegel, spirit's self-development in effort to attain absolute freedom, spirit's progressive self-consciousness of freedom in and through man, then, the necessity of Hegel's conception of freedom arises. In his thought, freedom is licentiousness inasmuch as it is not exercised within the ambit of the law. Unrestricted freedom is for Hegel substantial freedom as opposed to subjective freedom, freedom under law, which is the essence of spirit. Sequel to this, the goal of history is the evolution of state, that is, "a union of rational wills" where law makes possible the continuous exercise and development of freedom. This, Hegel termed the march of God on earth (Hegel, 1982, pp166-7).

In the German world, Hegel (1982) further held, the principles of universality present in Christianity reconciled the antithesis in the world-history and at the same time freed the state from being inferior to the Church.

Thus it happens that in virtue of elements of universality, which have the principle of spirit as their basis, the empire of thought was established actually and concretely. The antithesis of church and state vanishes. The spiritual becomes reconnect with the secular, and develops this latter as an independently organic existence (p. 206)

For Hegel (1982), the reconciliation of the spiritual with the secular, the union of the Church and the state, marked the accomplishment of the ultimate project of the process of history as it provided the ground for subjective freedom in its superlative order. This suggests that for Hegel, the world-history ended in the German world. He says, “[...] the spiritual is no longer an element foreign to the state. Freedom has found the means of realizing its ideal – true existence. This is the ultimate result, which the process of history is intended to accomplish...” (p. 206)

But the problem is, if the spirit is actually absolute, as Hegel claims, and undergoes an absolute process of self manifestation; can such a project be terminable at all? Can the project of the spirit be accomplished within a material time? In other words, is the world-history based on Hegel’s philosophy actually terminable? This is because termination of the project of the absolute spirit which is actually the essence of its being implies putting a check on the absolute, either by itself or by something external to it and this results in a fundamental contradiction.

All the same, the concern of this engagement here is Hegel’s submission that conflicts of opposites is the motive behind the movement of the world-history towards the evolution of state where the essence of spirit – freedom, will be fully manifested. He thought that the Prussian state was the ideal state of world-history. The salient point of Hegel’s philosophy of history is that conflict is necessary and inevitable aspect of world-history. War indeed causes insecurity of property, but this is a necessary commotion.

Democracy as the end of world-history

The philosophy of clash of opposites as the propeller of the world-history is still very much alive in this contemporary period. Recently, it found expression in the work of Francis Fukuyama (1992), *The End of History and the Last Man*. In the said work, Fukuyama subscribes to the theory of the dialectical movement of the world-history but, however, declares that the dialectical movement has come to an abrupt end with the emergence of liberal democracy thereby marking the end of history. He opines 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.... Liberal democracy may constitute the ‘end point of mankind’s ideological evolution’ and the final form of human government and as such constituted the ‘end of history’ (p.xi).

A major pitfall in reading Fukuyama is the failure to comprehend what he meant by the end of history which flows from what history is for him. Fukuyama accepts Hegel’s definition of history as “[...] the progress of man to higher levels of rationality and freedom, and this process had a logical terminal point in the achievement of absolute self-consciousness” (p64). Sequel to this definition of history, Fukuyama did not mean, by the “end of history”, “[...] that the natural cycle of birth, life, and death would end, that important events would no longer happen,” (xii). No. Independent events will continue to occur. What he meant by the end of history was his interpretation of Hegel’s and Kojève’s speculative end of history (Fukuyama, 1992: 192). “It meant, rather, that there would be no further progress in the development of underlying principles and institutions, because all of the really big questions had been settled” (pxii).

According to Fukuyama (1992),

Hegel believed that alienation – the division of man against himself and his subsequent loss of control over his destiny – had been adequately resolved at the end of history through the philosophical recognition of the freedom possible in the liberal state”. (p65)

The implication is that the emergence of the modern universal and homogeneous state (liberal democracy) represents the end point of human ideological evolution beyond which it is impossible to progress further. Thus the end of history means the end of human ideological evolution, which democracy represents, and for Fukuyama “[...] meant the end of not only of large political struggles and conflicts, but the end of philosophy as well” (p67).

Fukuyama’s idea of liberal democracy as marking the end of history was largely influenced by the end of the grueling and perilous Cold War between the West and the East as a result of the collapse of communism in the early 90s. He believes that communism and fascism were the two major rival ideologies that challenged liberal democracy but “[...] a growing belief that democracy was the only legitimate source of authority in the modern world” (p21) led to their collapse. Fukuyama posits that the growing number of countries adopting liberal democracy starting from the first sign of the collapse of communism and following the complete fall of the Berlin Wall

“[...] is the fact that democratic government has broken out of its original beachhead in Western Europe and North America and has made significant inroads in other parts of the world that do not share the political, religious, and cultural traditions of these areas”. (p51)

Despite all this, Fukuyama claims that his submission that the emergence of liberal democracy marks the end of history is not propped on empirical evidence of the collapse of communism but on “[...] a trans-historical standard against which to measure democratic society, some concept of ‘man as man’” (p288). This stems from his conviction that the judgment of democracy lies in its ability or otherwise to fulfill the concept of man as man. Therefore, an all important question is, according to him, what actually constitutes man as man, that is, man as different from other animals?

To answer the above question, Fukuyama (1992) relies heavily on Kojève’s claim that desire for recognition is the most fundamental human longing, not shared by any other animal and that the struggle for recognition is the primordial force behind historical process (p.288). By implication, any political arrangement that is able to settle this struggle for recognition mollifies the spirit of history and therefore brings it to an end. Sequel to this, Fukuyama rejects what he views as economic history of Hobbes, Locke

and Marx in favour of Hegel's philosophy of history and its interpretation by Kojève; for:

Not only is man not determined by his physical or animal nature but his very humanity consists in his ability to overcome or negate the animal nature. He is free not just in Hobbes' formal sense by being physically unconstrained, but free in the metaphysical sense of being radical undetermined by nature. (Fukuyama, 1992, p149)

Fukuyama (1992), therefore, admits Kojève's submission that:

Hegel's first man is radically different from the animals in that he desires not only real 'positive' objects ... but also objects that are totally nonmaterial. Above all, he desires the desire of other men, that is, to be wanted by others or to be recognized. Indeed for Hegel, an individual could not become self-conscious ... without being recognized by other human beings. (p146)

This quest for recognition by others, accordingly, triggered off the first bloody war in Hegel's state of nature (Fukuyama, 1992, p.147) and so started the world-history. Going technically, Fukuyama (1992) maintains that the thymos present in man seeks outlet in the form of megalothymia (unequal recognition) and will be satiated in isothymia (universal and equal recognition). Consequently, the world-history which started with the struggle of one to be recognized by the other will be terminated by all recognizing all equally.

All the events of the past, Fukuyama holds, are simply steps towards the realization of an epoch of the last man, the man without chest, (Fukuyama, 1992, p.182) who does not seek to be recognized above others and the emergence of that epoch marks the end of history because the spirit of history is satisfied and moves no further (p.136).

For Fukuyama the present day liberal democracy is the dream era. Liberal democracy, he claims, provides us with not only the freedom of property but also the recognition of our dignity. "The liberal democratic state values us at our own sense of self-worth. Thus both the desiring and the thymotic parts of our souls find satisfaction" (Fukuyama, 1992, p.200). Modern liberal democracies recognize all human beings universally by granting and protecting their right (202). Liberal democracy has therefore reconciled the

contradictions inherent in political and economical arrangements of the previous epochs by satisfying the megalothymia not by imposing “[...] constraints on natural instincts for aggression and violence” but by fundamentally transforming the instincts themselves (p.263). Liberal democracy is thus the perfect and ideal state and the flaws find therein result from incomplete implementation rather than the principles of democracy. Relying on this Fukuyama (1992) avows, “[...] we can argue that history has come to an end if the present form of social and political organization is completely satisfying to human beings in their most essential characteristics” (p.136).

Evaluation

By this submission Fukuyama forecloses the possibility of evolution of better social and political organization from the present day liberal democracy. But surprisingly he admitted that some aspects of inequality will remain in this “perfect” state: “[...] not that all social inequality was eliminated but that those barriers which remained were in some respect “necessary and ineradicable” due to the nature of things rather than the will of man” (Fukuyama, 1992, p.291). Now if the nature of things, nature of man inclusive, makes inequality ineradicable, one wonders how in democracy unequal persons will be recognized equally. Fukuyama here seems to have involved himself in the error Aristotle long ago found with democracy namely, that it recognizes the unequal as equal; because people are equal in some respects they think they are equal in all respects; “[...] because men are equally free, the claim to be absolutely equal” (Stumpf, 1971, p.105). The type of society Fukuyama thinks liberal democracy is, would have been possible if men were absolutely equal.

Besides, if the nature of individual flows into the nature of state and that the struggle for recognition can manifest in the form of nationalism, religion, and culture, as Fukuyama (1992, p.214) acknowledges, and that some form of nationalistic megalothymia will remain in liberal democracy (p.229), then, what stops the shift of the battle for recognition from individual level to between states, cultures, religions, or better, civilizations. He actually admits that all these pose problems to the realization of democracy, maintaining that “[...] the thymotic origin of religion and nationalism explains why the conflicts over values are potentially much more deadly than conflicts over material possessions or wealth” (Fukuyama, 1992, p.214) but down plays their

perniciousness in plunging mankind into the next level of conflicts to keep history moving (pp.215 – 222).

The truth of the matter is that democracy today is helpless in the face of nationalistic, economic, cultural and religious megalothymia which has continued to dictate the world affairs, conditioning even democracy itself and shaping the direction of the world history. This is why democracy is failing today. Galston and Kamarck (2022) observe this thus. “There is near-universal agreement that our system is not working well – in particular that it is not delivering the results people want. This is troubling because most people value democracy for its fruits, not just its roots”. Peterside (2021) makes similar comment regarding failure of democracy in Nigeria thus. “The inability of Nigerian democracy to bridge the gap between inequality and poverty has heightened the lack of faith in democracy”. Interestingly, Fukuyama (2012, p.10) admits that there is democratic recession taking place around the world since the 2000s. Even the Arab Spring that was thought to set democracy on a firm foundation in Africa could not achieve much.

In Fukuyama (1992) is seen over-emphasis on the social tendencies of man to the utter neglect of his anti-social tendencies which Kant (1784) holds to be the spirit of the world-history. Yet, he acknowledges that:

The fact that peace in historical state systems has been so difficult to obtain reflects the fact that certain states seek more than self-preservation. Like giant thymotic individuals, they seek acknowledgement of their value or dignity on dynastic, religious, nationalist, or ideological grounds, and in the process force other states either to fight or to submit. The ultimate ground of war among states is therefore thymos rather than self-preservation. (Fukuyama, 1992, p.255)

Thus, his acclaimed general acceptance of liberal democracy is negated by this stand. The truth is rather that the West with its economic and military superiority complex is trying to superimpose liberal democracy on all peoples of the world irrespective of their historical and cultural antecedents. This explains the difficulty in imbibing the rudiments of the political system in many countries of Asia and Africa and the perception of the propagation of liberal democracy as Western agenda is brewing

violent conflicts in many places. Complaining about this, Waruiru (2011 online) laments:

But it is now becoming clear that building a successful democracy is not as easy as many Americans had assumed. Pure democracy is a system that works well in particular cultures, and not all cultures are equally capable of building harmonious democratic societies.

Furthermore, Fukuyama did not even envisage his universalization of Western brand of democracy, which J. S. Mill (1990, p.271) had pointed out to be a replacement of the tyranny of one with the tyranny of majority, as an imposition on the whole world and as a quest by the West to be recognized by the entire world. In addition this perceived imposition is generating reactions from other regions of the world thereby opening the door of history he thinks liberal democracy had closed to a fresh struggle for recognition. Huntington (1996) capitalizes on this weak stand of Fukuyama and made name by declaring that the end of cold war had only opened a new vista for world-conflicts which he calls “clash of civilizations.”

Conclusion

From the foregoing it can be concluded that as beautiful as democracy is, it is yet to satisfy the yearning of the nature of man as man and therefore cannot stand in its present state as the end of ideological evolutions. The onus is on philosophers to work more on the principles of liberal democracy to make it more workable for peoples of diverse cultures. Please, rearticulate this. For now, the promoters of the system should apply caution and allow the non-Western world to absorb it at their own pace. Try and strengthen this conclusion and make your voice stronger!

References

- Coppleston, F. (1994) *History of Philosophy*, Vol. 7, New York: Image Books, 1994.
- Fukuyama, F. (1992), *The end of history and the last man*, London: Penguin Books.
- Fukuyama, F. (2012), *The Origins of political order*, USA: Farrar, Straus and Giroux.

- Galston, W. A and E. Kamarck (2022), ‘Is democracy failing and putting our economic system at risk?’, <https://www.brookings.edu/research/is-democracy-failing-and-putting-our-economic-system-at-risk> Accessed: February 3, 2023.
- Hegel, G. W. F. (1982), *Philosophy of History*, in R. M. Hutchins (Ed), *Great Books of the Western World*, Vol. 46, Chicago: Encyclopedia Britannica Inc. 1982.
- Hobbes, T. (1990), *Leviathan*, in M. J. Adler (ed.), *Great Books of the Western World*, 2nd ed. Vol.21, Chicago: Encyclopedia Britannica Inc.
- Huntington, S. P. (1993) ‘The Clash of Civilizations’, *Public affairs*
- Huntington, S. P. (1996) *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*, New York: Simon & Schuster Paperbacks.
- Kant, I. (1784), *Idea for a Universal History from a Cosmopolitan Point of View*, Translation by Lewis White Beck (1963), from Immanuel Kant, “On History,” The Bobbs-Merrill Co.
- Locke, J. (1993), *Two Treatises on Government*, Edited by M. Goddie, London: Orion Publishing Group.
- Mill, J. S. (1990), “On Liberty” in M. J. Adler (ed.), *Great Books of the Western World*, Vol. 46, (Chicago: Encyclopedia Britannica Inc.
- More, B. N. & K. Bruder (2002), *Philosophy: the power of ideas*, 5th ed., USA: McGraw Hill Higher Education.
- Omeregbe, J. O. (1991) *Simplified History of Western Philosophy*, Lagos: JOJA Educational Books.
- Peterside, D. (2021), “Has democracy failed Nigerians?”, *the Cable*, thecable.ng/has-democracy-failed-Nigerians/amp. Accessed: February 3, 2023.
- Plato (1941), *Republic*, trans., F. M. Comfort, Oxford: Oxford University Press,
- Stumpf, S. E. (1971), *Philosophy: History and Problem*, (USA: MacGraw-Hill Inc.
- Waruiru, M. (2011), “The Failure of Democracy in Africa” <http://www.takimag.com> Sourced: 3 February, 2023.