

ROUTLEDGE INNOVATIONS IN POLITICAL THEORY

# Liberal Democracy as the End of History

Fukuyama and postmodern challenges

Chris Hughes



# Liberal Democracy as the End of History

Fukuyama and postmodern  
challenges

Chris Hughes



This edition published 2012  
by Routledge  
2 Park Square, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon OX14 4RN

Simultaneously published in the USA and Canada  
by Routledge  
711 Third Avenue, New York, NY 10017

*Routledge is an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group, an informa business*

© 2012 Chris Hughes

The right of Chris Hughes to be identified as author of this work has been asserted by him in accordance with sections 77 and 78 of the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988.

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reprinted or reproduced or utilised in any form or by any electronic, mechanical, or other means, now known or hereafter invented, including photocopying and recording, or in any information storage or retrieval system, without permission in writing from the publishers.

*British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data*  
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

*Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data*  
A catalog record for this book has been requested  
Hughes, Chris (Christopher)

Liberal democracy as the end of history: Fukuyama and postmodern challenges /  
Chris Hughes.  
p. cm. — (Routledge innovations in political theory; 39)  
Includes bibliographical references and index.  
1. Democracy—Philosophy. 2. Liberalism. 3. Postmodernism.  
4. Fukuyama, Francis. End of history. 5. History—Philosophy. I. Title.  
JC423.H835 2011  
321.8—dc22  
2011014160

ISBN: 978-0-415-66905-4 (hbk)  
ISBN: 978-0-203-80217-5 (ebk)

Typeset in Times New Roman by Swales & Willis, Ltd, Exeter, Devon



Printed and bound in Great Britain by  
TJI Digital, Padstow, Cornwall

# Liberal Democracy as the End of History

Francis Fukuyama claims that liberal democracy is the end of history. This book provides a theoretical re-examination of this claim through postmodernist ideas.

The book argues that postmodern ideas provide a valuable critique to Fukuyama's thesis, and poses the questions: can we talk about a universal and teleological history; a universal human nature; or an autonomous individual? It addresses whether postmodern theories – concerning the movement of time, what it means to be human, and what it means to be an individual/subject – can be accommodated within a theory of a history that ends in liberal democracy.

The author argues that incorporating elements of postmodern thought into Fukuyama's theory makes it possible to produce a stronger and more compelling account of the theory that liberal democracy is the end of history. The result of this is to underpin Fukuyama's theory with a more complex understanding of the movement of time, the human and the individual, and to show that postmodern concepts can, paradoxically, be used to strengthen Fukuyama's theory that the end of history is liberal democracy. The book will be of interest to students and scholars of political theory, postmodernism and the work of Francis Fukuyama.

**Chris Hughes** currently teaches at the University of Liverpool and the University of Manchester, UK.

# **Routledge Innovations in Political Theory**

- 1 A Radical Green Political Theory**  
*Alan Carter*
- 2 Rational Woman**  
A feminist critique of dualism  
*Raia Prokhovnik*
- 3 Rethinking State Theory**  
*Mark J. Smith*
- 4 Gramsci and Contemporary Politics**  
Beyond pessimism of the intellect  
*Anne Showstack Sassoon*
- 5 Post-Ecologist Politics**  
Social theory and the abdication of the ecologist paradigm  
*Ingolfur Blühdorn*
- 6 Ecological Relations**  
*Susan Board*
- 7 The Political Theory of Global Citizenship**  
*April Carter*
- 8 Democracy and National Pluralism**  
*Edited by Ferran Requejo*
- 9 Civil Society and Democratic Theory**  
Alternative voices  
*Gideon Baker*
- 10 Ethics and Politics in Contemporary Theory**  
Between critical theory and post-marxism  
*Mark Devenney*

- 11 Citizenship and Identity**  
Towards a new republic  
*John Schwarzmantel*
- 12 Multiculturalism, Identity and Rights**  
*Edited by Bruce Haddock and Peter Sutch*
- 13 Political Theory of Global Justice**  
A cosmopolitan case for the World State  
*Luis Cabrera*
- 14 Democracy, Nationalism and Multiculturalism**  
*Edited by Ramón Maiz and Ferrán Requejo*
- 15 Political Reconciliation**  
*Andrew Schaap*
- 16 National Cultural Autonomy and Its Contemporary Critics**  
*Edited by Ephraim Nimni*
- 17 Power and Politics in Poststructuralist Thought**  
New theories of the political  
*Saul Newman*
- 18 Capabilities Equality**  
Basic issues and problems  
*Edited by Alexander Kaufman*
- 19 Morality and Nationalism**  
*Catherine Frost*
- 20 Principles and Political Order**  
The challenge of diversity  
*Edited by Bruce Haddock, Peri Roberts and Peter Sutch*
- 21 European Integration and the Nationalities Question**  
*Edited by John McGarry and Michael Keating*
- 22 Deliberation, Social Choice and Absolutist Democracy**  
*David van Mill*
- 23 Sexual Justice/Cultural Justice**  
Critical perspectives in political theory and practice  
*Edited by Barbara Arneil, Monique Deveaux, Rita Dhamoon and Avigail Eisenberg*

- 24 The International Political Thought of Carl Schmitt**  
Terror, liberal war and the crisis of global order  
*Edited by Louiza Odyseos and Fabio Petito*
- 25 In Defense of Human Rights**  
A non-religious grounding in a pluralistic world  
*Ari Kohen*
- 26 Logics of Critical Explanation in Social and Political Theory**  
*Jason Glynos and David Howarth*
- 27 Political Constructivism**  
*Peri Roberts*
- 28 The New Politics of Masculinity**  
Men, power and resistance  
*Fidelma Ashe*
- 29 Citizens and the State**  
Attitudes in Western Europe and East and Southeast Asia  
*Takashi Inoguchi and Jean Blondel*
- 30 Political Language and Metaphor**  
Interpreting *and* changing the world  
*Edited by Terrell Carver and Jernej Pikalo*
- 31 Political Pluralism and the State**  
Beyond sovereignty  
*Marcel Wissenburg*
- 32 Political Evil in a Global Age**  
Hannah Arendt and international theory  
*Patrick Hayden*
- 33 Gramsci and Global Politics**  
Hegemony and resistance  
*Mark McNally and John Schwarzmantel*
- 34 Democracy and Pluralism**  
The political thought of William E. Connolly  
*Edited by Alan Finlayson*
- 35 Multiculturalism and Moral Conflict**  
*Edited by Maria Dimova-Cookson and Peter Stirk*

- 36 John Stuart Mill – Thought and Influence**  
The saint of rationalism  
*Edited by Georgios Varouxakis and Paul Kelly*
- 37 Rethinking Gramsci**  
*Edited by Marcus E. Green*
- 38 Autonomy and Identity**  
The politics of who we are  
*Ros Hague*
- 39 Dialectics and Contemporary Politics**  
Critique and transformation from Hegel through post-Marxism  
*John Grant*
- 40 Liberal Democracy as the End of History**  
Fukuyama and postmodern challenges  
*Chris Hughes*



**For my Mum and Dad**

# Acknowledgements

I have received comments, feedback and suggestions on this book, and material related to it, from far too many people (including anonymous reviewers) to name everyone. However, I would particularly like to thank Steve de Wijze, Angie Wilson, Joe Femia and Kim Brownlee for the useful comments and valued support which they provided.

I offer a special thanks to Alan Hamlin for the sage support he provided during my PhD, and his comments which were very valuable for the development of this work. But, possibly more importantly, I wish to thank him for his support during the development of my academic career and for facilitating a great deal of learning in political philosophy.

But, most importantly, I wish to thank my Mum and Dad for their continued and unwavering love and support, even when times have been difficult; without their love and support none of my achievements would have been possible.

I gratefully acknowledge permission to reprint material, previously published as:

Chris Hughes 'A Politics in the Absence of a Universal Human Nature', *Review Journal of Political Philosophy*, 8.1 (2010) pp. 75–102;

and Chris Hughes, 'The Recycling of Time and The End of History', *International Journal of Baudrillard Studies*, 8.1 (2011).

# Contents

<i>Acknowledgements</i>	xii
Introduction	1
1 Methodology: an approach to philosophical analysis	18
2 Fukuyama I: the concept of a <i>history</i> with universal direction and end point	35
3 Fukuyama II: why does <i>history</i> end in liberal democracy?	49
4 Postmodern perspectives on the flow of time	68
5 Questioning the universality of human nature: a politics without a concept of the ‘human’	98
6 The myth of the individual: how ‘I’ is constructed and gives an account of itself	118
7 A theory of a <i>history</i> which ends in liberal democracy through a reading of Fukuyama and postmodernism	140
Postscript: limitations and outcomes of the study	169
<i>Notes</i>	175
<i>Bibliography</i>	209
<i>Index</i>	218

# Introduction

## The scope of the book

In this book, I provide a theoretical examination of Fukuyama's claim that liberal democracy is the end of *history*. The concepts of history and *history* are central to this thesis; they require careful explanation and elaboration. By means of a preliminary explanation, *history* refers to a particular and philosophical concept of history; whereas, history is used to cover the multitude of ideas which are part of the common usage of the word 'history'. I will leave aside detailed explanation of the difference I make between history and *history* for the next section of the Introduction.<sup>1</sup>

The book assesses the theoretical and philosophical content of Fukuyama's claim that liberal democracy is the end of *history*. I seek to pose the question, is the idea that liberal democracy is the end of *history* a compelling theory? I do this by posing various challenges to the idea that *history* has culminated in liberal democracy. I use a range of critiques, ideas and authors to level challenges to core arguments in Fukuyama's thesis. Specifically, my book provides an answer to the question: does Fukuyama's end of *history* thesis provide a compelling account of the movement of time and history/*history*, where an individualistic understanding of the human acts as the *geist* propelling *history* to its end point, and where the end point of *history*'s movement is liberal democracy? This is a long and unwieldy question, and this specific task is approached by examining three ideas which are intrinsic to Fukuyama's thesis. The first idea is the claim that it is possible to construct time and history as something which has a universal, forward-moving direction; the second idea is the claim that there is a universal *geist* behind the movement of history and *history*; and finally, the third idea is the notion that this *geist* is an individualistic account of what it means to be human. The concept of a *geist* is central to the idea of a teleological *history*, and the idea that there is a *geist* driving and underpinning the movement of *history* is an idea I will explore in much more depth when I discuss the concepts of history and *history*.<sup>2</sup>

I limit the scope of the book to a consideration of these three areas, since I cannot explore all possible challenges to Fukuyama's account of liberal democracy or the concept of a *history*. I have further limited the range and scope of the critiques I deploy against the ideas of *history* and liberal democracy, because although

## 2 Introduction

numerous critiques can be posed, e.g. from Marxists, Fascists, Communitarians and even other Liberals, the critiques which I focus on are critiques which spring from ideas in postmodern philosophy.<sup>3</sup> Due to the importance of postmodernism as a theory and a method of critique for the purposes of this book, postmodernism is something that requires substantial exploration to elucidate its points of divergence and its common features. However, I will leave aside any further discussion of ‘postmodernism’ until the next section of the Introduction.

This book is, essentially, a reading of Fukuyama’s theory in opposition to a range of concepts derived from postmodern theory. It is not an attempt to construct a homogenous postmodern critique; it is, instead, an attempt to pose a critique through postmodern concepts. I use concepts from postmodern theory as my method of critique, since postmodern ideas have been less frequently and less overtly used to challenge Fukuyama than traditional ideologies, e.g. Marxism and Fascism. Fukuyama has addressed these more traditional challenges in depth;<sup>4</sup> but he has not formulated a detailed and in-depth response to arguments and ideas found in postmodern theories. Thus, this book aims to both open up this critique, and then provide a response to it.

I hope to make an original contribution to political thought in this book by attempting to problematise Fukuyama’s theory. In doing so, I make a significant contribution to two debates. First, I enter the debate about the meaning of the concept of a *history* and show how a *history* is constructed. I question the feasibility of constructing a *history* and provide a fresh analysis about the legitimacy of a *history*. Second, I question the validity of the metaphysical assumptions which underpin liberal democracy and examine whether liberal democracy and liberal democratic values can feasibly be put forward as the final social/political system. I use Fukuyama’s theory as the basis of this examination, since Fukuyama presents himself as a spokesperson, defender and advocate for both the concepts *history* and liberal democracy. Fukuyama’s originality stems from his claim that not only is there an end point to *history* but that we have also reached that end point.

Fukuyama follows a long-standing tradition in attempting to write a *history* which can reach an end point. This tradition stems, primarily, from modernity’s Enlightenment project.<sup>5</sup> The Enlightenment approach to understanding the world requires detailed exploration and explanation in order to elucidate the nuances of this theory, because despite some uniting ideas, it is/was not a uniform movement, since Liberalism, Utilitarianism and Marxism have all been aligned, in some sense, to this general school of thought.<sup>6</sup> I provide a more detailed discussion of the nuances and common features of Enlightenment thinking in the next section of this Introduction. Although the Enlightenment tradition gave us the concept of an end of *history*, the claim that *history* actually *has* ended is a more specific and unique claim, and the relationship between the general Enlightenment position with its theory of a theoretical end to *history*, and Fukuyama’s specific theory with its claim that *history* has ended is something I also explore in the next section of this Introduction.

The primary focus of the book is to examine whether Fukuyama’s theory that *history* has reached its end point in liberal democracy is compelling. I subject

this theory to analysis by drawing on a range of concepts and critiques derived from ideas in postmodern thinking. I do not seek to either wholly defend Fukuyama's position in the face of postmodern critiques or support the postmodern critique; instead, I seek to locate points of convergence between key postmodern concepts and Fukuyama's thought in order to transcend or bridge the apparent dualistic binary between Fukuyama and postmodernism. I aim to take seriously both the claim that we can conceive of a *history* which ends in liberal democracy and a range of postmodern ideas which challenge this concept of a *history* and their arguments for thinking about history as something which must be kept open, something which cannot end.

In this book, I examine the differences in the theoretical methodologies and ways to think about core social and political ideas in Fukuyama's Enlightenment approach and postmodern thought. My primary hope in this book is to explore the possibility of producing a space where a conversation between the two can take place. I assess the possibility of points of convergence, resonance and commonality between these positions. A second goal, and one which stems from this, is to show that a conversation produced between Fukuyama's thinking and postmodern ideas could be constructive for contemporary political theory. I seek to illustrate limitations and problems in Fukuyama's theory through a discussion of postmodern concepts; however, I also want to show that by instilling postmodern concepts into Fukuyama's theory that it is possible to reconstruct his theory. Thus, this book will, ultimately, argue that it is possible to produce an enhanced and more compelling account of Fukuyama's theory of liberal democracy as the end of *history*, by incorporating postmodern concepts into it.

### **Theoretical underpinnings of the project**

This book relies on: a vast array of philosophical terms; a range of key ideological positions; and numerous central ideas and concepts. Before embarking on the project of reconstructing liberal democracy as the end of history through a blending of Fukuyama's theory and postmodern ideas, it is important to clarify the most central concepts. For now, I will leave aside discussion of technical terminology and specific concepts and, instead, focus on four ideas and ideological perspectives which underpin this project, and upon which this project is constructed.<sup>7</sup>

Fukuyama's claim that liberal democracy is the end of *history* invokes three core ideas which need to be explained and defined. The first of these is the methodological and epistemological background from which Fukuyama is working, i.e. the Enlightenment approach. Thus, I shall start by discussing the common features and points of divergence within Enlightenment theory, and Fukuyama's relationship to the Enlightenment tradition. However, I do not intend to spend too long discussing Enlightenment theory, since it is the concept of *history*, as constructed within Enlightenment theory, which is the primary concern for my work. Thus, the second concept which I attempt to define is *history*; and, specifically, I discuss how I differentiate history and *history*. The third concept invoked by Fukuyama's theory, which requires elaboration, is liberal democracy. Liberal

#### 4 Introduction

democracy is a rich and divergent ideology, with a vast literature; therefore, my discussion on this is limited to Fukuyama's defence of it. Finally, in this section, I produce a discussion on the methodology and epistemology which I am using to critique Fukuyama, i.e. postmodernism. It is necessary to spend some time exploring what is meant by postmodernism and elucidate the divergences within the broad theory of postmodernism. There are numerous topics on which there seems to be no shared position between the various postmodern thinkers, and thus any reference to a postmodern position must be a recognition of the diversity within the 'ideology' of postmodernism.

#### *Enlightenment theory*

The Enlightenment is both a period in history and a philosophy about the world, knowledge, humans, politics, etc. The Enlightenment is a period in history because the ideas, values and ways of thinking about the world in Enlightenment thought became the dominant way of thinking. The Enlightenment way of thinking is, arguably, still the dominant form of discourse, and it is an epistemological and methodological approach for theorising about the world and society which I need to explore, and to some extent define, since it is from within this tradition that Fukuyama operates.

Enlightenment thought is best understood as an approach for theorising about the world and politics, rather than as an ideology. As a school of thought, it can be seen to possess a number of core unifying traits, but its epistemology can be used to ground a variety of conflicting ideologies. Although Enlightenment theory may be used to justify and ground numerous ideological positions, it is based on the underlying notion of the development of rationality. Enlightenment thought takes the view that humans are progressing towards the greater usage and fulfilment of their rationality. For Kant, the Enlightenment is the development of reason; it is the development of each man's understanding.<sup>8</sup> The Enlightenment is a system of thought based around the belief in man's ability to reason, and the search for a social/political order which facilitates this. Thus, in a historical context, Enlightenment thought was a radical and dangerous philosophy, since it was an attack on authority and 'guardians'.<sup>9</sup> The Enlightenment both as a philosophy and a period of history sought to 'liberate mankind from immaturity . . . [leaving] all men free to use their own reason in all matters of conscience'.<sup>10</sup>

Enlightenment theory and its epistemological approach to human understanding implies a great many things. First is the idea of 'man's emergence from . . . immaturity'<sup>11</sup> – the idea that man is progressing towards the use of his own reason and that the aim for mankind is for each individual to 'have [the] courage to use your *own* understanding!'<sup>12</sup> Thus, the epistemological framework of Enlightenment theory can be seen to have some unifying traits concerning: the passage and movement of time and history, human nature and the individual.<sup>13</sup> Most crucially for the project I am undertaking in this book, Enlightenment theory produces the formula for the notion of a *history*, based on the idea that through the cultivation of reason, time and history move in a progressive manner. Kant's definition of the

Enlightenment as man's emergence from immaturity defines historical movement by its progression from one phase – a lesser phase – to a new, higher phase; and, implied in this is the concept of teleology, and an end point where the end point is when mankind leaves behind its immaturity and emerges into adulthood. The Enlightenment, thus, postulates a theory about the perfectibility of man; it takes a positive account of mankind, because even if mankind is seen to be an immature state, Enlightenment theorists argue mankind can rise from barbarism through the freedom to reason and 'men will of their own accord gradually work their way out of barbarism'.<sup>14</sup> Thus Enlightenment theory provides the basis for theorising about a progressive/teleological *history*, since it is premised on the improvement and progress of mankind.

Fukuyama's conception of man does not always sit comfortably with the Enlightenment concept of a man who is moving towards self-reasoning. For Fukuyama, there is a side of man that may act contrary to rationality; there is a side of man that is willing to risk his very existence for prestige. If we take rationality to be a desire to preserve the body, and attain/secure basic natural needs/desires, e.g. food, water, shelter, rest etc., then to argue that man is willing to risk his life for immaterial goods, e.g. recognition, produces the implicit argument that there is also an irrational side to man. Fukuyama does recognise man's desire for natural goods,<sup>15</sup> but he argues that humans want to be recognised as human, and that each human wants to be seen to possess a certain quality, dignity and value. For Fukuyama, a man's 'encounter with other men leads to a violent struggle in which each contestant seeks to make the other "recognize" him by risking his own life. Man is . . . [led] into a violent struggle to the death for pure prestige'.<sup>16</sup> Although a willingness to jeopardise one's own existence for something that is not materially essential to life seems irrational, there is a process of reasoning behind the action, as the reason to act in this manner originates from a desire for recognition and dignity; and thus Fukuyama's man may not be rational, per se, if rationality is construed with material preservation. However, Fukuyama's concept of man is still a concept of man as a reasoning being, but his claim that man has a violent impulse for non-material desires does put Fukuyama at odds with many Enlightenment thinkers. Thus, Fukuyama is not wholly representative of the Enlightenment tradition and poses some critiques to Enlightenment thought, himself; however, he can still be seen to be working from within an Enlightenment framework, because his theory is based on the notion of progress and the movement of history/*history* towards a 'mature' social/political order. For Fukuyama, even though the individual may not always be 'rational', humanity is progressing towards a rational social/political order, a social/political order which does not possess contradictions and satisfies the desires and objectives of mankind.

### ***The concepts of history and history***

In some ways, Fukuyama is the first thinker to argue that *history has ended*. Hegel had declared that *history* ended with the Battle of Jena in 1806,<sup>17</sup> but he also questioned whether the realised European state embodied freedom and justice (the end



## 6 Introduction

point for *history* in Hegelian thought), and argued that the ‘world spirit is always ready to move on . . . [and] not even the most advanced human state can realize the human species’ potential for freedom’.<sup>18</sup> Philosophers who endorse the concept of *history* do not tend to argue that *history* has ended, or even that it necessarily will end. Instead, they tend to argue that *history can* end, i.e. they argue there is a deep universal force driving *history*; and that *history* is driven towards the realisation of this geist. This position is perfectly exemplified by Kant, for whom *history* was an evolutionary process whereby the intelligent and instinctive sides of man become reconciled and conflict between body and mind becomes civilised. Thus, for Kant, the end point of *history* is when man is sufficiently prudent and rational to overcome the shortcomings of his instinctual nature.<sup>19</sup> Kant does not argue man has, or ever will, achieve this, but he argues *history* has direction and is programmed by a geist, and that *history* is a process which is seeking to realise the geist; thus, Kant argues, we can write *history*, because there is an end point.

It is important to underline the difference I make between history and *history*. It is possible to argue that *history* has ended; but also argue that history has not ended, or will necessarily end. Fukuyama acknowledges events (i.e. history) will continue, but he claims *history* has ended because philosophical conversations about the ideal social/political system have reached their cumulative point. Whilst it is important to distinguish history from the past, it is even more important to distinguish history from *history*.

History is not the same as the past – the past is events which are emplotted, and as part of their narration, they become history: ‘history is a discourse about, but categorically different from, the past’.<sup>20</sup> History is a discourse about things that happen in time; it is ‘the creation . . . of a particular narrative form on the past’.<sup>21</sup> History is not the same as the actuality of the past, since it is a discourse about empirical events. History is ‘the need to *interpret* the past, not simply present it [and] finding a larger context for the story in an attempt to say not just “what happened” but what it meant’,<sup>22</sup> but what it is important to take from the notion of history is the idea that history is about events – actual, specific events which happened.

*History*, on the other hand, as Kant explains, is the attempt to discover a metaphysical, universal ‘*purpose in nature* behind this senseless course of human events’.<sup>23</sup> Thus, for Fukuyama, history and events do continue even at the end of *history*, because *history* ‘is not the end of worldly events but the end of the evolution of human thought’.<sup>24</sup> *History* ends when we locate a social/political order which satisfies the universal and metaphysical force driving it. For Kant, for instance, the end of *history* is the idea that

the *history*<sup>25</sup> of the human race as a whole can be regarded as the realisation of a hidden plan of nature to bring about . . . [a] perfect political constitution as the only possible state within which all natural capacities of mankind can be developed completely.<sup>26</sup>

Fukuyama’s argument concerning the end of *history* and continuation of history can be more clearly elucidated by examining his metaphor of mankind as wagons