

Prof. Howard Williams
(Aberystwyth University)

Abstract

Reconsidering Francis Fukuyama and the Radical Enlightenment's Vision of an End of History

Two decades have passed since Francis Fukuyama announced that the end of history had arrived with the collapse of Soviet Communism. Here I will examine Fukuyama's thesis in the light of subsequent developments in world politics. How well has the thesis stood the test of time? Fukuyama's radical argument will be reconsidered in the context of the philosophies of history of Kant, Hegel and Marx from whom he borrows such a great deal. Does Fukuyama's argument carry forward best the progressive impulses of the Enlightenment or does it hit upon the same difficulties of the argument as it is found in many of his Enlightenment progenitors? In particular I shall try to show that Fukuyama relies too heavily upon the determinism of Marx's theory of history and equally draws too much from the overconfident optimism of Hegel's idealist approach. I shall argue that enthusiasm for modernism (by which I mean such developments as democracy, universal human rights, freedom of speech, religious toleration, secular education and equal liberty) has to be filtered through a Kantian perspective which demonstrates respect for the moral, voluntarist dimension of the aspiration for progress. Progress cannot be assumed to be the automatic outcome of the historical process; each generation has to work for it anew through moral, political and educational endeavour.