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Nonsense and the Inevitability of Democracy **by James Bovard**

Many Americans are being lulled into assuming that democracy is inevitable. This is a favorite theme of President Bush's beating on the same drumhead used by President Clinton, President Wilson, and other notable demagogues. But the fact that politicians agree does not make something true.

Since Woodrow Wilson proclaimed that democracy was the destiny of humanity, more than 100 democratic governments have crashed and burned around the globe, replaced by dictators, juntas, or foreign conquerors. Yet we continue to be assured that democracies are inevitable and that universalizing democracy will solve almost all of the world's political problems.

The current cult of "democratic inevitability" was jump-started by Francis Fukuyama, whose 1989 article (later expanded into a book) "The End of History" made him an instant intellectual cult figure. Fukuyama was a Reagan political appointee at the State Department and is currently on the board of directors of the National Endowment for Democracy. He hailed the "unabashed victory of economic and political liberalism" and proclaimed that "we in the liberal West occupy the final summit of the historical edifice." He announced,

What we are witnessing is not just the end of the Cold War, or a passing of a particular period of postwar history, but the end of history as such: that is, the end point of mankind's ideological evolution and the universalization of Western liberal democracy as the final form of human government.

Fukuyama revealed that "the present form of social and political organization is completely satisfying to human beings in their most essential characteristics." Fukuyama is the Pangloss of political philosophy: liberal democracy is the best of all possible worlds, and we should all be happy because its triumph everywhere is fated.

Democracy and the French Revolution

Fukuyama hailed German philosopher G.W.F. Hegel as the supreme “philosopher of freedom.” But Hegel was as much a champion of freedom as Nietzsche was a champion of Christianity. Fukuyama reminds readers that Hegel

proclaimed history to be at an end in 1806. For as early as this Hegel saw in Napoleon’s defeat of the Prussian monarchy at the Battle of Jena the victory of the ideals of the French Revolution, and the imminent universalization of the state incorporating the principles of liberty and equality.

Fukuyama stresses that the 1806 battle “marked the end of history because it was at that point that the vanguard of humanity (a term quite familiar to Marxists) actualized the principles of the French Revolution.” He notes that “the present world seems to confirm that the fundamental principles of sociopolitical organization have not advanced terribly far since 1806.” He neglected to mention Hegel’s rapturous comment after the battle of Jena — “I saw the emperor, this soul of the world, riding through the streets.”

To view the armies of Napoleon as engines of liberal democracy is peculiar. Napoleon, aside from crushing the Venetian republic, destroyed freedom of the press, had political opponents in France assassinated, brutally suppressed popular uprisings against French rule in Spain and elsewhere, and spawned wars that left millions of Europeans dead. Perhaps Fukuyama was merely ahead of his time, championing democracy’s being imposed by foreign conquests. But Napoleon’s invasions did not create democracies; instead, they spurred a backlash of repressive reaction throughout Europe. His wars profoundly stimulated efforts to unify Germany, which did not exactly advance liberty in Europe.

Fukuyama quotes Hegel’s assertion that “the History of the World is nothing other than the progress of the consciousness of Freedom.” But Hegel was not using “freedom” in the sense that Washington or Jefferson did. Hegel declared, “The State in-and-for-itself is the ethical whole, the actualization of freedom.”

Glorifying the state

Hegel was renowned as the “Royal Prussian Court Philosopher” at the University of Berlin. Far from being a champion of the individual against his rulers, he stressed that “all the worth which the human being possesses — all spiritual reality, he possesses only through the State.” He profoundly influenced modern political thinking by mystifying government, declaring that the state is “the shape which the perfect embodiment of Spirit assumes.”

Hegel was the great liberator of political power:

The State is the self-certain absolute mind which acknowledges no abstract rules of good and bad, shameful and mean, craft and deception.

German philosopher Jakob Friedrich Fries, a contemporary of Hegel's, declared that Hegel's theory of the State had grown "not in the gardens of science but on the dunghill of servility." German philosopher Ernst Cassirer observed in 1945 of Hegel,

No other philosophical system has done so much for the preparation of fascism and imperialism as Hegel's doctrine of the state — this "divine Idea as it exists on earth."

No alarm bells went off in Washington, even though this theory of inevitable liberal democracy was deduced from the writings of a philosopher whose ideas were previously invoked to sanctify both communism and fascism. One eminent historian speculated during World War II on "whether the struggle of the Russians and the invading Germans in 1943 was ... a conflict between the Left and Right wings of Hegel's school." Hegel's canonization as the hero of democracy is another example of how the historical record is not permitted to cast doubt on theories of history.

Fukuyama referred to "post-historical societies" — nations where democracy had already been established — as if there could be no turning back. He takes his definition of the end of history from Hegel. As Cassirer noted,

To Hegel, the State is not only a part, a special province, but the essence, the very core of historical life.... Hegel denies that we can speak of historical life outside and before the State.

Fukuyama's article concluded with profound lamentations:

The end of history will be a very sad time.... In the post-historical period there will be neither art nor philosophy, just the perpetual caretaking of the museum of human history. I can feel in myself, and see in others around me, a powerful nostalgia for the time when history existed.

Washington's embrace of Fukuyama

Fukuyama's assumption that life would have little or no meaning after the spread of democracy and freedom implies that political action, or political strife, is the primary source of life's meaning. This may be true in Washington, but happily, most people in the world do not take their life's mission from the government.

Fukuyama's article evoked thunderous praise. His thesis was fanatically embraced by many Washingtonians and much of the U.S. policy elite. The Fukuyama–democratic-inevitability boom illustrates that Washington intellectuals react to pretentious obscurity with the same gullibility that many poor people react to Lotto advertisements.

Fukuyama's theory came at the perfect time: just as the Cold War was ending and a new rationale was needed for a massive U.S. military machine. His thesis sanctifies U.S. power the same way that Marx's law of history sanctified Soviet aggression to impose communism on foreign countries. Marx's interpretation of Hegel helped "prove" that communism was inevitable. Fukuyama's reading of Hegel provides an iron law of history in favor of the triumph of democracy.

The democratic-inevitability theory is also akin to the Marxist theory of the withering away of the state. Marx asserted that, after the creation of communism, the state would simply wither away, since there would be no need or incentive for people to exploit one another. Democratic inevitability implies that, once democracy is achieved, politicians will no longer seek power to violate the rights and liberties of citizens. For some unexplained reason, after democracy becomes universal, voting will turn politicians into choir boys.

In a preface to his administration's 2002 National Security Strategy, Bush practically canonized Fukuyama's view:

The great struggles of the twentieth century between liberty and totalitarianism ended with a decisive victory for the forces of freedom — and a single sustainable model for national success: freedom, democracy, and free enterprise.

The Bush administration effectively invoked historical inevitability for its preferences and values — in the same document in which it proclaimed the right to launch preemptive attacks on practically any nation on Earth.

George W. Bush uses God instead of G.W.F. Hegel to sanctify his foreign policy. Bush proclaimed at a 2004 fundraiser that

the Almighty has — believes that every person should be free. It's a gift from the Almighty, regardless of their religion or the color of their skin. I believe that as the torchbearer of freedom, the United States must lead and must never shirk our duty to lead.

(Bush routinely uses "democracy" and "freedom" interchangeably.) If nothing else, promising to spread freedom abroad consoles some Americans for its loss at home.

Nothing has happened in the last century — or millennium — to make politicians less dangerous. Those who pursue power remain the predator class. There is no magic in a

proclamation that “democracy has now been officially achieved everywhere” that will change human nature.

Why would history stop after democracy was achieved? The experience of many countries has, instead, been “one person, one vote, one time.” Yet, we are supposed to assume that the parade ceases after democracy is reached and will not proceed over any nearby cliffs.

Encouraging people to view democracy as inevitable lulls them to dangers posed by their rulers and other ambitious politicians. If democracy is inevitable, then political progress is on automatic pilot. The Founding Fathers believed that freedom would always be in danger from power — that there would always be politicians and tyrants and tyrant assistants conspiring against freedom. “Eternal vigilance is the price of liberty” was a common American saying in the 19th century. The contemporary version of that slogan appears to be “Eternal sloth is the luxury of democracy.”

Why would democracy be inevitable? Not because of human genes — since most of the human race has gotten along without it for 99.9 percent of its recorded history. Not because of technological destiny: the tools for surveillance (and thus, central control) are spreading far more quickly than the average citizen’s defenses against external intrusions.

Some people insist that democracy is inevitable because it is the only just form of government. Since when is justice inevitable? “Would be nice if true” is not a good test of probability. Democracy is inevitable only if one assumes that almost all history is the “exception that proves the rule” about what the future will be.

The more that democracy is assumed to be inevitable, the more likely democracy will self-destruct. Faith in inevitability deadens the sense of peril — and people blithely acquiesce to one power seizure after another by the ruling class.

James Bovard is the author of [Attention Deficit Democracy](#) [2006] as well as [The Bush Betrayal](#) [2004], [Lost Rights](#) [1994] and [Terrorism and Tyranny: Trampling Freedom, Justice and Peace to Rid the World of Evil](#) (Palgrave-Macmillan, September 2003) and serves as a policy advisor for The Future of Freedom Foundation.

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