

From Kin-based to State-based Societies

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Book Review of *The Origins of Political Order*

by Francis Fukuyama

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Francis Fukuyama is well-known for his book *The End of History and the Last Man*, which in 1992 forecast the result of a perceived global march towards liberal democracy. Many critics pointed to the historical determinism of this forecast to which Fukuyama argued that man's struggle for recognition could, as Hegel suggested, create the conditions for social evolution to occur in a similarly to the evolution of species in natural history. Fukuyama's latest book *The Origins of Political Order*, the first in a set of two, depicts the evolution of political societies from pre-human times to the eve of the French and American Revolutions. The second book is expected to cover the period thereafter to the present.

One of the first points that Fukuyama makes in his new book is that human beings never existed in a pre-social state, as argued by Thomas Hobbes and Jean Jacques Rousseau. This is a point taken from anthropology, one of the many disciplines which Fukuyama used in researching this book. Since both Hobbes and Rousseau relied on the freedoms enjoyed by early man to justify the naturalness of individual rights, Fukuyama's assertion is likely to be taken out of context by collectivists. A lot of water has passed under the bridge since *The End of History* and *The Origins of Political Order*, and that has dampened the optimism apparent in the first book. However, there is nothing in this book to suggest that Fukuyama has abandoned his liberalism to become a collectivist.

Unlike *The End of History*, this book has no sweeping predictions. The only statement admissible is within a particular society: '*Countries are locked into a single path of development by their unique historical pasts*'. This implies that due to intrinsic differences between societies, each society may have a slower or faster pace of political evolution. Furthermore, Fukuyama asserts that political development can progress as well as stagnate and decay.

While accepting Max Weber's definition of 'state' as '*an organization deploying a legitimate monopoly of violence over a defined territory*' Fukuyama takes this further to emphasize the fact that state is about power; for the good of the citizens this power needs to be controlled. He characterizes the 'modern state' as the state whose power is well controlled by institutions like the rule of law and accountability. Another important feature of the modern state is the division of labor based on specialization and expertise, and having an impersonal recruitment by government. The criteria of the impersonal recruitment are the opposite of the recruitment based either on kinship or personal reciprocity, a practice known as 'patrimonialism'.

China was the first country to introduce civil service examinations and a civilian-based bureaucracy that replaced the powerful families that used to run the state. Fukuyama could have gone further in the specification of how the system of recruitment should be, what kinds of checks it should have and its compatibility with parallel systems of recruitment.

Continuing with the terminology, a 'polity' is another word used extensively in this book. Although not defined as such, it refers to a state or any organized community.

The first chapter of the book discusses the necessity of politics, the science or art of political government. Obviously politics has been around for a long time and Fukuyama recognizes that the past exerts a major influence in the present. Each separate country needs to have a memory of its past in order to understand its present. As Fukuyama puts it, '*things that happened thousands of years ago continue to exert major influence on the nature of politics*'. A country with a memory will be able to re-evaluate itself and to discard all the baggage which is now irrelevant or stands in the way of modernity. However, the important concept that needs understanding is not politics *per se* but modern politics, based on the rule of law and state accountability. This requires a definition of 'institutions' and that of Samuel Huntington is the one he used: '*stable, valued and recurring patterns of behaviour*'. Since this book stops on the eve of the French and American Revolutions, it has limited examples of societies, all from Western Europe.

The dawn of political order began in the East. The state appeared in China, India and the Middle East before it appeared in Europe. The Chinese civilization is considered to be the oldest in the world, with archaeological evidence of settlements on the middle and lower Yellow River in Northern China pointing to the year 5,000 B.C. The earliest dynasty of Xia appeared around 2,000 B.C. and it was followed by the Shang (1,500 B.C.), the Western Zhou (1,200 B.C.) and the Eastern Zhou (770 B.C.). China's dynasties were crucial in its state-forming process, as they reduced the number of existing polities from 3,000 in the Xia dynasty to 23 in the Eastern Zhou dynasty. The process of unifying China continued during the Warring States Period (425-221 B.C.), which is marked by the greatest loss of lives in history due to warfare, when 23 polities were amalgamated into seven. China as a unified state appeared around 221 B.C. during the Qin dynasty.

Although India has a civilization that is nearly as old as China, the emergence of the Indian state was held back by the strict social class structure of India. In its early days, India was characterized by hundreds or even thousands of small polities and chiefdoms. By the beginning of the first millennium B.C. these were organized into three states: Kashi, Kosala, and Magadha, and the chiefdom (*gana-sangha*) of Vrijjis. Magadha (today's Bihar) played the role of the state in unifying much of the subcontinent under a single house. By 461 B.C. Magadha controlled the Ganges delta and much of the lower course of the river. It was invaded by Alexander the Great during the short-lived Nanda dynasty. It was during that period that the *Arthashastra* appeared, a treatise in Indian statecraft, by the Brahmin writer Kautilya. According to Fukuyama, although the *Arthashastra* delved into a set of values and social structure, it was outside politics. A comparison between the Indian empire of Ashoka with the Chinese empire founded by Qin Shi Huangdi, which came into being at the same time, showed that the Qin empire had many characteristics of a true state including a uniform system of regional subdivisions while the Ashoka had none. Much later, and after the emergence of Islam, India was invaded by Turko-Afghan Muslims. By the early thirteenth century, the sultanate of Delhi was conquered by the Mamluk dynasty of Qutb-ud-din Aybak.

The ancient civilizations of the Middle East had long disappeared by the time that the first Arab state appeared in the form of the Islamic Caliphate, although the latter borrowed ideas from the ancient states of Persia and Byzantium. Before the appearance of the Islamic Caliphate, Arabia was largely stateless and its societies were essentially tribal and violent. The future Prophet Muhammad, who according with the Muslim tradition received his first revelation when he was forty years old, was born in A.D. 570 in Mecca, into the Quraysh

tribe. He soon started to preach to Meccan tribes but was forced to move to Medina in 622. In Medina, he was asked to mediate between local tribal disputes, a task he carried out by drafting a kind of Constitution of Medina, a document that defined a community of believers, the Umma, that transcended tribal loyalties. According to Fukuyama, Muhammad's polity marked a break with the existing kin based-system and set the conditions for the Arabian state that emerged under the charismatic leadership of Muhammad. Since Muhammad died without a son his political power passed to one of his companions in the Umayyad clan, a segment of the Quraysh tribe, which evolved into a dynasty. Although the Arab state soon developed into an empire they never managed to remove its tribal traditions that influenced both the administration of government and its armies.

One of the tribal traditions that the new Arab state incorporated was the institution of military slavery. Thanks to it the Muslim empire was able to expand fast. By the end of its third caliphate it incorporated the entire Arab peninsula and large parts of today's Lebanon, Syria, Iraq, Iran, and Egypt. It fought the Persians and won, it continued to expand into Damascus, Northern Africa, Anatolia, Sind and Central Asia; in 711 Arab armies reached Spain and conquered it; and continued their path of conquest France and Portugal. The caliphs al-Ma'mun (813-833) and al-Mu'tasim (833-842) started to obtain Turkish slaves known as Mamluks and train them as soldiers. In spite of the power of Mamluk regiments, the Abbasid empire did not survive, although the institution of military slavery was crucial for Islam in the next centuries. A Mamluk sultanate was established in Egypt and it managed to sustain itself for a long time as well as to stave off attacks by the Mongols. The Ottoman Turks who had conquered Constantinople in 1453 began to expand and in 1517 they defeated the Mamluks. The Ottoman state perfected military slavery and then emerged and expanded into Europe.

In Europe, the process of state building resembled those of other parts of the world. In Europe, the fragmented tribal societies dominated by kinship evolved to feudal societies dominated by elites formed by warriors and risk-taking individuals. Like other parts of the world, it was a tortuous process peppered with civil wars and fanaticisms. Gradually the feudal societies became organized around estates and a monarch who relied on the elites for support. Such estates were the Parliament in England, the *Cortes* in Spain and Portugal, the sovereign courts in France, the *Diet* in Hungary and the *zemskiy sobor* in Russia. The role of religion in European state building was linked to the Catholic Church. From the end of the Middle Ages to the beginning of World War I the European state system changed from some four hundred sovereign entities to twenty-five states.

Although the East has a claim for the first states, the first modern states appeared three centuries ago in Europe. A close look at five countries showed that each had their unique aspects and conditions that affected how and when their modern rule of law and accountability in government came about. According to Fukuyama, the process of the European Rule of Law started in the twelfth century and took several more centuries to complete. Although England was the first to achieve accountability in government, this had the cost of a destructive civil war. Denmark, on the other hand, managed to obtain both the rule of law and accountability in government without civil wars. Although the singularities of each society means that there can be no universal formula for state building or rebuilding, states can be models for one another and some models are more useful than others. The case of Denmark inspired international development technocrats to coin the phrase '*getting to Denmark*', meaning how to achieve modernity peacefully.

Francis Fukuyama is a 59 years American political scientist who obtained his first degree in classics from Cornell University and his PhD in Political Science from Harvard, and a self-

described nonpartisan. Author of several books and many book chapters, mostly in Political Science, he is currently at Stanford University, California, where he is the Olivier Nomellini Senior Fellow at the Freeman Spogli Institute of International Studies. Previous to that he was at the Paul H. Nitze School of Advanced International Studies (SAIS) of John Hopkins University. His book, *The Origins of Political Order* is an expert opinion on international politics with well documented facts, sound terminology, extensive chapter notes and bibliography. With a massive amount of information of cultures outside the West this work is an ideal starting point to seek out sound answers for modern concerns such as the extent to which Islam represents a threat to the West and how to tackle any challenge. As Fukuyama pointed out, each country's past predisposes it to a unique path of development and this is why an awareness of the past is necessary to resolve the problems of the present. Without knowledge of their own past, countries will remain constrained by crutches they no longer need. This book's portrayal of the social history of the world's most important societies and the comparison of equivalent institutions in different societies offers a comprehensive insight of other cultures and a better understanding of our own Western culture.