

Post-Historical Factor in the Contemporary Political Process: a Philosophical Analysis

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Abstract

The article aims to reveal the features of how the ideas of the end of history and post-history influence the contemporary political process. The adherents to the concept of the end of history, while considering the collapse of authoritarianism and totalitarianism and the withdrawal of any alternatives to liberalism from the historical scene, ignore the deep crisis of the liberal ideology and liberal-democratic regimes. The main fallacy of the adherents of the end of history and the post-history concepts is the confusion of the sense of the end of history that has developed in the public consciousness with the completion of historical development. The way out of this situation is developing the paradigm of linear historical development, which can adequately respond to the current political crisis, rather than claiming the end of history.

Keywords: end of history; post-history; political process; ideology; philosophy of history

1. Introduction

In the late 20th century, the ideas of the end of history and of humanity entering the post-historical era became frequent. For a while, these two ideas were subject to active discussion among scholars and even covered in newspapers and journals. Nowadays, at first glance, they seem to recede far into the background. For this reason, one may see all that as of a

temporary interest; the ideas are out of fashion now and have fell into oblivion. However, it is a deceptive impression.

One should assume that the notion of the end of history or at least that of the deadlock state into which humanity has entered are deeply rooted in the contemporary public consciousness. It should be emphasized that the concepts of the end of history and post-history are not the cause, but the consequence of the uncertain situation in which humanity has found itself.

This uncertainty is especially dangerous in the political process, which ultimately defines the direction of social development. In this respect, philosophy should aim at revealing the onset and background of a theory rather than overthrowing it. In the view of philosophical analysis, the nature of paradigm sets formed by post-historical ideas concerning political processes triggers particular interest within the current article.

This article aims to reveal the peculiarities of how the ideas of the end of history and post-history affect the contemporary political process.

2. Ambivalence of Contemporary Criticism of Concepts of the End of History and Post-History

The concepts of the end of history and post-history are not the fruits of some philosophizing intellectual's imagination. They result from comprehending real tendencies incident to the contemporary political process. Along with that, they represent metaphysical (in the traditional sense) one-dimensional perceptions of contradictory characteristics of the contemporary political processes.

The idea of the end of history was always present in linear concepts of philosophy and history, for example, in the studies by Hegel, Marx, Jaspers, etc. Nevertheless, it was Francis Fukuyama (1990) who first transferred this idea from the exclusively philosophical and historical dimension to political philosophy. He defined the competition of political ideologies as a content of an historical process. In his opinion, as it was the liberal ideology, which has no serious alternatives

hereafter, that won in the ideological struggle, the historical process is complete.

Very few scholars share his conclusion about the end of history. However, his statement about the victory of the liberal ideology was indirectly – if not directly – supported by many. It can be confirmed by existing conclusions about the integration of modern ideologies mainly based on liberal values (Dalton, Welzel, 2014), the transition of political struggle from strategic problems to daily, routine tasks (Dalton & Welzel 2014; Grant 2001), universal recognition of liberal rights and liberties (Akram, Marsh & McCaffrie 2014; Kimlicka 2014; Richards Smith 2014), etc.

But the majority of researchers, including the adherents to the post-history concept, evaluate the contemporary political process in the opposite way. The concept of the end of history was subject to the most severe criticism by Jacques Derrida (1994), who qualified Fukuyama's work *The End of History and the Last Man* as 'new testament rhetoric': he considered frivolous the apology for the triumph of the capitalism or economic and political liberalism, for the 'universalization of the Western liberal democracy as the final point of human government,' and for 'the end to the problem of class antagonism'. 'What cynicism of "pure consciousness" what intellectual blindness can make one write, and even believe, that "everything that stood in the way of the reciprocal recognition of human dignity, always and everywhere, has been refuted and buried by history"' (Derrida 1994, 98). Besides, Baudrillard (1983) convincingly demonstrated that the peculiar feature of modernity is the end of the political rather than the triumph of democracy. It is appropriate to mention as well the theorists of multiculturalism admitting that the contemporary liberal democracy requires significant corrections (Grant 2001; Guo & Wong 2015; Wieviorka 2014).

It is slightly more complicated concerning the theory of post-history. It is also evoked by the contemporary political process, but by its crisis manifestations. Firstly, its adherents stress that currently there is no political ideology capable of addressing all the critical problems of modernity. According to Derrida, 'A set of transformations of all sorts (in particular,

techno-scientifico-economico-media) exceeds both the traditional givens of the Marxist discourse and those of the liberal discourse opposed to it. Even if we have inherited some essential resources for projecting their analysis, we must first recognize that these mutations perturb the onto-theological schemas or the philosophies of technics as such. They disturb political philosophies and the common concepts of democracy, they oblige us to reconsider all relations between State and nation, man and citizen, the private and the public, and so forth' (Derrida 1994, 88). Secondly, they prove that the peculiarity of the contemporary society is its increasing political indifference (Baudrillard 1983).

On their parallel ways to the conclusions of the theory of post-history there were also the social and humanitarian sciences. Originally, the linear understanding of the historical process was based on the philosophical studies by Hegel, Marx and other thinkers of the Modern History. It implied the human ability to comprehend the meaning and orientation of the historical process. However, as soon as in the late 19th century, neo-kantianism, neo-hegelianism, neopositivism and postpositivism as well as many others questioned this ability. And indeed empirical historians initiated the transition from macro- to micro-history. Therefore, as Franklin Ankersmit reasonably underlines, the transition from speculative philosophy of history to historicism and then to postmodern philosophy of history, i.e. post-history, is a fairly consistent outcome (Ankersmit 1994).

Invidious postmodern conclusions about the wreck of the 'Enlightenment Project' were most substantially grounded by Jürgen Habermas (1987). His criticism of posthistorical views on the political process was supported by adherents to both antimulticulturalism (Joppke 2004; Malik 2015) and liberal ideology (Akram, Marsh & McCaffrie 2014; Dalton & Welzel 2014; Thomassen 2015).

This notwithstanding, the criticism of both the theory of the end of history and that of post-history seem one-dimensional. In other words, while revealing their theoretic and methodological drawbacks critics fail to pay enough attention to

a certain legitimacy of their argument. Therefore, this research attempts to conduct a dialectical analysis of these theories.

3. Main Approaches to Interpretation of Concepts of “The End of History” and “Post-History”

In contemporary science the concepts of ‘the end of history’ and ‘post-history’ have two interpretations. The first of them – within linear philosophy – implies that ‘the end of history’ means the termination of the historical development of humankind, while ‘post-history’ (‘post-historical society’) is the name of the final stage. In particular, this is how they are understood in the famous concept of Francis Fukuyama (1990). According to the second interpretation, which derives from postmodern philosophy, ‘the end of history’ and ‘post-history’ mean that the previous understanding of the historical process becomes a thing of the past. In order to prevent confusion, this article understands the end of history according to the first definition and refers the second one to post-history.

The theories of the end of history and post-history are sure to affect public consciousness in various ways. Therefore, it should be taken into consideration in the course of studying the influence of post-historical ideas on the contemporary public consciousness. Taking this circumstance into account is possible due to the application of comparative analysis.

Along with that, the peculiar feature of the contemporary time is a curious combination of the ideas of the end of history and post-history that exists in the public consciousness in many countries. In other words, researching the influence of post-historical ideas on the contemporary political process implies separate consideration of how both ideas affect practice, while public consciousness should be considered as something synthesized from these both theories. The consideration of these both circumstances is only possible by relying upon analysis, synthesis and a system method.

The problem of correlation between social theories and political practice is most completely solved through dialectical method. In particular, it implies that social theories reflect fundamental tendencies of political practice, but they also significantly influence its course.

It should be noted that the idea of the end of history has nothing new – it was present in all linear concepts of the philosophy of history. It functioned as a kind of historical orienting point, then, in Fukuyama's concept, where it obtains another meaning and turns into a kind of starting point. Therefore, this research applies historical method to take into account historical variability of methodological and worldview-related (axiological) dimensions of the concept of the end of history.

Lastly, it should be clarified that this article understands the end of history according to Fukuyama's interpretation. As for 'post-history', there is no consonance concerning its definition in postmodern philosophy, and so the main reference is made to Jean Baudrillard's interpretation.

4. Liberalism, the Social, the Individual: Post-History versus the End of History

The main argument of Fukuyama in favour of the end of history is the collapse of authoritarian and totalitarian regimes, the oblivion of all the alternatives to liberalism, and 'final' establishment of liberal ideology in the public consciousness of the humankind. It is very hard to object to the first part of the argument, while the second one is completely unacceptable. The point is that Fukuyama did not pay attention to the fact that liberalism (both as ideology and as practice) was also involved in severe crisis. In this regard, postmodernism seems more consistent because it declares the 'decline' of modernist metanarratives in general, including universal ideologies.

It is mainly agreed that contemporary democracy faces a serious crisis. All the manifestations of the crisis can be divided into two groups based on their temporal dimension. In other words, it is the crisis of democracy today and that in the future.

The crisis of democracy today is primarily manifested in the decline in confidence in contemporary democratic institutions. For instance, according to Richards and Smith (2014), the proportion of those who had 'almost never' believed that the British government prioritized social needs over political interests increased from 10% in 1974 up to 40% in 2009. Akram, Marsh & McCaffrie (2014) draw attention to the widespread drop in political participation in developed liberal

countries. Although the authors specify the emergence of new forms of political participation, the crisis of traditional forms is obvious. Thus, in post-war Great Britain about 80% of the population took part in general elections, while in the early 21st century this figure accounted for only 50-60%. According to Akram, Marsh & McCaffrie (2014), Armingeon & Guthmann (2014), and Thomassen (2015), party membership fell by half or more in France, Norway, Sweden, Finland, Switzerland, and Ireland compared to the 1980s.

In this regard, one even concludes that in developed democratic countries a devoted, loyal citizen is being substituted by a new assertive one as a type of political culture (Dalton & Welzel 2014). The previous political culture was characterized by high confidence in institutions, high participation in elections and other conventional forms of legitimate activities. A new political culture is characterized by low confidence in institutions and the participation in non-violent activity that is provocative towards elites. On the one hand, the new culture bearers are adherent to democracy, but on the other hand, they are unsatisfied with the realization (implementation) of democracy in their country (Dalton & Welzel 2014).

It should be underlined that the crisis began back in the 1960s. The research conducted then demonstrated the same data. Thus, the group of scholars led by Dalton (2002) reported that the proportion of strong party adherents declined by 26% in the Great Britain; in Sweden, Austria and Australia – by 15%; in Norway – by 9% and in the USA – by 7% (Dalton & Welzel 2014, 262-263). Webb, Farrell & Holliday (2002) conducted similar research and revealed the same data in all the 16 Western democracies under study, which allowed the authors to state the impossibility of denying the weakening of public support for political parties in the majority of Western democracies. In Canada, the number of those who trust political parties declined from 30% in 1979 to 11% in 1996 and in Germany – from 43% in 1979 to 26% in 1993 (Dalton & Wattenberg 2002, 28).

An ideology should conform not only to the present but also to the future. In other words, it should be capable of solving possible prospective problems. If looking at the problem

under study through this lens, the prospects of liberalism are far from being positive. Dahl (1989) convincingly demonstrated that the modern liberal democratic system may function efficiently only in a nation-state. However, nowadays, as a result of globalization, nation-states are becoming a thing of the past and national identity is diffusing, i.e. the foundations of liberal democracy are being demolished.

In this respect, the ability of liberal ideology to extrapolate its values and practices to new social relations assumes significance. In this regard, it is sure that the most serious challenge for liberalism is multiculturalism. Some prove that it represents a new stage of liberal development, is consistent, getting widespread, and takes root; (Kimlicka 2014; Guo & Wong, 2015; Wieviorka 2014), others claim its failure and that it undermines the foundations of liberalism (Joppke 2004; Malik 2015). Although there is no consensus concerning the achievements of multiculturalism, the fact that liberalism has to solve this problem is undeniable. If one manages to insert the provisions of multiculturalism into liberal ideology, it may safely be said that it will not be the same (i.e. current) liberalism.

Fukuyama does not mention anything concerning these manifestations of crisis that the contemporary liberal democracy is involved in. Acknowledging that contemporary democracy faces a large number of problems, he refers to drug abuse, homelessness, criminality, ecological catastrophes, and thoughtless consumerism. He states that ‘these problems are not obviously insoluble on the basis of liberal principles, nor so serious that they would necessarily lead to the collapse of society as a whole, as communism collapsed in the 1980s.’ (Fukuyama 1992, xxi).

As there does not yet exist any proper solutions to these problems, it is untimely to claim that one has found the optimal ideology. In this respect, the theory of the end of history has an extremely negative influence on the solution to the stated problems, creating an illusion of solving all the critical problems and channeling ideological struggle in the wrong directionsure enough that historical process is infinite, applying the terms used by Karl Popper (2013), and represents a

sequence of shifts from a less perfect ideology to a more perfect one.

Unlike the adherents of the end of history, their counterparts supporting the theory of post-history bring the crisis of contemporary democracy to the forefront rather than turn a blind eye to it. In particular, Baudrillard explicitly states, 'the only genuine problem today is the silence of the mass, the silence of the silent majority' (Baudrillard 1983, 23-24).

One has to agree with him that such political indifference should not be explained through the manipulation of consciousness, although it should not be completely ignored either. Baudrillard explains the indifference of the masses through being ontologically inherent in them: 'this indifference of the masses is their true, their only practice, that there is no other ideal of them to imagine, nothing in this to deplore, but everything to analyse as the brute fact of a collective retaliation and of a refusal to participate in the recommended ideals, however enlightened. Nevertheless, this is the very thing that makes the masses be what they are' (Baudrillard 1983, 14).

According to Baudrillard (1983), Modern History saw the "rise and fall of the political". He states that the political and the social were inseparable since the French Revolution. The political manifested the social, with the latter becoming its content. However, the emergence of Marxism initiated the hegemony of the social and the economic, with the political converting to its reflection. Having expelled the political and become omnipresent, now the social backfired; it suffered the same fate as the political: '...the social itself no longer has any name. Anonymous. THE MASS. THE MASSES' (Baudrillard 1983, 19).

Baudrillard interprets the social as a feature that is only inherent to modernist society. However, now 'chaotic' society replaces that with fixed structure and relations. Baudrillard states: 'the social has well and truly existed, but does not exist anymore' (Baudrillard 1983, 82). Along with the social, the political is also becoming a thing of the past.

There is a need to dwell on two key problems that Baudrillard raised, namely, the end of the social and the nature of the masses. He understands both definitions ('the social' and 'the masses') in a specific way.

Conventionally, social relations are defined as those that people establish in the course of the reproduction of social being. Such understanding of social relations exists in any society, while, according to Baudrillard, the social exists only in modernist society. Is such understanding of the social legitimate?

On the one hand, no one would question the specific features of social relations in modernist society. Baudrillard attached great importance to the temporal factor, stressing the sustainability and stability of social relations.

On the other hand, when accelerating and changing quite rapidly, do they stop being social? Yes, sure, in its classical meaning. Indeed, social relations change more rapidly than one can comprehend them and develop a strategy for their adaptation, let alone the inability to foresee and, certainly, to regulate them. Nevertheless, in their conventional meaning, social relations still exist. Consequently, a point should be made about new means to comprehend and regulate social relations.

In this respect, the explanation of the specific feature of postmodern social relations, which the adherents of the theory of post-industrial society suggested, seems more substantial. In particular, concerning the transformation of education, Alvin Toffler stated, “in stagnant societies, the past crept forward into the present and repeated itself in the future. In such a society, the most sensible way to prepare a child was to arm him with the skills of the past” (Toffler 1971, 398). The industrial education of the masses focused on (1) teaching well-known skills and (2) making a person disciplined. However, this system becomes obsolete in the post-industrial society. If knowledge gets out of date quickly, there is no need to remember it. In post-industrial society, ‘education must prepare people to function in temporary organizations—the Ad-hocracies of tomorrow’ (Toffler 1971, 400).

Conventionally, the term “the masses’ refers to atomized and alienated individuals. Such individuals are known to appear during the decomposition of traditional society and the establishment of the industrial one. These processes leave some individuals outside the system of traditional relations. Therefore, such an individual seeks to connect with those of

their kind and blend into the society of such individuals. José Ortega y Gasset noted, 'The mass is all that which sets no value on itself—good or ill—based on specific grounds, but which feels itself "just like everybody," and nevertheless is not concerned about it; is, in fact, quite happy to feel itself as one with everybody else' (Ortega y Gasset 1932, 14-15). Erich Fromm made a legitimate comment that one of the main mechanisms of 'escape from freedom' is a transformation of person into an 'automation': 'the individual ceases to be himself; he adopts entirely the kind of personality offered to him by cultural patterns; and he therefore becomes exactly as all others are and as they expect him to be. The discrepancy between "I" and the world disappears and with it the conscious fear of aloneness and powerlessness' (Fromm 1960, 160).

It would be quite appropriate to stress that Baudrillard's statement about the masses generally contradicts the postmodernist idea of a fragmented world, society and subject. The fragmentation of society means that a single social environment is torn into separate pieces, with every individual being isolated in their own little world. Such an individual does not seek to blend into society, nor become similar to others, but, conversely, he/she tries to stand out from the society, become nothing like others.

This contradiction is likely to be triggered by the following circumstance. On the one hand, postmodernists had an intuitive feeling of an unusual type of society being established. On the other hand, different representatives of postmodernism prioritize various characteristics of this society. What is that new society like?

Social sciences provide the knowledge that in the infancy of mankind, people lived in communities (that sometimes called 'Gemeinschaft'). This community was based on 'natural', tribal relations. Then, it has been substituted by society in its modern meaning, i.e. based on rational relations (defined as 'Gesellschaft'). This society is where a nation is formed, i.e. individuals that realize their interests and rationally regulate their relationships.

However, the transition from community to society can trigger the emergence of the masses, i.e., as said, individuals

that seek to blend into a community of their kind. In post-industrial society, it is not unexpected that individuals increasingly focus on satisfying their personal needs. Such society makes an impression of being a mass society, in the sense that all the people are involved in solving their personal problems in similar way. They are not a nation determined to pursue collective interests any more. However, it is not a mass society in its traditional meaning as individuals act separately. Baudrillard pays attention only to one feature of a new society – the unwillingness of individuals to be concerned about common problems. Along with this, he is right that the established society is strikingly different from the former, industrial one and requires deep research.

There is no doubt that there are many factors that cause this political indifference of the masses, with the delegitimization of modern democratic institutions being a major consideration. These institutions were meant to solve the problems of the development of the modernist society, so they do not correspond to a further development of the post-industrial one. This problem produces a fundamental issue of orientation and points to the further development of society. Besides, researchers are both concerned (Kutyryov 2016; Omelchenko 2017) and optimistic (Mattern & Floerkemeier 2016; Santucci 2016) about the opportunities of further scientific and technical progress influencing social and human relations.

Neither the concept of the end of history nor that of post-history contribute to the solution of the stated issue. Their main drawback is the excessive influence of determinism. This is a paradox, especially for post-modernism. Claiming the end to metanarratives (universal theories) (Chotchaeva & Sosnovskii 2017, 179), it implicitly proposes a new one. It can be said that it is the metanarratives of the past, not metanarratives in general, that have become obsolete.

5. Conclusions

The concepts of both the end of history and post-history manifest the contradictory nature of the political processes that unfold nowadays. Along with that, they are one-dimensional expression of various tendencies. The concept of the end of

history expresses such features of the contemporary political process as the end of ideological struggle, the priority of short-term factors over long-term ones, worldwide spread of liberal values and practices. The concept of post-history expresses such features of the contemporary political process as the crisis of democratic institutions and the decline in political participation. Both concepts mix the ideas of the termination of the historical process and that of the (real) historical process itself in the public consciousness.

The concepts of both the end of history and post-history have a reverse influence on the contemporary political process. The concept of the end of history, while substantiating the end of political and ideological struggles, drives away from the comprehension of the increasingly fundamental contradictions of modern society. The concept of post-history, while substantiating the end of the political, creates the wrong idea about the insoluble social and political contradictions.

The main fallacy of the concepts of the end of history and that of post-history is the interpretation of the feeling of the end of history and the deadlocked state of the historical progress formed in the public consciousness as the termination of historical development. Stressing this aspect of the situation, the theories unconsciously worsen it.

The way to overcome the current state of affairs is to avoid claiming the end of history and to work out a paradigm of linear historical development that is able to become a new political ideology that would adequately respond to the political crisis. That said, suggesting working out a linear paradigm, no single option of development should be claimed as the only possible way of considering the contemporary methodology (involving the synergy of diverse perspectives).

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