

The “End of History” and the “Last Man” in Europe—The Contemporary Rise of Illiberalism

Gábor Dániel Nagy 

Department of Social Studies, University of Szeged, Szeged, Hungary
Email: gabor.d.nagy@gmail.com

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Abstract

The concept of the “End of History” was originally developed by G. W. F. Hegel in the *Phenomenology of the spirit* in 1806 (Hegel, 2018). The concept can be closely related to a utopia, the completion of the work of philosophers, and the creation of a perfect framework of the finished system of ideas. Hegel had a lot of influence on Western philosophy with the development of this idea and on Marx, who obviously thought of history in dialectic terms. However, he developed the idea of “communism”, which would have been a state of humankind very similar to the concept of Hegel, with no class differences and no opiates of the people—and no place for further development (Marx & Engels, 2002). The “End of History” is based on this theoretical viewpoint that mankind has reached the final and most advanced form of societal development. However, the theorists and their intellectual followers both have to realize a painful way that the phenomenon can only be attained preliminarily. It proves to be a utopia.

Keywords

Illiberalism, End of History, Last Man, Utopia, Europe

1. The End of History

In 1806’s *Phenomenology of the Spirit*, written by G.W.F. Hegel, the idea of the “End of History” was presented for the first time (Hegel, 2018). It’s possible to draw parallels between this idea and utopia, as well as the completion of the work done by philosophers, and the development of a flawless structure for the complete set of thoughts.

With the creation of this theory, Hegel had a significant impact on Western

philosophy, and Marx, who evidently conceived of history in dialectic terms.

On the other hand, he came up with the concept of “communism”, which would have been a condition of humankind comparable to Hegel’s conception, except that there would have been no distinctions in class and no opiates used by the people, and there would have been no room for future progress (Marx & Engels, 2002). The “End of History” has nothing to do with communism; it is rather the final say on behalf of science to end all forms of totalitarianism.

2. The Last Man

The concept of the “Last Man—Letzter Mensch” comes from Friedrich Nietzsche’s (2005) *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, and it is also part of a dichotomy—there is the first man and the last man in Nietzsche’s philosophical understanding. The last man is also a theoretical form to express the end of development, but the last man is far from perfect (it is not the Overman-Übermensch). Also, the last man does not stand any deviations from itself, still having the same needs as the first man, but judging its predecessors as “mad”. Shaw (2014) provides a great interpretation of the concept and demonstrates its influence on the seminal work of Max Weber (2002) on the connection between Protestantism and the rise of capitalism. It also draws a parallel with the scripture—at the times of Judgment, Jesus Christ will judge the dead and live. Jesus himself is the real God and real man—theologically speaking based on Christian thinking Jesus’s second coming will be the coming of the “last man” to judge all others. Eschatologically, the last man is not a person but a level of development or action of supernatural powers in concluding the work of creation on behalf of God.

3. Fukuyama’s Interpretation of the Two Concepts in 1989/1991

The euphoria of the fall of communism in the Eastern Bloc in 1989/1990 brought many Western scholars, including Francis Fukuyama (2006), to the conclusion that liberal democracy was able to take over everywhere in the world, and thus we are coming close to the end of history. Fukuyama also took the concept of the last man and integrated it into his theory. The End of History would not have meant the end of events, and the Last Man was not perfect. However, it was idealized to be free from the madness of its predecessors by Fukuyama (2006) himself. He first wrote about the idea in 1989 in the *Journal American Prospect*, which later developed into a full book. His optimistic and overly idealistic thinking was immediately scrutinized and attacked by many members of the scientific community, to be finally proven wrong by the worldwide rise of illiberalism, especially exemplified in Central-Eastern Europe, his muse region of the original theory. This idea was also proven wrong by the bloody Yugoslav wars, which even led to the Genocide of Srebrenica, one of the most horrifying events at the end of the 20th century (Dale, 2014). Fukuyama wanted to cherish the fall of the land of absolute evil—the fall of the Soviet Union. He was too fast to think

that the fall of communism also led to the final stage of human development. There were many things that could alter the scope and direction of reality towards ideas that are not as clear and simplistic. The illiberal thinking really intends to keep former conservative ideals alive, not only by making concessions to totalitarian systems still in existence, such as communist dictatorships. The ideals that kept the World divided into a bipolar system of states are still useful for many politicians to keep their electorate active and aware of the dangers they face in case they abandon their own habits and customs (Halecki & Halecki, 1952). It is a possible retrograde way of thinking that might lead back to the resurrection of the enemy in order to strengthen contemporary illiberal rule. Liberalism wasn't able to answer these challenges properly, and the *naïveté* of leading global thinkers enabled many illiberal personas to gain power and prestige in the 21st century.

4. The Roots of the Rise of Illiberalism in CEE History

Central and Eastern Europe always used to be a puffer region between empires, as Brzezinski (2001) refers to the concept in his 2001 writing. The area between Western Europe and Russia was always a zone for taking in the eyes of conquerors and was usually ruled by outside rulers during its history. After the reconciliation of 1868, the Austro-Hungarian Empire was short-lived (Treaty of Saint-Germain-en-Laye, 10 September 1919; Treaty of Trianon, 4 June 1920) (Wallace, 1999). It was the only truly Central and Eastern European Empire, and it only existed for around 50 years, mostly ruled by Franz Joseph, and was a constant target of the rising nationalism of the oppressed ethnicities living under the rules of foreign powers during most of their history. The Holy Roman Empire of the German Nation, the Ottoman Empire, Napoleon's empire, the Third Reich and the "Soviet Empire" kept Central and Eastern Europe under foreign rule for most of its history. The rise of nationalism in the 19th century led to many independence movements causing conflicts and the dissolution of the Austro-Hungarian Empire (e.g., Beneš, 1916), which disregarded the interests of its constituting ethnicities, except for Austrians and Hungarians.

The general struggle for nationhood and sovereignty left its unerasable traces on all countries of Europe, thus leaving a "Wounded Identity" (Máté-Tóth, 2019) in all the contemporary countries of central and Eastern Europe. Empires came and went, rulers gained and lost owners, but the people were the same under their rule, whose interests were seldom served by any political system.

5. Contemporary Illiberalism in Hungary and Poland

The two exemplary states of illiberalism are Hungary and Poland. Both countries are led by powerful right-wing leaders, and right-wing ideology is claimed to be based on traditional Christian values. These countries even allied themselves against other European Union member states by vetoing a State of the Rule of Law observation initiative on behalf of the European Commission and propa-

gated unanimously by the European Parliament. Illiberalism takes precedence over the end of history. It is characterized by charismatic political leaders who emphasize the primogeniture of their own nation over others. They deny the concept of the United States of Europe and propagate a confederation of sovereign European states. Jaroslaw Kaczynsky and Viktor Orbán were the two leaders. They expressed their commitment to protecting their countries from pluralistic ideas coming from the Western part of Europe and from anything that would affect their countries' societal and political structures.

However, coming back to Fukuyama (2014), but in this instance, his 2014 work, these political regimes demonstrate the failures of liberal democracies by making the rise of populist illiberal leaders possible.

6. Illiberalism or Populism?

Based on our observations so far, we must pose the question: are the political regimes of contemporary Poland and Hungary illiberal or are those just under the rule of populist leaders? As far as populism is concerned, it is no longer possible to define a clear difference between Eastern and Western Europe. As Cas Mudde and Kaltwasser (2017), a populist expert, stated in an interview, there are many differences among the regions: "Western and Eastern Europe". However, behind the rising tendencies of populism, there are differences in cultural and societal processes in addition to populist tendencies in the Eastern and Western parts of Europe. One of the differences is that in the Eastern half of Europe, people were socialized under communist ideology and circumstances (a kind of empire...). This is a correct, yet overly simplified statement. For an appropriate understanding of populism in the European region, it is necessary to take the general geopolitical, geo-cultural and cultural heritage of the region into account all at once when analyzing populist tendencies. History and philosophy have a major role in this work soon. If this work is not done properly and swiftly, than the divided bipolar World will never disappear, and the infighting among humans will never cease to exist. The grand philosophical ideas shall be brought to life by proving to be good examples of our predecessors: we should really develop to be able to end the liberal and illiberal thinking, and shall elect to pursue a way of life compatible with the needs of humanity: to live in peace and harmony with each other, nature, and the supernatural powers themselves.

7. Conclusion

Contemporary illiberalism is probably just a short stop in the history of Central and Eastern Europe. The ideas of Hegel and Nietzsche, interpreted by influential contemporary scholars, are here to stay. They will always be basic philosophical frameworks for historians and philosophers, political scientists, and sociologists working on the analyses of their contemporary political and societal systems. Illiberalism is most probably a mere station in the history of Central Europe, and we can hope that the "End of History" and "The Last man" can someday arrive to fulfill their prophesized roles in human evolution by their progenitors and

many proponents in this geographical region and the Whole World as well.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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