

## NOTE

## Identity and Telos: Political Questions as Metaphysics and Metaphysics as Political Questions in Christendom and the Enlightenment

Jason Morgan

Contemporary philosopher Michael Sandel terms the Cartesian individual exercising Hobbesian autonomy in a world without abiding attachment the “unencumbered self”. The unencumbered self, Sandel says, “rules out the possibility of what we might call *constitutive* ends.”<sup>1)</sup> For Sandel, various unencumbered selves, linked into ad hoc communities by political power but with no abiding attachments implied, are the building blocks of modern politics and other associative activities.

Seen from this perspective, the traditional ways of categorizing human beings, such as belonging to nations (from Latin *natus*, “born [to, into]”), religious groups, tribes, professional guilds, or clans — and later to nation-states and, even more artificially, to races — hold no real taxonomic power over the radically autonomous self. It is not that someone is or is not, say, a female, a Catholic, a Mayan, a nurse, a Guatemalan, or a Latina — all things that many people would predicate of a person with two  $\chi$  chromosomes who was born and raised in Guatemala City to an old Mayan family and who spent her weekdays caring for patients at a hospital and her Sunday mornings at Holy Mass. Rather, it is that anyone can choose to be any of these things, regardless of tradition, training, or communal understanding of belonging. If the unencumbered self is a free radical, it can attach to any cluster of atoms and become part of any gathering of other free radicals, based only on the will. As has been shown by a number of bewildering news items over the past decade, white women can “identify” as black, men can “identify” as women, women can “identify” as men, adults can “identify” as babies, and, in some cases, humans can “identify” as hippopotamuses, dogs, elves, or anything else imaginable.<sup>2)</sup>

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1) Michael Sandel, *Public Philosophy: Essays on Morality in Politics*, 162, cited in David Gordon, “Michael Sandel’s Case for Statism,” at Mises.org, published January 17, 2006. <https://mises.org/es/library/michael-sandels-case-statism>

2) See Andy Pulman and Jacqui Taylor, “Munchausen by Internet: Current Research and Future Directions,” *Journal of Medical Internet Research*, vol. 14, no. 4 (Jul.–Aug., 2012). doi: 10.2196/jmir.2011,

Identity, or willed belonging indifferent to traditional, biological, or institutional recognition of membership, has slowly become the ground of modern politics, even of modernity. But what is identity, in this voluntarist-political sense, and how did it overtake much older, and, one would think, more demanding markers of group membership? What is the identity of identity, the intellectual history of what is, properly speaking, an anti-idea, a triumph of the will? Francis Fukuyama's new book, *Identity: The Demand for Dignity and the Politics of Resentment* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2018), is an attempt to understand and explain the identity phenomenon, and then to weave it into a larger understanding of the modern political landscape while prognosticating the future of what Sandel might call the "clothed unencumbered self".

Fukuyama, of course, gained worldwide notoriety with the publication of his 1989 essay, "The End of History?" and then follow-up book, *The End of History and the Last Man*.<sup>3)</sup> Fukuyama's argument in that suite was essentially Hegelian. The spirit of History, in the sense in which Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (1770–1831) had vindicated the politico-epistemological dogma of liberal democracy, was portrayed by Fukuyama as having brought the drama of history to a close, with the struggle for political format decided with the fall of the Berlin Wall and the collapse of the Soviet Union.<sup>4)</sup> As Fukuyama puts it in the closing passages of *The End of History and the Last Man*, what remains of history resembles a procession of wagons coming over a hill, all destined to arrive at the "end of history," namely, liberal democracy. What comes after the "end of history" is a sort of post-Hegelian promised land in which the world has arrived, or will soon arrive, at a political equilibrium, all liberal, all democratic, all taking part in the spirit of Hegelianism.

In *Identity*, Fukuyama is back on familiar Hegelian ground. But this time Fukuyama's argument is more multiplex. The first blush of triumphant Hegelianism is gone, done away with by the surge of movements around the world rejecting the liberal-democratic ascendancy, even finality, that Fukuyama peddled as a younger man, that rejection stemming largely, if not exclusively, from the failure of liberal democracy as a political system to satisfy the masses that liberal democrats claimed benevolently and disinterestedly to rule. What went wrong? Why did liberal democracy founder so? Fukuyama is now at pains to say that the encomium to Hegel that *seemed* to be the point of his earlier work was not the entire story. As he lays out in the preface to *Identity*, Fukuyama sees himself as having been

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Chayla Haynes, Saran Stewart, and Evette Allen, "Three Paths, One Struggle: Black Women and Girls Battling Invisibility in U.S. Classrooms," *The Journal of Negro Education*, vol. 85, no. 3, Why We Can't Wait: (Re) Examining the Opportunities and Challenges for Black Women and Girls in Education (Summer 2016), 380–391, and Emily James, "I've gone back to being a child': Husband and father-of-seven, 52, leaves his wife and kids to live as a transgender SIX-YEAR-OLD girl named Stefunknee," *Daily Mail*, December 11, 2015.

3) See Francis Fukuyama, "The End of History?" *The National Interest*, no. 16 (1989), 3–18, and *The End of History and the Last Man* (New York, NY: The Free Press, 1992).

4) See Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, "Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel," and Karl Popper, *The Open Society and Its Enemies* (reissued: Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2013).

largely misunderstood in his argument in *The End of History*. “My critics,” Fukuyama complains, “did not note that the original essay had a question mark at the end of the title, and they did not read the later chapters of *The End of History and the Last Man* that focused on the problem of Nietzsche’s Last Man.” (xiii) This re-emphasis of the Nietzschean element, the voluntaristic and atavistic spirit of the strongman that greatly troubles the likes of Francis Fukuyama, is a nod to the failure of the original Hegelian argument to account for, and predict, the turn away from liberal democracy that followed after a halcyon decade or so of high globalist liberalism swept much of the world. Fukuyama’s task in *Identity* is to explain why his critics, and also he himself, could not come sufficiently to terms with the nationalism and religion that should have long since disappeared were Fukuyama applying a strictly Hegelian, or democratic-socialist-Marxist, scheme to historical change. For Fukuyama, it is the Nietzschean element which was not sufficiently incorporated into the Hegelian schema. To the original atmospheric of Hegelian philosophizing Fukuyama now seeks to inject a due Nietzschean regard for *thymos* (θυμός), the ancient Greek understanding of “the part of the soul that craves recognition of dignity (xiii)”. Fukuyama’s remit in *Identity*, then, is to graft onto Hegel the Nietzsche part of the title of his world-famous book, and in so doing to recover identity for Hegelianism, and vice versa. If *thymos* can be tamed and Hegelianized, it can be rendered *isothymos*, equality of dignity desired and proffered. This done, the Hegelian “end of history” can get back on track, and the challenges to Fukuyama’s ideology can be discounted and the ideology preserved.

But it is precisely because Hegelianism is an ideology, a closed episteme with heavily Gnostic overtones, that Fukuyama’s project is doomed from the outset.<sup>5)</sup> Indeed, Fukuyamian Hegelianism conceals much more than it reveals. Fukuyama’s predication of early modern and modern history on Hegelian dialectics creates an automatic tautology of historical unfolding. According to the Fukuyamian position of neo-Hegelianism, liberal democracy is not just a destination for history but also an epistemology in its own right. When Fukuyama cites Samuel Huntington and Larry Diamond, for example, and in particular the latter’s notion of a “democratic recession” following the rise in the number of democratic states following the demise of Soviet Russia, the baseline for the analysis is that liberal democracy is the way the world should both look and be. (3–6)

The extension of liberal democracy is the neo-Kantian project of globalization and one world government. Fukuyama grows especially impatient with questions about globalization and all of its attendant policies, such as open borders and unrestricted free trade. When these things do not work, Fukuyama retreats from his Hegelian bailey to his Nietzschean motte, seeing the dark undercurrents of the human psyche at work in the frustration of the Hegelianism that should have gone according to globalist plans. This is the episte-

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5) See Eric Voegelin, *The New Science of Politics: An Introduction* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987).

mological tautology of liberal democracy that blinds Fukuyama and others like him. Fukuyama attempts to encapsulate the world in globalism and its conceits — to begin with liberal democracy and also end up there — and, when anyone objects, to fault them for having been slighted in globalism gone a little too far, too fast.

It is no coincidence, therefore, that the very first sentence of *Identity* reads, “This book would not have been written had Donald J. Trump not been elected president in November 2016.” (ix) President Trump is the wooden stake to the heart of the seemingly deathless G. W. F. Hegel, and Fukuyama can neither forgive nor understand the rejection of what appears to Fukuyama to be the is and the ought of the political world. What follows is largely the same old story of “resentment,” the mean-spirited disavowal of the goods of liberal democracy. Ironically, this emphasis on resentment reads much like Nietzschean *ressentiment*, although for obvious reasons Fukuyama is silent on this point. Instead, Fukuyama sticks to “resentment” as he and his fellow liberals now choose to define it, namely, as the refusal to abide by the liberal-democratic order. “Resentment” is also a heuristic device for investigating why Hegelianism does not ride smoothly at anchor. In *Identity*, it is the “resentment at indignities” (8) that Fukuyama wants to understand, why Hegelianism tends to eddy in identity politics.

It is a perfect confluence of intellectual historical strands when Fukuyama acknowledges that identity politics was a term popularized by developmental psychologist Erik Erikson (1902–1994) in the 1950s. (9) Echoing the psychological jargon of that time, Fukuyama sets his terms out in this way:

In this book, I will be using *identity* in a specific sense that helps us understand why it is so important to contemporary politics. Identity grows, in the first place, out of a distinction between one’s true inner self and an outer world of social rules and norms that does not adequately recognize that inner self’s worth or dignity. Individuals throughout human history have found themselves at odds with their societies. But only in modern times has the view taken hold that the authentic inner self is intrinsically valuable, and the outer society systematically wrong and unfair in its valuation of the former. It is not the inner self that has to be made to conform to society’s rules, but society itself that needs to change.

The inner self is the basis of human dignity, but the nature of that dignity is variable and has changed over time. In many early cultures, dignity is attributed to only a few people, often warriors who are willing to risk their lives in battle. In other societies, dignity is an attribute of all human beings, based on their intrinsic worth as people with agency. And in other cases, dignity is due to one’s membership in a larger group of shared memory and experience.

Finally, the inner sense of dignity seeks recognition. It is not enough that I have a sense of my own worth if other people do not publicly acknowledge it or, worse yet, if they denigrate me or don’t acknowledge my existence. Self-esteem [a term Fukuyama

earlier problematized in his discussion of the California Task Force to Promote Self-Esteem and Personal Social Responsibility (93 ff.)] arises out of esteem by others. Because human beings naturally crave recognition, the modern sense of identity evolves quickly into identity politics, in which individuals demand public recognition of their worth. Identity politics thus encompasses a large part of the political struggles of the contemporary world, from democratic revolutions to new social movements, from nationalism and Islamism to the politics on contemporary American university campuses. Indeed, the philosopher [sic] Hegel argued that the struggle for recognition was the ultimate driver of human history, a force that was key to understanding the emergence of the modern world. (9–10)

The stage is thus set at the beginning for the morality play that will unfold. Fukuyama sees society as a Hegelian ground of competing *thymoi*, with *isothymos* the equivalent, perhaps, of Ludwig von Mises' evenly-rotating economy, a state never achieved but always just over the horizon.<sup>6)</sup> Once human existence is seen as the drama of a craving for self-esteem working out against the struggle to have others esteem one, then it becomes easy to posit identity as the vehicle of that struggle. Fukuyama sees identity as helping us understand that economic inequality, one of his other oft-repeated watchwords, cannot be solved without a more complex view of the "human soul" (11), as Fukuyama puts it, prior to identity but leading into it.

The rest of the book follows, much of it formulaically, from these premises. We get the usual smattering of Socrates and Plato, for example, and the conflation of identity with a whole range of practices and appearances (homosexuality getting leveled out, for instance, and entirely miscategorized in the process, to nationality or ethnic background (see, e.g., Chapter Two, "The Third Part of the Soul," featuring the debate between Adeimantus and Glaucon in Plato's *Republic* over "the nature of a just city" (15)). And as the leveling of the self goes, so goes democracy, for which non-leveled selves are anathema. "Predemocratic societies rested on a foundation of social hierarchy," Fukuyama explains:

so this belief in the inherent superiority of a certain class of people [which Fukuyama above calls '*megalothymia*, the desire to be recognized as superior'] was fundamental to the maintenance of social order. The problem with *megalothymia* is that for every person recognized as superior, far more people are seen as inferior and do not receive any public recognition of their human worth. (21)

The fundamental problem with Fukuyama's position is that liberal democracy is not a good lens through which to view anything besides liberal democracy. Plato was not a liberal democrat, and so Fukuyama has trouble pressing him into service in support of post-Enlightenment ideas. Here we find the rub, the Enlightenment disfiguring of human

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6) On the evenly-rotating economy, see Israel M. Kirzner, "Entrepreneurial Discovery and the Competitive Market Process: An Austrian Approach," *Journal of Economic Literature*, vol. 35, no. 1 (Mar., 1997), 60–85.

beings. The Enlightenment's loss of the concept of the human person — the beginning of the long slide toward what Sandel rightly diagnoses as the “unencumbered self” — is the underlying weakness of Fukuyama's concept of identity.

Fukuyama relies heavily on Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712–1778), for instance, for his argument that the feeling, thinking person with an interior life grew out of Rousseauan emotionalism and the vistas of the interiority of the other (see, e.g., 109–110).<sup>7)</sup> And Fukuyama's Rousseau grows out of a post-Christendom Enlightenment Europe opened up by Martin Luther (1483–1546) and other Protestants (Rousseau hailed from Calvinist Geneva) for consideration of “the notion, central to questions of identity, that the inner self is deep and possesses many layers that can be exposed only through private introspection,” a development Fukuyama credits to Martin Luther. (28) The Catholic Church, Fukuyama asserts via Luther, “acted only on the outer person — through confession, penance, alms, worship of saints — none of which could make a difference because grace was bestowed only as a free act of love by God.” (26) Luther “rejected the Universal Church,” Fukuyama continues, but “he accepted completely the underlying truth of Christianity.” (29) In other words, before there was the Enlightenment, there were no fit subjects for liberal democracy, and so the Hegelian world that Fukuyama sees as ending with the triumphs of the last decade of the twentieth century did not really begin until the fifth decade of the seventeenth, with the Westphalian settlement of the question of the Church's involvement in what are now termed “secular affairs”. Before Luther, Fukuyama seems to believe, no one had plumbed “the underlying truth of Christianity”. Luther was an individualist pioneer who struck out on his own path to divine what divinity had left unsaid until Luther's arrival.

The rest of modern history is, for Fukuyama, a variation on this theme. From the atomized believers, each his own priest, freed from thralldom to Rome arose a myriad of Protestant denominations which all had to grapple with the problems of authority and unity in the face of ascendant *isothymia*. Thomas Hobbes (1588–1679) tried to solve this problem in *Leviathan*, and since Hobbes endless others have also attempted to impose order upon a scattering of unencumbered selves.<sup>8)</sup> Eventually, groups, and not necessarily religious groups either, began to take precedence over the individuals constituting them. What had begun in the dissolution of one kind of *megalothymia* ended up in another. This trend accelerated when even national allegiances, which had saved Europe from International Socialism in the wake of World War I, gave way to the unencumbered self replete with the power to reject even birthright and national identity in pursuit of any form of belonging it chose. From the 1970s, “lived experience”— which as Fukuyama explains grows out of the

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7) See Rousseau's *Julie, ou la nouvelle Héloïse* (1761), Samuel Richardson's *Pamela, or Virtue Rewarded* (1740), and Lynn Hunt, *Inventing Human Rights: A History* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company Press, 2007), as well as the review of Hunt's book by Belinda Walzer in *Comparative Literature Studies*, vol. 46, no. 1 (2009), 193–196.

8) See, e.g., Carl Schmitt, tr. George D. Schwab, *The Concept of the Political* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996).

German distinction between *Erfahrung* (“experiences that could be shared, as when people witnessed chemistry experiments in different laboratories”) and *Erlebnis* (“the subjective perception of experiences, which might not necessarily be shareable”) (109)— became the organizing, or disorganizing, principle of, well, lived experience. Modern life became, as summed up by Walter Benjamin (1892–1940), “a series of ‘shock experiences’ that prevented individuals from seeing their lives as a whole and made it hard to convert *Erlebnis* to *Erfahrung*,” producing for Benjamin “a ‘new kind of barbarism’ in which communal memory breaks down into a series of individual experiences.” (109)<sup>9</sup> This is the peril of identity politics, a “new barbarism” wherein pure *Erlebnis* produces a hyper-*thymos*-ism of every Hobbesian, Cartesian, Lutheran self competes with every other, a war of all against all in pursuit of the Nietzschean fulfillment of the promises of Hegel.

But things need not be so bleak, Fukuyama argues. There are ways in which liberal democracy can cater to the needs of the individual for thymotic recognition while also preserving the isothymic equilibrium required for liberal democracy to function in the first place. However, more trouble lies ahead with this move. Fukuyama says that the emergence of the self-aware self, also aware that others are equally sentient, which is a necessary condition for liberal democracy and human rights, comes from Rousseau (109–110), but it does not. Dignity, the valuing of the other as the self, is not a Rousseauan or an Enlightenment concept at all. It is a Catholic one. Fukuyama gives no indication that he has studied anything of the Church beyond what Martin Luther said about it. This, and Fukuyama’s other, earlier mistaking of Lutheran caricatures for authentic Catholic teaching, indicates that the Enlightenment, as represented by latter-day Hegelians such as Fukuyama, is a poor guide to Christendom, which the Enlightenment claims to have succeeded. This is unfortunate, because it is precisely the traces of Christendom that Fukuyama has spent his life studying, all the while believing himself to be focusing on early modern and modern political philosophy.

Consider, as a foil to Fukuyama’s *Identity*, a recent book by historian Andrew Willard Jones, *Before Church and State: A Study of Social Order in the Sacramental Kingdom of St. Louis* (Steubenville, OH: Emmaus Academic, 2017). In this book, Jones argues that the France of King Louis VIII (1187–1226) and St. Louis IX (1214–1270) was not divided between secular and sacred, as most scholars since the so-called “Enlightenment” have tended to argue. According to Jones, the society of Ludovican France during the thirteenth century was one of what Henri de Lubac (1896–1991) called “the complete act”: *negotium pacis et fidei*, “the business of the peace and the Faith”. There was no “Church” and “State,” but a societal whole in which the whole human person, material and spiritual, was incorpo-

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9) See also Tomoko Masuzawa, “Tracing the Figure of Redemption: Walter Benjamin’s Physiognomy of Modernity,” *MLN*, vol. 100, no. 3, German Issue (Apr., 1985), 514–536, and Thijs Lijster, “All Reification Is a Forgetting”: Benjamin, Adorno, and the Dialectic of Reification,” in Samir Gandesha and Johan F. Hartle, eds., *Reification and Spectacle* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2017).

rated into a complete societal and sacramental act, equally material and spiritual. In other words, there was no Cartesian split — people were whole, the Faith was whole, the realm was whole, and the king and the pope ultimately had the same job, namely, the maintenance of the peace. The maintenance of the peace was “the complete act” of the human person. The anthropology of the Middle Ages was fundamentally different than the Cartesian, atomistic, voluntaristic deracinated misanthropology of the Enlightenment and after.

The implications of this for political philosophy are profound. When read against the grain, and in light of the truths expounded in Jones’ book, we find that we moderns are forced to confront the possibility that we have gotten the most basic thing — our identity — entirely wrong. Failing to know our identity, we have splintered into ten thousand identities, all tacit confessions that we do not know who we really are. Jones was not the first to understand this, of course. Danish philosopher Søren Kierkegaard (1813–1855), for example, puzzled at the Hegelian-professing scientist who, figuratively, Kierkegaard saw as living in a hut outside of the palatial philosophical system he had constructed. Kierkegaard’s perplexity was extrapolated by Walker Percy (1916–1990), the Louisiana philosopher whose novel, *The Moviegoer* (1961), was an exploration of this theme of alienation, of what Percy called being “lost in the cosmos,” the human person seeking for “love in the ruins” of the Church.<sup>10</sup> This whole-person understanding, a culmination of the rich anthropology of the Mishnah and the rabbinical reflections on the revealed will of God, orientated man to an end, not within himself, but infinitely above and beyond. That Lutheranism, liberalism, and their offshoots fascism, communism, and identitarianism cannot do this is precisely because the first step of these ideologies is a rejection of the whole-person teleologic anthropology of Christendom and its Jewish teachers.<sup>11</sup>

Absent this teleology, man collapses into a meaningless heap, a physical thing, or perhaps a thing with noumenal tendencies, but without any sustainable identity beyond himself. He becomes the Cartesian self, unencumbered, as Sandel argued. It is this self that Francis Fukuyama is trying to understand in *Identity*, a self somewhat more complex than the liberal-democratic self in the shadow of the Hegelian Geist, inflated and animated by a faux-Platonic Nietzschean thymos craving recognition (as Hegel also argued) but falling back into resentment if denied it. This self is, to be sure, the self that Hobbes saw as the

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10) Peter Augustine Lawler and Brian A. Smith, eds., *A Political Companion to Walker Percy*, Ch. 1, “Walker Percy: A Brief Biography,” by Ralph C. Wood, citing *Walker Percy, Conversations with Walker Percy*, ed. Lewis A. Lawson and Victor Kramer (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1985), 127. See also Walker Percy, *Lost in the Cosmos: The Last Self-Help Book* (New York: Farrar, Straus, 1983) and *Love in the Ruins: The Adventures of a Bad Catholic at a Time Near the End of the World* (New York: Farrar, Straus, 1971).

11) See David Berger, *Cultures in Collision and Conversation: Essays in the Intellectual History of the Jews* (Boston: Academic Studies Press, 2011), Igor H. De Souza, *Rewriting Maimonides: Early Commentaries on the Guide of the Perplexed* (Berlin/Boston: Walter de Gruyter GmbH, 2018), and A. G. Roeber, “What the Law Requires Is Written on their Hearts: Noachic and Natural Law among German-Speakers in Early Modern North America,” *The William and Mary Quarterly*, vol. 58, no. 4 (Oct., 2001), 883–912.



element of political life. But as Andrew Jones reminds us, there is another way of understanding the self, namely as a whole, and capable of seeking peace and not just the absence of conflict, concord, and not just Fukuyama's warmed over *isothymia*.

The moral life demands that we understand the moral subject, namely the human person, in his or her full dignity, transcending every political ideology or other reductive scheme. Identity in the Fukuyamian, Hegelio-Nietzschean, Eriksonian sense is not identity suitable for a human person if it does not take into account the nature of the person: made in love for peace, and not evolved in bloodshed for war. Fukuyama seeks to understand identity, but by reducing it at the outset to the unencumbered pinball self of liberal democracy, he defeats his own project before it even gets underway. The "constitutive ends" of which Sandel speaks are more than mere ancillaries to morality, they are determinative of it. Francis Fukuyama's *Identity*, therefore, is best read in concert with a book such as that by Andrew Jones, which gives a whole-person account of who we are, and why we want to belong in the ways that we do.

