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THE IDOL OF HISTORY

By James W. Ceaser

I. Introduction

"The idol of communism, which spread social strife, enmity and unparalleled brutality everywhere, which instilled fear in humanity, has collapsed."[1] These words, spoken by Russian president Boris Yeltsin before a joint session of the U.S. Congress in 1992, brought a tumultuous response from America's political leaders. The evocation of the theme of idolatry by a former member of the Communist Party was striking, all the more so because it must have called to his listeners' minds the dramatic scenes of the destruction of the statues of Lenin then taking place throughout the Communist world. Nothing of the kind had been seen since the end of the Pagan era, when temples of the old gods were toppled throughout the Roman Empire. The events that historian Edward Gibbon, in his classic *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, described as happening in Alexandria in A.D. 389 might just as well have applied to what was happening in Minsk or Tirana: "The huge idol [of Serapis] was overthrown and broken into pieces, [its] limbs ignominiously pulled through the streets."[2]

Yeltsin's use of "idol" here was of course more figurative than literal. It followed the meaning first given to the term by philosopher Francis Bacon in the seventeenth century, when he identified an idol not with a physical object representing a god, but with false beliefs. Idols, Bacon said, are "received systems" that take "possession of the human understanding . . . [and describe] worlds of their own creation after an unreal and scenic fashion."[3]

A synonym today for idolatry in this sense is another term intimately associated with communism, one which shares idolatry's root: "ideology."[4] This word was coined at the beginning of the nineteenth century by French *philosophe* Destutt de Tracy to designate a new science of rational ideas intended to replace religion and metaphysics and guide the

[1] Boris Yeltsin, speech given to the U.S. Congress on June 18, 1992, cited in Richard Pipes, "Misinterpreting the Cold War" (a review of Raymond Garthoff's "The Great Transition: American-Soviet Relations and the End of the Cold War"), *Foreign Affairs*, January–February 1995, 157.

[2] Edward Gibbon, *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* (New York: Modern Library, 1995), 893–94.

[3] Francis Bacon, *The New Organon* (Indianapolis, IN: Bobbs-Merrill, 1960), 49.

[4] These two terms both have the same root as *eidos*, translated variously as "form," "species," or "idea."

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conduct of modern society.[5] But over time, the term has come to mean something different. For many, an ideology is a comprehensive and "rationalist" explanation of the world that in fact bears little relationship to reality. According to one definition in the *Oxford English Dictionary*, an ideology is "a systematic scheme of ideas . . . regarded as justifying actions, especially one that is adopted as a whole and maintained regardless of the course of events."[6] For French political theorist Raymond Aron, an ideology was "an all inclusive representation of the history of the world, of the past, the present, and the future, of what is and what must be."[7] Ideology, inaugurated as the science that would promote part of the great Baconian project, ended up being the purest exemplar of Bacon's despised idols.

The collapse of Communism in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe—Communist regimes still exist in North Korea and Cuba, and officially, at least, in China—shook the beliefs of many intellectuals to their foundations. As one sober English political theorist, John Dunn, recently observed, "An old and long vivid hope (or specter) has been laid to rest. . . . The presumption that socialism (or for that matter communism) represented a comprehensive, strongly internally related, novel, and plainly superior way of collective life has lost every vestige of plausibility and has done so with bewildering speed. . . ."[8] The consternation was probably more keenly felt among intellectuals in the West, where communism continued to have many convinced votaries, than in the East, where most thinkers had long since abandoned the faith. For many of Dunn's academic colleagues, the epitaph pronounced by another Donne seemed most appropriate: ask not for whom the bell tolls, it tolls for thee.

The "bewildering speed" with which Communism's collapse occurred has created a chasm between those who grew up before and after the collapse. The two generations seem virtually to come from different epochs. For those of the postcommunist age, who are now beginning to filter into the universities, reading a text by Marx or Lenin is seen purely as a historical exercise, not as a plausible invitation to action. Classic communist works have no more resonance with today's student than do the obscure tracts of medieval casuists.

The collapse of Communism must be seen in the larger context of developments since the eighteenth century. The Enlightenment produced

[5] For a history of this term, see George Lichtheim, *"The Concept of Ideology" and Other Essays* (New York: Random House, 1967), 3–96. For treatments of the concept of communist ideology on which I have relied, see Philippe Bénéton, *Introduction à la politique* (Paris: Puf, 1997); James Pontuso, *Solzhenitsyn's Political Thought* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1990); and Daniel Mahoney, *Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn: The Ascent from Ideology* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2001).

[6] *Oxford English Dictionary*, s.v. "ideology."

[7] Raymond Aron, *Démocratie et totalitarisme* (Saint-Amand, France: Gallimard, 1965), 53.

[8] John Dunn, "The Debate on Big Government," in Arthur M. Melzer, Jerry Weinberger, and M. Richard Zinman, eds., *Politics at the Turn of the Century* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2001), 206.

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three different "parties"—liberalism, communism, and fascism—that entered into a series of conflicts that played out in the great wars of the last century. Fascism, which was partly a reaction against the Enlightenment, was the first to be eliminated, after being defeated by the alliance of liberalism and communism in the Second World War. Both of these parties then claimed to be the legitimate carriers of Enlightenment ideas in the modern world. The cold war, which became the contest over which of these two parties would survive, ended with the victory of the West, leaving only liberalism. The only glimmer of conflict remaining inside the Enlightenment project comes from a still inchoate party, found at the edges of the antiglobalization movement, that says "No" to the whole idea of reason and development.[9] While great struggles in the world may yet emerge from other sources—from competition for dominion among nations, or from clashes among the cultural or religious beliefs of different "civilizations"—the wars generated by the contestants emerging from within the Enlightenment now seem to be at an end.[10]

References to "idols" nonetheless can remind us that the victors on the battlefield or in political competition do not always win the intellectual wars. Bacon cautioned that idols, even after they have been exposed and defeated in name, often manage to insinuate themselves into the victor's systems of thought: "In the very instauration of the sciences [idols will] meet and trouble us, unless . . . men fortify themselves as far as may be against their assaults."[11] Gibbon observed that many Christians, in their desire to win over the pagans to their side, allowed themselves to be "insensibly subdued by the arts of their vanquished rivals."[12] In the strongest caution of all, Friedrich Nietzsche pointed out that "the most powerful idols can be the ones that are not known or recognized as idols."[13]

Among the principal political idols of communism, three beliefs come immediately to mind: the awe of communist power, coming from the military might and ruthlessness of the Soviet Union; the acceptance of the legitimacy of the dictatorship of the proletariat (whether by a party or, as it often turned out, by a single individual—for example, Stalin, Hoxha,

[9] Beginning with the so-called new philosophers in the 1960s, there was a direct attack on the idea of rationalism and progress. As Bernard Henri Lévy wrote, "We must believe in progress, believe in its infinite power, and grant it all the credit it asks for. But we must simply denounce it as a reactionary mechanism which is leading the world to catastrophe." Bernard Henri Lévy, *Barbarism with a Human Face*, trans. George Holoch (New York: Harper and Row, 1979), 2, cited in Daniel Mahoney, *The Liberal Political Science of Raymond Aron* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 1992), 85.

[10] For a presentation of the thesis that there is potential for conflict among different "civilizations," see Samuel P. Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* (New York: Touchstone, 1997).

[11] Bacon, *The New Organon*, 58–60.

[12] Gibbon, *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, 903.

[13] Friedrich Nietzsche, "Twilight of the Idols," in Walter Kaufmann, ed. and trans., *The Portable Nietzsche* (New York: Viking Press, 1977), 466.

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Ceausescu, and Kim Il-Sung); and the faith in the superiority of an economic system of state ownership and central planning. Each of these idols would now seem to have been smashed beyond repair. But can the same be said of the supreme philosophical idol of the whole Marxist system (its Jupiter, so to speak): the communist doctrine of history? Has it too been destroyed? Or has it—or something akin to it—succeeded in finding a home inside of liberalism in the postcommunist era?

Let us recall the centrality of the doctrine of history to communist ideology. Insofar as the Communist Party once enjoyed a source of legitimate authority, it derived it from the claim that the party "represented" history. The party did not need the consent of the people, it claimed, because it had the support of history. Philosophy, Marx argued, was the "head" of the revolution, and the proletariat its "heart";[14] the head was to be advised or led by "a portion of the bourgeois ideologists, who have raised themselves to the level of comprehending theoretically the historical movement as a whole."[15] The claim of historical movement being the source of the party's authority is found not only in classic communist writings, but also among party members in the Soviet Union in the years after the Russian Revolution. In one of the great fictional accounts of this period, Arthur Koestler's *Darkness at Noon*, the ideologist Rubashov (who is a compendium of actual Soviet political figures whom Koestler had met) declares, "We dug in the primeval mud of history and there we found her laws. We knew more than ever men have known about mankind; that is why our revolution succeeded."[16]

By the middle of the twentieth century, the doctrine of scientific history had evidently begun to lose support among communist leaders and intellectuals. For many in the East, communist ideology ceased to be an object of genuine intellectual conviction and became a cynical instrument for holding onto power and privilege. There was a standard joke in Eastern Europe that if you wanted to buy copies of the works of Marx and Lenin, you had to go to Western Europe to find them. And even in the West, where adherence to communism lasted longer and was more ardent, many intellectuals began to follow French philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre in seeking to ground communism in existentialist commitment rather than history. Yet the very fact that orthodox communists could plausibly ridicule existentialism as "bourgeois" (existentialism is, after all, individualistic rather than collectivist, stresses freedom over determinism, and revels in the mood of permanent loneliness rather than in joyful anticipation of the end of alienation) illustrated the depth of com-

[14] Karl Marx, "Contribution to Hegel's Philosophy of Right," in Robert Tucker, ed., *The Marx-Engels Reader* (New York: Norton, 1972), 23.

[15] Karl Marx, "The Communist Manifesto," in Tucker, ed., *The Marx-Engels Reader*, 343.

[16] Arthur Koestler, *Darkness at Noon* (New York: Bantam Books, 1941), 67–68.

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munism's problem. Communism without its doctrine of history is like religion without belief in God.[17]

II. The Meaning of History

Just what kind of idea is the communist doctrine of history? It is a variant of an earlier and more general idea of a universal history of progress that was first sketched by French philosophers Jacques Turgot and the Marquis de Condorcet and was then developed by Kant and Hegel. But how does one classify this more general idea? What is its relationship not only to communism, but also to liberalism? Is liberalism distinguished from communism by virtue of its rejection of a doctrine of history, or is liberalism itself an offspring of the same general idea? Finally, to echo Bacon's concern, has the idol of history managed in some form to gain a firmer foothold on liberalism since the collapse of Communism?

To begin to address such questions, it is necessary to have a clearer notion of what is meant by a "doctrine of history." Unfortunately, there is little agreement in this area on even the most basic of concepts and vocabulary. In the most general sense, history as an intellectual discipline is the study of things from a temporal perspective. In its original or classical sense, it referred to an investigation of the past—that is, to events that have *already* occurred. As Hegel once wrote, "*history*, according to the current representation of it, has to do with what has happened, hence with what is contingent, passing, and past."[18] But for the past two centuries, due in no small part to the influence of Hegel himself and then of Marx, the domain of history has come to include not only inquiries about the past, but also prognostications about the future. Accounts of what lies ahead, once considered to be the stuff of prophecy or divination, have become the primary reason for studying "history."

More important than the subject matter of history is the question of its character or nature. What kind of thing is an account of matters occurring inside of time? What happens in history, and what meaning does it have for us? Two basic responses have been given to this question. According to one view, the flow of time contains no story or meaning: history is one thing after another. (In a slightly different view that is broadly similar, history just keeps repeating itself in an endless succession of cycles without having a conclusion or ending.) According to a second view, time is a realm in which fundamental meaning is revealed. Something happens

[17] For a treatment of the tension between Marxism and existentialism, see Werner Dannhauser, "Existentialism and Democracy," in Allan Bloom, ed., *Confronting the Constitution* (Washington, DC: AEI Press, 1990), 392.

[18] G. W. F. Hegel, *Vorlesungen über die Geschichte der Philosophie*, cited in Denis Kambouchner, *Notions de philosophie* (Paris: Gallimard, 1995), 3:569. Hegel is restating here the traditional view of history as developed in Aristotle's discussion in Aristotle, *Poetics*, chap. 9.

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in the course of history: a story occurs that provides insight into the most important questions of human existence.

The prestige of history depends on which of these views prevails. Under the first view, history cannot aspire to be the most significant of the intellectual disciplines. History may furnish examples of what has worked and what has failed, provide models of virtue and of vice, and supply the data from which generalizations or "laws" of social science can be constructed, but it can never claim to reveal answers to the deepest of human questions. Just the opposite is true under the second view. Under this understanding, history becomes the most important of the disciplines, replacing philosophy as the queen of the humanities. People look first to history to discover their basic orientations, and history is invoked inside of the political world as an important cause or justification of political action, as it is in communist ideology.

These two views of history can themselves be considered in a historical perspective. A history of history shows that sometime around 1800, history in the second, or meaning-laden, sense was discovered. It rapidly gained ground among thinkers and began to replace the first view, so much so that by the end of the nineteenth century it became virtually synonymous with a general understanding of history itself. To designate these two different views of history, some have adopted the convention—which I will follow here—of referring to the meaning-laden understanding of history as History (with a capital *H*), while reserving history (with a small *h*) for the first sense.

History (with a capital *H*) is generally recognized as coming in one of two forms (setting aside religious conceptions). One is Philosophy of History, of which the communist doctrine of history is the best-known example. A Philosophy of History refers—I use philosopher Karl Löwith's words—to "a systematic interpretation of universal history in accordance with a principle by which historical events and successions are unified and directed toward an ultimate meaning."[19] Such a story may be one of decline or retrogression, as in historian Oswald Spengler's famous *The Decline of the West*.[20] But in most accounts of a Philosophy of History, the leading theme of the narrative has been one of progress, of mankind marching onward and upward to something better and higher, as in the final, glorious stage of communism, in which, in Marx's words, there is a "*definitive* resolution of the antagonism between man and nature, and between man and man."[21]

According to many scholars, the idea of there being a story inside of time, especially one culminating in a triumphant end, owes its origin to biblical religion. Philosophy of History is a secularization of the biblical

[19] Karl Löwith, *Meaning in History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1949), 1.
[20] Oswald Spengler, *The Decline of the West*, 2 vols. (New York: A. A. Knopf, 1928).
[21] Karl Marx, "Private Property and Communism," in Eugene Kamenka, ed., *The Portable Karl Marx* (New York: Viking Press, 1983), 149–50.

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understanding of time, which emerged through an adaptation and modification of the idea of Providence. As Löwith remarks, "historiological futurism was first made possible by Christian eschatology."[22] Of course, Philosophy of History represents a radical change in the idea of Providence. Under Philosophy of History, History becomes fully intelligible to man's reason, and the Golden Age that lies ahead is a product of human efforts, not God's design. Time is understood to be linear, as it is in Christianity, only without reference to God or eternity; man becomes his own providence.[23] Under this view, as Mexican poet and philosopher Octavio Paz noted, "meaning resides neither in the past nor in eternity but in the future, so that history is also called progress."[24] Only the obscurantist, who holds fast to the obsolete and superstitious beliefs of the past, rejects progress.

The other form of History, often referred to as "Historicism" or as "the Historical School," is less rigorous than a Philosophy of History in that it offers no single, universal account of history. It stresses instead a plurality of units or wholes—these may be civilizations, nations, cultures, peoples, or races—each having its own character that is revealed in the process of its historical growth or unfolding. Organic growth or unfolding constitutes the core of history and (in some views) of biology as well, creating a new parallel between the physical world (nature) and the human world. As Isaiah Berlin explains this view, it refers

> to associations of men which possess each its own individual laws of growth, its own unique 'organic' character—social wholes which develop like plants, obedient each to its own specific nature, and which can, therefore, neither be explained nor understood, nor maintained in the light of laws or principles which falsely assimilate them to some generalized pattern that ignores their particular essence, the individual goals in terms of which they live and act, values incommensurable with those of other societies or periods in terms of which alone all they are and do can be explained or justified.[25]

The appreciation of the centrality of this historical reality, which usually takes the form of a deep respect or veneration for the "germ" or "core"

[22] Karl Löwith, *Martin Heidegger and European Nihilism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), 85. See also Leo Strauss, *Natural Right and History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1953), 317.

[23] Octavio Paz, *Convergencias* (Barcelona, Spain: Seix Barral, 1991), 16; Aurel Kolnai, *"Privilege and Liberty" and Other Essays in Political Philosophy*, ed. Daniel J. Mahoney (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 1999), 128.

[24] Octavio Paz, *Convergences* (New York: Harcourt, 1987), 121. Note that for Paz, modern man, found in the early part of the twentieth century, has been superceded by postmodern man, who has doubts about progress.

[25] Isaiah Berlin, foreword to *Historism*, by Friedrich Meinecke (London: Routledge, 1972), xi.

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from which a community has emerged, is one of the most fundamental of all human experiences and helps to engender a respect for ancestral authority. People come to know that History is not merely a series of events that passes over them, but something larger than they are, a deep process that controls and molds them.[26]

What these two views of History—Philosophy of History and Historicism—share, to repeat, is the view that human meaning is to be found in the unfolding of time. There are a number of ways of articulating this abstract yet fundamental point. As German philosopher Reinhart Koselleck has put it, historical narrative under this understanding is "expected to provide the unity found in the epic derived from the existence of Beginning and End."[27] The old distinction between history and poetics, which derives from Aristotle, now falls, and history is understood as a form of poetics. Leo Strauss speaks of History as having the character of being a "world" or an "object";[28] in an elaboration by political theorist Harvey Mansfield, it "acquires patterns of its own" in which certain effects "are thought to come from forces larger than human, though less than divine."[29] History is seen as possessing its own agency.

Let us now turn to history (with a small *h*). Many fewer attempts have been made to catalogue and analyze the different possibilities of what history is, as opposed to what History is, probably because the former category is more heterogeneous. It is usual to begin here with the cyclical view of time associated with classical philosophy, as this idea has been frequently opposed on a metaphysical level to the Philosophy of History. The cycle here originally referred chiefly to changes at the cosmic level, especially to the periodic natural destructions of the world through flood or fire. Some extended the cyclical idea to apply to patterned sequences of changes of regimes and to a periodic rise and fall of civilizations.[30] Curiously, the cyclical view bears one important point of resemblance with a Philosophy of History. Both accounts purport to allow one to locate the present on a curve and then extrapolate whether the future is on a trajectory of growth or of decline. But the more decisive point still remains that under a cyclical view, there is no end to the temporal process and no meaning that emerges from a temporal account. Things just keep going round and round. The ancient philosophers, accordingly, did not seek meaning in

[26] This is a paraphrase of a sentence from George H. Callcott, *History in the United States, 1800–1860* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins Press, 1970), 8.

[27] Reinhart Koselleck, *Futures Past* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1985), 29–30.

[28] Leo Strauss, *"What Is Political Philosophy?" and Other Studies* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1973), 60.

[29] Harvey Mansfield, *Machiavelli's Virtue* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 136. See also ibid., 109–22.

[30] See Leo Strauss, "Progress or Return?" in Hilail Gildin, ed., *An Introduction to Political Philosophy* (Detroit, MI: Wayne State University Press, 1989), 261; and Löwith, *Meaning in History*, 7–9.

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time, but turned instead to a study of the permanent characteristics of things—that is, to a study of nature.[31]

There is a modern restatement of the classical cyclical view that appears to be nearly the same in its content, although strikingly different in tone. It is Friedrich Nietzsche's famous doctrine of "Eternal Recurrence." Nietzsche contended that the world "is a circular movement that has already repeated itself infinitely often and plays its game *in infinitum*."[32] Followers of Nietzsche applied this idea to produce cyclical historical narratives. The impact or effect of this idea in modern times, however, has been anything but "classical." Classical philosophy confronted the cycle without emotion, "philosophically" or stoically. Not so with the moderns. Their reaction has been tinged with indignation and despair, or, as in Nietzsche's own case, with a willful bravado. As theologian Reinhold Niebuhr has argued, once the consciousness developed that time could be the source of meaning, it was all but impossible to recapture the original sense of equanimity about the cyclical view.[33] Talk of a cycle pointed now to an absence or void, to a cosmos without God or a principle of ordered reason. The world, on this view, is full of sound and fury signifying nothing.

A related comment can be made about another doctrine, one which may well have been inspired by the doctrine of Eternal Recurrence: the pagan or fascist view of history. The fascist view, as summarized by twentieth-century Hungarian political theorist Aurel Kolnai, seeks to restore history "to its place as an aspect of natural 'becoming,' a cosmic wave of vital ups and downs, an aimless clash and interplay of irrational forces with man as their mere emanation, product, or sport, whose only task is to acknowledge his status as such and to make the most of it by submitting to the mysterious imperatives of that immutable order of everlasting change as reechoed in the 'throbbing of his blood.' "[34] Acting with resolution and even fury in the face of this irrational universe becomes the only solace of man. This understanding supposedly marks a return to the "original" view of history in the age before philosophy and Christianity. Yet as in the case of the Eternal Recurrence, it may again be doubted whether such a view is in any sense *genuinely* pagan. Lying behind it one senses a clear disenchantment with Providence or with ideas of progress, indicating that this modern paganism is a new doctrine designed to counter Christianity or a Philosophy of History.

Attention has been given to these modern views of history because they often head up lists of doctrines cited as opposing History. But in light of

[31] As Löwith remarks, "No classical philosopher turned to a reflection on the true essence of Being as preparation for the arrival of Being and of future history." Löwith, *Martin Heidegger and European Nihilism*, 85.

[32] Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, ed. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage, 1968), 549.

[33] Reinhold Niebuhr, *Faith and History* (New York: Scribners, 1949), 38, 157.

[34] Kolnai, *"Privilege and Liberty,"* 112.

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the argument here that these modern views of history are in fact drawing their energy from what they deny, they should more likely be counted the unnatural offspring of the idea of History rather than genuine alternatives to it. In any case, traditional or classical understandings of history should not be conflated with these theories. Their meaning must be sought elsewhere. Although it is foolish to speak of a single traditional view, some attempts have recently been made to restate the main aspects of the pre-Historical understanding. Two ideas stand out as constituting the warp and woof of traditional history: fortune or accident and human agency or freedom. Aron has characterized traditional history as a "history of events," where an event is defined as "an act performed by one man or several men at a definite place and time . . . that can never be reduced to circumstances, unless we eliminate in thought those who have acted and decree that anyone in their place would have acted the same way."[35] As this last condition is an absurdity, it follows that the future, from a human point of view, cannot be known. History is indeterminate, and seeking ultimate meaning in an account inside of time is a vain exercise. Far from depreciating the importance of human agency and activity, this understanding lends them greater weight. Insofar as the "acts performed" by human beings—rather than some great process acting for them—dictate what happens, there is now an immense field opened for the decisions of political actors and statesmen. They are not the servants of History, but free actors in their own right. But for a Lincoln or a Churchill, for example, the fate of mankind today would be different.

Traditional history does not, however, deny the existence of identifiable trends, at least for the foreseeable future. Events always take place in contexts that limit how people act, and important historical figures often direct their efforts at shaping those contexts. Contextual constraints, to draw again on Aron's terminology, make up the "process" dimension of history, which Aron believes has grown more prominent in the modern era. The dominant trend in modernity derives from factors relating to scientific and industrial development that push participating societies in a direction that Aron believes on balance favors a certain kind of progress.[36]

The question now occurs as to whether a historical analysis that detects progress must necessarily subscribe to the same idea of progress that is found under a Philosophy of History. Stated differently, can there be an idea of progress inside the category of history (let us call it progress$_1$) that

[35] Raymond Aron, *Politics and History*, ed. and trans. Miriam Conant (New York: Free Press, 1978), 33. Aron goes on to argue that to pay attention to events requires a certain attitude on the part of the historian, one that is increasingly at odds with the attitude encouraged by the dominant sociological and structural approaches to history. Aron writes, "[H]e [the historian] cannot interest himself in events as they happened if he is not interested in the actors. And he is not able to interest himself in the actors if he is not interested in the goal they gave to life. The history of events makes sense only to those who are not insensitive to the actions of men and to the things at stake in their rivalry." Ibid., 37.

[36] Raymond Aron, "Pour le Progrès," *Commentaire*, Fall 1978.

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is different from the idea of progress found under a Philosophy of History ($progress_2$)? The great difficulty here is that modern thought today has become confused as a result of a conflation of these concepts. The more modest notion of progress ($progress_1$) has virtually been lost.

An understanding of the distinction between these two ideas of progress—a distinction that was clear to some of those who founded liberalism—rests on an analysis of two factors: the certainty of change and the content of what changes. On the question of certainty, the understanding behind $progress_1$ is that of reasonable expectation of advancement. Human action can succeed in constructing a better world through projects of improvement that rely in large part on human foresight and science—for example, knowledge of how to construct better systems of government or knowledge of how to achieve greater productivity and technological development. Consider an instance familiar to Americans: the Founders acted under the view that the discovery and implementation of principles of political science could lay the groundwork for progress inside the political world, not only in America but elsewhere. But while progress is possible, it is not certain. If history, to use Aron's terms, is a "history of events," in which results depend at times on chance and on human choice, no one can foretell the future; individuals can act in ways that move us backwards. A "wrong election of the part we may act," *The Federalist Papers* declare, could well lead to the establishment of governments "forever destined to depend for their political constitutions on accident and force."[37] By contrast, a Philosophy of History supposes that a force of some kind is operating inside of time, perhaps directing human agency with a cunning it does not know, such that History will follow a certain course. If progress is not absolutely certain, it is nearly so.

The second factor distinguishing the two ideas of progress concerns what changes in history. Under most variants of $progress_2$, there is no permanency ascribed to human nature or to the basic political or social condition of man. Condorcet argued that "the progress of the perfectibility of man is truly indefinite . . . nature has marked no limit to the perfection of human faculties."[38] Similarly, Marx described a human being in the final stage (communism) who in many respects scarcely resembles the human being of the rest of history. The "new man," as later communists referred to him, would be liberated from all of the negative traits deriving from human alienation: "The positive suppression of private property . . . is therefore the positive suppression of all alienation, and the return of man from religion, the family, the state, etc., to his *human*, i.e., social life."[39] The communist man will then be free to pass his time "do[ing]

[37] *Federalist No. 1* (A. Hamilton), in Clinton Rossiter, ed., *The Federalist Papers* (New York: Mentor, 1953), 33.

[38] Marie Jean Antoine, Nicolas Caritat de Condorcet, *Esquisse d'un tableau historique des progrès de l'esprit humain* (Paris: Flammarion, 1988), 81.

[39] Karl Marx, "Private Property and Communism," 151.

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one thing today and another tomorrow, hunt[ing] in the morning, fish-[ing] in the afternoon, rear[ing] cattle in the evening, [criticizing] after dinner . . . without ever becoming hunter, fisherman, shepherd or critic."[40] Under $progress_1$ important improvements in the sciences can change much about man's lot and condition, but the fundamental elements of human nature and the human situation remain the same. Man's limits are fixed by the potentialities of his nature. In one of the most famous phrases in all of American political thought, James Madison asked, "But what is government itself but the greatest of all reflections on human nature?"[41] Under the communist Philosophy of History, politics in anything like the form in which it has been known simply ceases to exist. The state will "wither away," although only after it has first expanded, under the dictatorship of the proletariat, beyond all previously known limits.

The two ideas of progress are associated with very different attitudes toward the past. $Progress_2$ works on the assumption that the past has little to teach us; looking back, certainly looking back with reverence, is to be scorned. The present, on this understanding, is decisively better than the past, and the future will be better than the present. As mankind is always moving forward, there can be no merit or sense in venerating our "fathers." By contrast, a degree of reverence for the past is not inconsistent with $progress_1$. Since there is no guarantee of improvement, and since the choices made in the past in certain realms—for example, the political and the moral realms—may well be superior to any we make today, certain things can be admired, not just for being accomplishments for their time, but as being worthy models for today. As *The Federalist Papers* observed, "A reverence for the laws would be sufficiently inculcated by the voice of an enlightened reason."[42] With this attitude comes a different role as well for historians in their "public" presentation of history; the historian might now include as part of his function the inculcation of an attitude of appreciation of elements of the past.

Under the enormous influence of Philosophy of History in the first half of the twentieth century, some very strange attitudes grew up in the treatment of the theme of progress. One such response was the view that ordinary progress ($progress_1$) constitutes a pessimistic view of history, because it still allows for the possibility of regress. As an illustration, the leading American historian of the middle of the twentieth century, Richard Hofstadter, took the Founders to task on the ground that "they had no hope and offered none for any ultimate organic change in the way men conduct themselves. . . . But no man who is as well abreast of modern science as the Fathers were of eighteenth century science believes any

[40] Karl Marx, "The German Ideology," in Tucker, ed., *The Marx-Engels Reader*, 124.
[41] *Federalist No. 51* (J. Madison), in Rossiter, ed., *The Federalist Papers*, 322.
[42] *Federalist No. 49* (J. Madison), in Rossiter, ed., *The Federalist Papers*, 315.

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longer in unchanging human nature."[43] Stranger still was the response that human freedom is only vindicated by massive and self-evident failures. It is undisputable, of course, that some of the catastrophes of the last century that were widely recognized as such at the time—World War I and the rise of Nazism, for instance—made, for a time at least, a mockery of a progressive idea ($progress_2$) of Philosophy of History.[44] Some opponents of the Philosophy of History drew from this the lesson that the only way to refute the idea of History is to embrace tragedy. Gloomy defenders of human freedom found that the one thing they could not abide is progress of any kind. Such are the perverse intellectual gymnastics that can result from the dominance of the idea of inevitable progress.

III. Liberalism, Communism, and History

The communist view of history can now be classified, using the vocabulary of biology, as being in the kingdom of History, the phylum of Philosophy of History, and the class of $progress_2$. What is the status of the "idol" of history in relationship to liberalism? The best way to proceed in trying to respond to this question is to take a step back, as it were, and pose three targeted questions.

Question 1: Is liberalism grounded in or connected to a view of History (a Philosophy of History), so that communism and liberalism are offshoots of a common view of time? Or does liberalism reject History (or assign it a secondary or minor status), grounding or justifying itself with some other principle?

Many thinkers today connect liberalism with a Philosophy of History, arguing that the two were always tied together, or at least that they came to be tied together quite early. On this view, liberalism, for all intents and purposes, is associated with or depends on a Philosophy of History. This understanding of liberalism would seem to be very close to the thinking of, among others, Kolnai and Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn. The variant of History that these thinkers associate with liberalism can be traced to the meliorism found in Montesquieu, the Philosophy of History of Condorcet, and finally the less systematic but highly influential ideas of late nineteenth-century pragmatists and—the name itself is revealing—"progressives." Most progressives advanced an idea of progress under the slippery concept of "growth," a vague term that allows one to avoid

[43] Richard Hofstadter, "The Founding Fathers: An Age of Realism," in Robert H. Horwitz, ed., *The Moral Foundations of the American Republic*, 3d ed. (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1986), 74.

[44] I omit mentioning here as a major catastrophe the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917 for the simple reason that a large number of intellectuals in the West regarded it at the time not as a catastrophe, but as a great step forward. A broader recognition in the West that communism was a catastrophe on the same order as Nazism did not begin to take hold until the publication of Solzhenitsyn's major works in the 1970s, and perhaps not even until the collapse of the Soviet Union in the 1990s.

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specificity on the precise content of progress while still affirming the general principle. (Growth, as John Dewey once commented, consists of "growing.")[45] Progressives did, however, associate progress with democratic rule (under a planned society), not with the rule of a dictatorship, and with the allowed-for change that could come about without violent political revolution.[46] These differences clearly distinguished liberal progressives from communists, even though many progressives early on saw the ends or goals of the two systems as being the same—some even expressed their sympathy with communism.

It is not the case, however, that this progressive view was *originally* associated with liberalism, at least in the United States. Many of America's Founders had a deep suspicion of Philosophy of History. The authors of *The Federalist Papers*, whose work predated the publication of Condorcet's full account of his views on History, labeled the progenitors of this idea as "projectors" and "utopians" whose doctrines would promote unrealistic hopes and lend theoretical succor to demagogic theories.[47] This line of thought was followed up by more direct critiques of Philosophy of History once that view was more clearly defined. In John Adams's assessment of Condorcet's *Picture of the Progress of the Human Mind* (1795),[48] Adams accused Condorcet of having constructed a doctrine "that had no basis in experience or fact" and of "wag[ing] a more cruel war against truth than was ever attempted by priest or king."[49] Carrying this controversy into the center of American politics, Alexander Hamilton identified Jefferson as "a disciple of Turgot, a pupil of Condorcet."[50] It is important to point out, however, that these criticisms did not extend to the notion of progress in a more limited sense. On the contrary, Hamilton and others were noted proponents of the modernization and development of American society. Their criticisms of "utopianism" were intended to be a defense of a sober understanding of progress.

The non-Historical origin of American liberalism is confirmed from another source. As late as the beginning of the twentieth century, American progressive thinkers strongly attacked the American founding, together with a good part of the liberalism of the nineteenth century, on the basis that it was not grounded in History, as it ought properly to have been, but rather in nature. The Founders, in this view, had thus offered an inadequate metaphysical underpinning for liberalism. As

[45] John Dewey, *Reconstruction in Philosophy* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1957), 175.

[46] The idea that the progressive view is prominent in modern liberalism can be found in such writers as Strauss, Kolnai, and Solzhenitsyn.

[47] *Federalist No. 6* (A. Hamilton), in Rossiter, ed., *The Federalist Papers*, 34.

[48] Jean Antoine Nicolas de Caritat de Condorcet, *Outlines of a Historical View of the Progress of the Human Mind* (London: J. Johnson, 1895).

[49] Zoltan Harastzi, *John Adams and the Prophets of Progress* (New York: Grosset and Dunlap, 1964), 246, 247.

[50] Alexander Hamilton, "The Examination 9," in Patricia and Harold Syrett, eds., *The Papers of Alexander Hamilton* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1987), 25:501.

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Woodrow Wilson explained, "[T]he makers of our Federal Constitution . . . were scientists in their way, the best way of their age . . . and they constructed a government . . . to display the laws of nature. . . . The trouble with the theory is that government is not a machine, but a living thing. It falls, not under the theory of the universe, but under the theory of organic life. It is accountable to Darwin, not to Newton."[51]

The historical point argued here about the origins of liberalism in America clearly does not refute the claim of those who connect the "progressive view" with modern liberalism. Neither does it refute the claim that a progressive Philosophy of History represents a logical unfolding of liberalism.[52] Nonetheless, the fact that a well-developed strand of liberalism once existed that was self-consciously opposed to History puts some distance between liberalism and Philosophy of History and indicates, at a minimum, that non-Historical understandings may operate inside of a liberal framework. These non-Historical understandings admittedly grew weaker in the nineteenth century and were eclipsed by obeisance to the same idolatry of History that led to the development of communism. But this development may not have been the result of a natural or inevitable unfolding of liberalism. Such a conclusion would add weight to the possibility of a project that might be undertaken today to check or reverse the progressive view within a liberal framework.

Question 2: Has a Philosophy of History secured a stronger foundation inside of liberalism in the last half-century, especially since the collapse of European Communism?

The answer to this question cannot be a simple one. On the one hand, there are important signs that point clearly to a decline in the credibility and prestige of a Philosophy of History. On the other hand, a version of a Philosophy of History—not that of communism, obviously, but that of a modified progressive view—has recently been gaining ground, and a good case can be made that it is today the dominant intellectual understanding. Each of these positions requires examination.

The decline of standing for Philosophy of History predated the collapse of Communism. Postmodernist thought, which emerged in the middle of the past century, denied the idea that there is any kind of objective development in history. According to French philosopher Jean-François Lyotard, in what has widely been considered as the best summary of the movement, postmodernism begins with the understanding that "all meta-

[51] Woodrow Wilson, "What Is Progress?" in Wilson, *The New Freedom* (New York: Doubleday, 1918), 46–47.

[52] The argument here is that a full idea of progress ($progress_2$) is logically implicit in the theory of Enlightenment liberalism, even if it was not always present historically at its origins. Enlightenment liberalism is bent on the conquest of nature, and a Philosophy of History is an extension of the same idea of control, in the form of the elimination of chance, to the realm of time. See, for example, Strauss, *Natural Right and History*, 175–76.

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narratives" have lost evidence and credibility.[53] The principal "meta-narrative" that Lyotard had in mind was, of course, communism. Postmodernism thus pronounced the epitaph to communism's claims to comprehend the laws of History, even as many postmodern intellectuals were scrambling to find other grounds for maintaining their allegiance to Marxism. Following this postmodern victory, intellectuals today (including historians) love to speak of "stories" or "narratives"—by which they seem to mean constructed accounts of the past—but rarely (with an exception to be noted) speak of History.

If we move from this general intellectual change to historical accounts of the cold war and the collapse of Communism, we can identify other strands of thought that depreciated a Philosophy of History. On both the Left and Right, versions of history were presented that emphasized "events" (in Aron's sense) and the role of political actors as the primary sources of historical explanation. On the Left, many insisted that the cold war was largely precipitated by the errors and misperceptions of Western leaders, and that the source of the transformation of Communism in the 1980s was to be found in the reformist policies of Mikhail Gorbachev, often heralded as the greatest statesman of the late twentieth century. On the Right, many ascribed the origin of the cold war to the implacable logic of communist ideology and to the imperial designs of Stalin, while the collapse of Communism was attributed in no small part to the steadfastness of Margaret Thatcher and Ronald Reagan.

But in the past decade, another tendency has emerged to revive, if not always openly or in name, a mode of thought that supports a Philosophy of History. As time goes on, more and more scholars look back on the fall of the Soviet Union and judge it to be an all-but-inevitable result of a process of economic modernization and globalization, for which the Communist system proved to be manifestly ill-suited. It is almost in the nature of the industry of academic historical explanation to begin from a result and then work backward to produce reasons why that outcome must have happened in the way that it did. An increasing number of analysts today—far more, it seems, than were in evidence before the event occurred—have been saying that they "knew" that the collapse of Communism was in the works. If an outcome is something that could have been known before it took place, then its cause is presumably objective and hence potentially predictable in advance. On this view, history can be explained by general forces, not by decisions made or forgone (i.e., "events"). This approach is at least consistent with the general idea of Philosophy of History.

It is worthwhile to observe that the importance of the economic argument for Communism's collapse has, if anything, been *undervalued*. Few

[53] Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* (Manchester: University of Manchester Press, 1984), 37.

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have noticed that the primary significance of economic decline was more likely political rather than strictly economic. Communist ideology held that the communist system was more efficient than the capitalist system. The inability of the Soviet Union to meet the economic challenge of the West must therefore have produced among its leaders not just the ordinary measure of humiliation (experienced, no doubt, when they hungered to procure Western consumer goods and to avail themselves of Western medical services), but a recognition of failure according to their own standards. Although Communists from time to time spoke of the injustices of life in the West, the ground of their position never rested on these ethical judgments, but rather on an account of who the actual victor in the Historical process would be. Yet even granting this greater weight to the importance of the factor of economic decline, it is questionable what it actually proves in terms of the inevitability of any particular outcome. Economic decline might well have been a reason for Soviet leaders to turn to a military attack on the West before the economic decline became definitive. And who is to say that the West in the 1970s, which at the time was in a state of decline of its own—a decline in its will to resist—would not have acceded to Soviet military pressure?

Turning from this analysis of concrete explanations for the collapse of Communism to general philosophy, it is notable that the events surrounding the collapse brought to the foreground the first genuinely new and important statement of a Philosophy of History in more than half a century. In 1989, Francis Fukuyama published one of the most widely disseminated and discussed academic articles of the twentieth century: "The End of History?"[54] Drawing on an understanding of History taken from Hegel (as interpreted by French philosopher Alexandre Kojève),[55] Fukuyama sought to put into perspective the totality of meaning of the impending collapse of Communism: "What we may be witnessing is not just the end of the Cold War, or the passing of a particular period of post-war 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."[56] As he restated this view, more than a decade later, in *The Wall Street Journal*, "My observation, made back in 1989 on the eve of the collapse of communism, was that this evolutionary process did seem to be bringing ever larger parts of the world toward modernity. And if we looked beyond liberal democracy and markets, there was nothing else towards which we could expect to evolve; hence the end of history."[57]

[54] Francis Fukuyama, "The End of History?" *The National Interest* 16, Summer 1989, 3.
[55] Alexandre Kojève, *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel*, trans. James Nichols (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1969).
[56] Fukuyama, "The End of History?" 3.
[57] Francis Fukuyama, "End of History? History Is Still Going Our Way," *The Wall Street Journal*, October 5, 2001, A14.

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Although most historians and philosophers dismissed Fukuyama's references to an "end of history" as being nothing short of fantastic, the practical substance of his position has made remarkable headway and has been widely accepted. Accounts today that adopt the theme of "globalization" often echo Fukuyama's basic thesis and embrace a soft version of a Philosophy of History. Where these accounts view the process of globalization in a benign light, they resemble versions of the progressive view of History; where they deplore it, they resemble a form of Historical pessimism. In either case, an idea of History is lurking just beneath the surface. Recall Nietzsche: "The most powerful idols can be the ones that are not known or recognized as idols."

A striking indication of the renewed ascendancy of Philosophy of History can be found, of all places, in the writings of the great postmodernist philosopher Richard Rorty. To be sure, Rorty dismisses the validity of any notion of an objective account of history. Indeed, he argues just the opposite, claiming that all historical accounts are merely narratives or interpretations. Yet it is just this formal renunciation of History that allows Rorty to be taken seriously by his readers when he proceeds to offer what is the functional equivalent of the progressive view discussed above. Liberal society, he tells us, is best sustained by a "spinning [of] edifying first order narratives" that offer "a pageant of historical progress which will gradually encompass all of the human race."[58] Not only does Rorty deem such a progressive account useful in the sense of being able to induce people to do what he would like them to, but he even thinks it has a certain plausibility. In the light of the collapse of Communism, Rorty announces his "hunch . . . that Western social and political thought may have had the last *conceptual* revolution it needs."[59] Calling his thoughts a "hunch" rather than a "Philosophy of History" no doubt softens the blow, but it hardly affects the message. As political theorist Peter Lawler has convincingly argued, "Rorty learned what the Hegelian Francis Fukuyama learned from the fall of communism. It is now impossible even for philosophers to imagine a plausible alternative for the future to liberal democracy."[60] The upshot, then, is that while Communism has fallen, the idol of History has more than its share of remaining votaries in the West.

Question 3: Is a Philosophy of History, in the form of a progressive view, helpful for liberalism?

Arguments have been offered in support of both positions. On the affirmative side, many contend that every political system needs, or can profit from, a sense of confidence about the future. A progressive Philos-

[58] Richard Rorty, *Objectivity, Relativism, and Truth* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 211–12, 219.

[59] Richard Rorty, *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 63.

[60] Peter Augustine Lawler, *Postmodernism Rightly Understood* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 1999), 51.

ophy of History supplies that confidence. This point was famously stated by Immanuel Kant in his essay "Idea for a Universal History" (1784). One reason, Kant argued, for propagating an idea of progress is that it offers "a comforting view of the future."[61] In an age where religious belief is diminishing, people must have a reason other than the promise of divine compensation to make sacrifices for distant goals. The belief that their efforts will be rewarded with future success can supply the motive for action, as people will be able to think that they have acted on the "side" of history. A sketch of Historical progress also becomes a way in which intellectuals can exert control over the aims of political leaders. By instructing political leaders on where History is going, historians will be able "to direct the ambitions of national leaders and their servants," as Kant so ingeniously put it, "to the only means by which they can be honorably remembered even in the most distant future."[62]

In further support of the position that the progressive view is helpful to liberalism, some dismiss the charge that the common ancestry of the progressive view and communist ideology in Philosophy of History somehow taints the progressive view. The simple truth of the matter, some argue, is that these two views are fundamentally different: one supports liberalism, the other communism. Furthermore, these analysts argue, events of the last decade have proven not the error of a Philosophy of History, but the error only of the communist version. Each doctrine claimed that it knew the future direction of History, and it is now possible to say which one was correct. This conclusion may not have been knowable until the end of communism actually came into sight, but there is no shame in learning from facts.

There is, of course, another way of viewing the effects of the intellectual doctrine of a Philosophy of History. It is to say that it constitutes a threat, if not necessarily to the survival of liberalism, then to the quality of its culture. (An independent assessment of culture is needed here, as modern liberal regimes by their design leave more autonomy to the development of their culture than did regimes in the past.)[63] On this view, the progressive view has several problems. First, it leads to a disparagement of a heritage. It encourages those living today to think they know more than those who lived in the past, not just in the areas of science and technology, but in the political and moral realms as well. In the words of the first important proponent of Philosophy of History in America, historian George Bancroft, "Everything is in motion for the better. The last system of philosophy is always the best. . . . The last political state of the world

[61] Immanuel Kant, "Idea for a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Intent," in Kant, *"Perpetual Peace" and Other Essays*, trans. Ted Humphrey (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 1983), 39.

[62] Ibid.

[63] See Pierre Manent, *Cours familier de philosophie politique* (Paris: Fayard, 2001), 254.

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likewise is ever more excellent than the old."[64] Such a position leads to a deeply superficial prejudice in favor of "modern" thinking, a prejudice all the more shallow for its self-assurance that it possesses a monopoly on reasonableness.

Second, a progressive view has often shown itself wanting even in a practical sense. Not only does it fail to prepare the public mind for hard times, but also, when truly hard times come, it proves to be utterly unconvincing. In moments of deep crisis, the progressive view fails to capture the experience of the tragic that people then feel. At its best, a progressive view provokes despair at promises broken; at its worst, it leads to a weakening of people's resolve. It is noteworthy that during America's Civil War, Abraham Lincoln shunned altogether the progressive view that had been espoused by Bancroft (among others) before the war, knowing no doubt that to speak of inevitable progress at such a time would have sounded hollow. Lincoln turned in a different direction; in his Second Inaugural, he developed the theme of "the providence of God" and of purposes beyond man's own understanding.[65]

Third, the most complete accounts of Philosophy of History have suggested an end-state, as no other position enables one to say what History finally teaches. Rather than this position generating positive feelings of hope, as some progressive theorists suppose, it has a very different effect at the point at which the end-state is about to be achieved. It produces a profound despondency, as people despair that nothing remains to be accomplished. Even some who have propounded the progressive view have recoiled at the last moment from the consequences of their own thought, concluding, as Fukuyama has, that "the end of history will be a very sad time."[66] Other advocates of the progressive view, sensing just this problem, have tried to meet it with the philosophical legerdemain of speaking of "growing" as a way of trying to avoid there being any end to progress. History, on this view, resembles one of Zeno's paradoxes: it keeps jumping halfway to some putative goal it can never reach.

Finally, the progressive view of History leads to a materialist position. Despite the fact that goals or values about which the progressive view speaks are nonmaterial ones, such as the movement toward liberty and democracy, it cannot be said under the progressive view that these goals or values are intrinsically worthwhile. The progressive view of History is that these goals are validated or confirmed because they are destined to come to fruition. Their worth is ultimately proven by their success. It is at

[64] R. W. B. Lewis, *The American Adam* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1955), 163. Lewis is citing here from a speech Bancroft delivered to the New York Historical Society in 1858.

[65] Abraham Lincoln, "Second Inaugural Address," available on-line at http://libertyonline.hypermail.com/Lincoln.

[66] Fukuyama, "The End of History?" 18. Fukuyama ends his article by expressing the unexpected wish that "perhaps this very prospect of centuries of boredom at the end of history will serve to get history started once again." Ibid.

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this point that a Philosophy of History becomes virtually an object of worship in its own right.

IV. Conclusion

This essay has argued that the collapse of Communism in Europe, which most likely presages the collapse of Communism as a viable major alternative in the world, has not been as complete in every realm as one might have thought. Communism was predicated on the ground of a Philosophy of History that espouses a particular idea of progress. Liberal thought also contained such ideas, although it was never perhaps fully dependent on them. The collapse of Communism, far from undermining this way of thinking in liberal societies, has left it untouched or, more likely, has led to its strengthening. Western societies are free of the menace of communism as a political alternative, but they risk falling even deeper under the sway of one of its theoretical doctrines.

This result is by no means inevitable, in part for the very reason that there is no inevitability to history itself. The West has other alternatives, and can realize its highest potential by discovering other grounds for its political system and its culture. An unprejudiced encounter with the realm of history, undertaken without any preconceptions, reveals that what happens in the course of time is ultimately beyond man's foresight or control. No one can know when an event may strike unexpectedly, no one can know how different persons may choose to act in response, and no one can foresee the results of the interactions among these choices. The great intellectual systems seem only to be able to "predict" what has already happened. Compared to the realm of nature, where man may boast of acquiring almost complete control, the course of history seems to lie stubbornly beyond his management. It is from the contemplation of this fact that humans may acquire a sense of their limits and open their minds, in a spirit of wonder or awe, to something larger than themselves.

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