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** The surnames are listed in alphabetical order.*

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BOOK REVIEW

Francis Fukuyama

Liberalism and its Discontents

Profile Books Ltd. London, 2022, ISBN: 978-1-80081-008-2, 145 pp., \$17 US

The wisdom of classic liberalism is in jeopardy, and the fissures in the faith of its ideologues are now manifest. The liberal doctrine, in its current form, has not only failed to address the socio-economic problems, but its radical emphasis on individualization has ended up aggravating their severity. Francis Fukuyama in his book *Liberalism and its Discontents* has underscored the need to undo the wrongs committed by or associated with classic liberalism and to reestablish the faith in liberalism's ability to build an inclusive, egalitarian, liberal society. The author has underscored the virtues of classic liberalism and its subsequent drift towards the neoliberal doctrine that, he believes, led to the undermining of the virtues of the former. Especially, liberalism's call for human emancipation overextended by the neoliberal theorist to the point of breaking has reared doubts about liberalism's ability to craft a balanced, cordial and spirited society.

Thematic approach has been applied to structure the book. The first four chapters are devoted to vital aspects of liberalism: premises of liberalism, its journey towards neoliberalism, importance of individual in classic liberalism and its misuse under neoliberalism. Chapter five to eight deals with topics such as: how liberalism turned against itself, how focus on rationality was overstretched, and what role does and can modern technology play in enhancing and undermining classic liberalism. The last three

chapters sketches the way forward to construct a liberal egalitarian society.

The plea for man's freedom, the author has opined, from the shackles of social compliance against his approval inspired him to spring out from the established social framework to weave a personal framework, but eventually, his quest for self-actualization got metamorphosed into a drive for self-care. Accordingly, consumer products advertised as care for one's body as well as soul replaced religion and philosophy as springs to sate man's spiritual longing. As Fukuyama has put it "The self-care and wellness movements are simply contemporary manifestations of Rousseau's vision of the "plenitude" of the inner self." The utter disregard and indifference towards everything except that which is concerned with one's self resulted in contagious societal and economic ills summited in the gratuitous inequalities and fragmented spiritless societies.

Fukuyama has discussed at length the criticisms branded against liberalism's assertion that a man, being a sovereign agent, should be allowed to chart his own course of actions and enter into social contracts of his own will. The author has chronicled historical circumstances that gave birth and proliferation of the liberal proposition "original position of a man" in the writings of liberal theorists such as Luther, Kant, Hobbes, Locke, Rousseau and Rawls, and its subsequent criticism from critical theorists such as Marcuse and Mill. Critical theorists

maintain that in the real world, no “original position” exists as there is no choosing individual prior to that individual’s specific attributes such as race, gender, or sexual orientation; thus the “deontological” theory about human emancipation is flawed. Similarly, Marxists and Feminists vehemently disagree with the contention of free consent in the contract theory of workers and women. The disadvantaged position, they state, of these two groups barely allows for their consent to qualify as voluntary.

However, Fukuyama has defended liberal theory by underscoring that liberal doctrine is not flawed in essence. It was only the self-indulgence of neoliberal theorists that took the individualistic creed to its limits. While listing the truth as being that humans are both pro-social and selfishly individualistic and need to be accommodated in a broader understanding of liberalism, which can embrace and accommodate cultural diversities, rather than shunning liberalism and embracing brutal authoritarianism.

Similarly, the French Enlightenment’s glorification of reason’s capability to enter the domain of societal value systems has finally culminated in the “cognitive crisis”. The liberal enlightenment method of verification through empirical analysis, its ability to produce repeatable results and utter disregard for absolute authority are presented as the only valid way to objectify reality. However, critics such as Foucault and Edward Said have rejected the liberal proposition of “word neutrality”, as Foucault believes that discourses are created to reflect and implement the views of dominant groups. Furthermore, economists use complicated mathematical models, which are bereft of the ground realities of the marginalized sections of society, just to validate the tenets of market economics.

However, Fukuyama has stated that it is because of “intellectual capture” that economists and experts have reached a particular set of conclusions rather than because of their conscious biasedness or corruption. Furthermore, he cautions against

the consequences of Foucault’s power relation theory’s underlying assertion that every discourse hides its hidden agenda to dominate other groups; from this perspective, the author has opined, the rising calls from marginalized groups to be treated as equals would be interpreted by rightwing populists as a zero-sum power struggle and an attempt to get dethroned and overpowered; Moreover, the social divisions will be intensified through online platforms and Network Economics tilted towards sensationalism over careful vetting of information.

Fukuyama has also subscribed to the views of rightwing populists and leftwing radicals that there is an identity crisis in liberal societies as they consider themselves as citizens of the world rather than of a particular nation. Consequently, it has provided an opportunity to the rightwing populists and leftwing radicals to pitch identity-based alternatives to classically liberal societies. But Fukuyama has questioned the validity of both as realistic alternatives to replace the classic liberal system. While the author has claimed the rightwing populists’ would be a majoritarian model that would persecute minorities and other ethnic groups; the leftwing model’s everyday life would be overshadowed by concerns like gender, race, color, and ethnicity, and liberal ideals like color-blind meritocracy will take a backseat.

In conclusion, Fukuyama has suggested that to overcome the problem of common identity in a principle-based liberal society there is a need for a strong state to enforce those impartial principles. Hence, the state would provide a sense of community and bond within its territory. Besides, a liberal egalitarian society’s foundation would rest on the following principles: role of government in wealth distribution, social security, committed federalism, freedom of speech with appropriate limits, the primacy of individual rights over the rights of a group, and recognition that human autonomy is not unlimited.

However, it is surprising to see, despite author’s support for wealth redistribution,

that the words such as Keynes, Keynesian economics, and welfare economics are not mentioned even once in the whole book. Moreover, the author has associated every failure of liberal framework to neoliberal theorists and has defended classical liberalism from acquisitions but has not provided any realistic alternative except crafting a strong state. Though, the author has suggested that a strong state is inevitable to implement the liberal ideas, even by force, but the solidification of identity politics based on nationalism and patriotism can again plunge nations into ruthless competition and conflict with everyone and everything.

The book would be helpful for policymakers to reformulate and restructure public policies; to academicians and researchers to revisit and rethink about liberalism in modern era; more importantly, to general readers who desire to figure out why liberalism failed to live up to its ideals.

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