

## Festival of Ideas

### Francis Fukuyama: Can Liberalism Survive?

In conversation with Andrew Kelly

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**Andrew Kelly:** Welcome to Bristol Ideas and We The Curious. I'm Andrew Kelly from Bristol Ideas. It's an honour, again, to have Francis Fukuyama with us. Francis has spoken twice before in Bristol and he's been a great influence on our work in the city. Francis is currently Olivier Nomellini Senior Fellow at Stanford University. He was previously at John Hopkins and George Mason and the RAND Corporation. His books include, most famously, perhaps, *The End of History and the Last Man*, *Identity*, *The Origins of Political Order*, *Trust: The Social Virtues and the Creation of Prosperity* and now *Liberalism and its Discontents*. And it's that book we're talking about tonight. Frank – thank you so much for joining us again.

**Francis Fukuyama:** Thanks, it's a great pleasure to be back for my third visit. I appreciate it.

**Andrew:** Frank, before we move on to talking about liberalism and your book, how complacent do you think we've been in the West, or worldwide, when it comes to protecting liberalism and promoting democracy?

**Francis:** Well, I think, pretty complacent. I think that people get used to peace and prosperity of the sort that's brought on by living in a liberal society. You know, one of the problems of liberalism is that because it's really a means of controlling conflict, and kind of lowering the temperature of politics, it doesn't stir people to great emotions. And they tend over time, I think, to take it for granted. And, if you think about it, in general, we haven't had any big interstate wars since 1945, at least not in Europe, we have had an extraordinary period of economic growth, and since the end of the Cold War, we don't have a lot of people living in terrible dictatorships. Now, that seems to be changing. But I do think that if you grew up in that kind of a system, you tend to think, well, this just happens, this is the way life is. And I do think you get used to it and take it for granted.

**Andrew:** We'll come back to this point towards the end when we look at some of the solutions to the crisis of liberalism and democracy. But tell us about liberalism. You go right back to the seventeenth century, don't you, for your definition?

**Francis:** Liberalism has several different meanings. In the United States, it's really anyone that's left of centre. In Europe, it tends to have a different connotation. They're liberal parties on the continent, like the Free Democrats in Germany who tend to be centre-right, a little bit pro-business, pro-property rights, this sort of thing.

I'm not using 'liberal' in either of those senses. I'm using it in a more classical sense. And it did really originate in the middle of the seventeenth century. In fact, Thomas Hobbes was really, in a way, one of the first liberal theorists, and he wrote in direct reaction to the English Civil War. So, at that point, in the middle of the seventeenth century, Europeans had been slaughtering each other for 150 years over religious differences, burning people at the stake for heretical views. And the early liberals said it's crazy to base a political order on a single religious doctrine, because we don't agree on what those doctrines are. At that point it was Protestants and Catholics, or different sects of Protestants, and so forth. The basic idea that Hobbes and then John Locke put forward was that we should lower the sights of politics. It's not aiming at the good life, it's aiming at life itself. Hobbes said the most fundamental right of nature is the right to life. And that gets transmuted into life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness in the US Declaration of Independence. And so, you're basically saying, no, we're not going to go to heaven as a result of living in our community. We're going to tolerate other people. People

disagree about this. And that's in a way the origins of a liberal order. It's based on the single virtue, a primary virtue, which is tolerance.

**Andrew:** And you break it down into three areas, don't you? Pragmatic, moral and economic.

**Francis:** Yes. One of the reasons I wrote this book is I think people forget why it's actually good to live in this kind of society, and I think people needed to be reminded. And I do think there are three major justifications for liberalism. I just gave you the first one, it's a pragmatic one. You've got a very diverse society, you don't agree on the most important fundamental value issues, and so you agree to disagree. Just to illustrate the problem, if you move away from that, you look at contemporary India. Gandhi and Nehru established the Indian Republic on the basis of liberal principles, because India is this unbelievably diverse society, people differ in terms of religion, caste, ethnicity, region, language, and so forth. And it seems to me hard to figure out how you can govern a country that diverse except on the basis of some liberal principle. And what's been happening since Mr Modi became prime minister is that he's trying to move India's national identity to one that's based on Hindu nationalism. As a result, you have maybe 200 million citizens of India who are Muslim who are not Hindu, and this is leading to both discrimination against them but it's also setting the ground for a lot of violence. And that's what happened when he was the chief minister in Gujarat earlier in his career. I think that's a kind of contemporary example of the way that liberalism can actually buy peace if you agree not to make religion itself the centre. So that's the pragmatic one.

The second justification is moral. And it really has to do with an understanding of what's most basic to human beings. Liberals believe that all human beings have rights, they have certain basic rights, and probably the most important thing that makes us humans as a whole, and equal as humans, is our capacity for choice. So liberal societies first and foremost protect our ability to make these basic choices in life. What we're going to do for living, who we're going to marry, where we're going to live, what religion we're going to profess, or no religion at all if we choose that way. And ultimately it does get connected to democracy, because one of the important choices we make is sharing in political power through the franchise, the right to vote.

The ability to be fully human for a liberal does involve protecting the sphere of individual autonomy. And that is what I think in a liberal society is what gives people dignity. That in an authoritarian society, even a relatively mild one like Singapore, the government treats its citizens as if they're children, they don't know their best interests. And so, we, this good paternalistic state, are going to guide them to understand what their interests are. In a hard authoritarian state, it's much rougher than that. The state is going to tell you exactly what you need to do and what you need to think. And I think in both of those cases, it's not treating people as adults that have the capability of coming to judgments on their own. So that, I think, the protection of dignity, is really important. And by the way, how does the liberal state protect that dignity? By declaring and then enforcing certain basic rights, right. So the right to speak, right to associate, right to believe, and ultimately, the right to vote, become expressions of that autonomy, and it is a rule of law that institutionally protects human dignity. So that's the moral justification.

Then the final justification is economic, because among the rights that liberal societies have protected over the years is the right to own property and the right to transact. And between a rule of law designed to protect property rights and a rule of law that can adjudicate commercial disputes and enforce contracts, it makes possible the modern economic world, which is why liberal societies have historically been associated with both the commercial and industrial revolutions and with a high level of prosperity. And you can actually see that – when China actually adopted some liberal ideas under Deng Xiaoping, they, after 1978, allowed some citizens to actually in effect own property. Technically the state still owns it, but you can buy a house in China and you can sell it to somebody else, and if you're a peasant, you can keep the results of your labour. And once that

happened, all of a sudden the Chinese began to get rich. I think liberalism's connection to property rights and to a market economy has also been one of its big selling points. So, between those three justifications, that's why a liberal society is preferable.

**Andrew:** And what does this mean for people? You talked about the golden age of this period, the 1950s to 1970s, which is the period I grew up in. What did that mean in terms of prosperity, in terms of democracy, in terms of people's participation?

**Francis:** Well, it was a pretty good period. Actually, somebody was asking me in a recent interview what I thought about the twenty-first century, and I said it really sucks compared to the second half of the twentieth century – that was a pretty good period. In fact, the period from the 1950s through the 1970s in France is known as *les trente glorieuses*. It was the glorious 30 years in which there was a combination of pretty widely shared economic growth. There was peace in Europe, Germany and France were no longer fighting one another. There was the Cold War, but that was kept in check.

And in a sense for the Marxist, it was a difficult period because there was a belief that there would be this progressive immiseration of the proletariat. In fact, the proletariat organised in trade unions, and they demanded a larger share of the corporate profits, and, not equally, but everybody in that period grew richer. And there weren't these horrendous conflicts, like the two World Wars.

So this was a pretty good period. And then, after 1989 and 1991, the other half of Europe began to experience something like what Western Europe had experienced because communism collapsed. And communism was a dictatorship, you did not have these kinds of freedoms, you didn't have the property rights, but you also didn't have any of the individual rights to think and criticize and move about and so forth. And so that really led to an extended period of peace and prosperity, at least in Europe and in North America.

**Andrew:** Let's move on to liberalism under attack now. Your book goes into detail about the attack from the right, as well as from the left. What are the problems from the point of view of the right, first of all?

**Francis:** I think the right's criticism is something that has been a sore point with many people since the beginning of liberalism. So, if you remember, I said the basic idea of liberalism is you give up the aspiration to define the good life in terms of religious values or some deep historical cultural tradition, because you recognise that your society is going to be diverse. But that means that you don't also have the strong sense of community in a liberal society, because it is diverse, and people are going to be different from you. You're not all moving in the same direction. And at best, it can seem kind of boring, that you're allowed to do whatever you want. One of the great criticisms of liberal societies is that it promotes private life and mindless consumerism, so people are more worried about having the latest iPhone or keeping up with their neighbours, and it takes their sights off deeper issues that animate other societies. For religious people in particular, they think that there's a kind of militant secularism or anti-clericalism, actually, that liberals possess, that they want to enforce their values on them, and so things like gay marriage and transgender rights have been very controversial for many conservatives.

And I think the other big thing that happened is that there was a revolution in economic thought, so that the kind of economic liberalism that existed in the middle of the twentieth century, in the 1970s and 80s, got transformed into what's now called neoliberalism. Some people think that neoliberalism is just a synonym for capitalism, but I actually think that it's a particular interpretation of a market economy that became much more extreme. Margaret Thatcher and Ronald Reagan were the two political apostles of neoliberalism. And it was felt that markets were good, and they were the solution to any given social problem, and the state was inevitably

the enemy of efficiency, of growth, of progress, and therefore you had to get the state out of its regulatory functions. This created a certain form of globalisation in which multinational corporations seeking the highest degree of economic efficiency would move from one country to another seeking low labour costs, which have been a devastating consequence for communities, especially working-class communities in rich countries, and this produced a tremendous amount of social disruption. And that's why I think there's a working-class... I mean working-class people used to vote for left-wing parties, but in France, in this country, in the United States, there's been this shift where they started voting for right-wing populist parties. And it was also quite easy to blame immigrants for a lot of their problems, because there was competition at the low end of the job market, low-cost labour being brought into the country, and this is a line that that populist politicians sold.

**Andrew:** And on the left?

**Francis:** I think on the left, you had a different critique, which was also understandable. You had growing inequality, especially beginning from the 1970s onwards, and the neoliberals were cutting back on social protections, on state services, on the welfare state, and meanwhile people were not doing well, they were struggling. And I think the main critique of people on the left is liberalism protects everybody's rights, including the rights of all the fat cats and the hedge fund managers, and the Goldman Sachs of the world. It came to a head, really, in the 2008 economic crisis, where taxpayers ended up bailing out the richest banks in the world. This created an understandable amount of resentment that this had happened, and therefore a very great unhappiness with a liberal political order that didn't move fast enough. Because that's the characteristic of liberal societies, you have to debate and argue and there are interest groups and negotiations and so forth. And a lot of times, as a result of that, you don't get stuff done. So I think that's really the unhappiness on the left. And so, in a way, they both converge in thinking that liberalism isn't adequate to get them what they want.

**Andrew:** And at the same time, you've got the Putins and the Orbáns who are really attacking it in their countries as well.

**Francis:** Yes, so you have the rise of an international illiberal right that in certain places actually emerges with an illiberal left, like Venezuela. Hugo Chávez starts out promoting Bolivarian socialism, so he claims that he's a man of the left. And, you know, he had a claim to that, because he was providing free eye clinics and subsidised food, and so forth. But as the regime starts to deteriorate, oil prices collapse, they get into drug trafficking and selling off state assets and big-time corruption – owning condos in Miami and this sort of thing, and then getting help from Russia, which, as far as I can tell, is turning into a kind of fascist country.

And so the old division between left and right – the left used to be in favour of more equality and the right wanted more tradition and hierarchy and so forth – that's gotten completely scrambled and the two have kind of joined hands in opposition to liberalism as a rule of law doctrine and also democracy in many ways as reflecting people's choices. And it turns out that Russia is part of the glue that holds everybody together.

It's very interesting. If you look at populists around the world, so Marine Le Pen and Éric Zemmour in France, Jair Bolsonaro in Brazil, Viktor Orbán in Hungary and Donald Trump in the United States, they've all said positive things about Putin. And I think it reflects a deeply illiberal streak in the populist right. So what defines a populist? A populist is popular, right? They get elected initially, they do reflect legitimate elections, but once they come into office, they say the people wanted me as their direct representative and here are these courts, here are these media outlets that are criticising me, and by doing that, you're actually keeping the people from exercising their will, and therefore you want to be able to get past all of the checks and balances, and the legal constraints that a liberal society imposes on executive power. And I think that's why they like Putin, because they see here's a guy that was elected, he seems to represent the will of the Russian people...I mean, with

Trump, you can just absolutely see this. When the Ukraine crisis first emerged, he said, 'Oh, well, Putin just declared these regions in Ukraine to be independent. How brilliant is that? You know, I wish I could do that.' So you see that connection between this desire to have unmediated, unchecked power and this form of populism. And that's, I think, the kind of global alliance now that we're dealing with.

**Andrew:** I want to move on to some of the criticisms of liberalism, but also how we solve some of these problems and answer some of these questions.

**Francis:** I'm better at the criticism than the solution.

**Andrew:** All right, okay. Well, that might be a bit unfair on yourself, because there are solutions here. One of the things we've been trying to ask in our work is what we do about these problems? And we haven't got all the answers, or even many of the answers, but we're trying to get there.

The first one links directly to one of the criticisms you've talked about. This is about economic growth, and about the promise of a better life. One of the things that I think we've lost, certainly in this country, is the old idea that generations following you will be wealthier than generations now, the child will be wealthier than the parents and so on. How damaging has that been? And also the fact that we're living through quite a low productivity period in the West as well.

**Francis:** Well, it's a big problem. A market economy produces unequal results. Not everybody does as well. As long as the economy as a whole is advancing, and as long as everybody has at least some share of that growth, then I think the society is stable. And that was really the situation in the 1950s, 60s, up until the oil crisis in the 1970s, that everybody felt like they were doing well, and therefore there was a lot of consensus. But productivity began to slow down, you got runaway inflation in the 1970s, people's savings got to be worth less. And because of globalisation, a lot of the inequality started increasing. And so that consensus began to erode.

The other thing is that I don't believe that liberalism by itself is sufficient. It really has to be linked to democracy. And the democracy part is what moderates liberalism, because if you have just a liberal regime without democracy, that was England in the nineteenth century, right? So you have these fat cat capitalists, and they're all getting really rich, and they're doing it by squeezing their workers as hard as possible, and that produces the opposite reaction, so that's how you get Marxism, that this seems very unjust to people.

But when you link liberalism to democracy, and you let workers vote, and you let them organize, and trade unions, and so forth, their share of the total product begins to increase and they've got political power, and that's where you get a welfare state that redistributes some of the some of the richness that's produced by capitalism, and it reduces that degree of inequality. And that's kind of the problem with neoliberalism. It directly attacked the welfare state and tried to try to cut it back.

In a way, those 30 years when the whole of Europe was doing pretty well was also the high point of social democracy in Europe, because you had political parties that really wanted to do some redistribution of the benefits of capitalism. That, I think, kept things going. But there's been this long-term decline of left-wing parties in Europe. They're much less, like the French socialists just disappeared in the last election and the German Social Democrats are much less powerful than they were. There are a lot of complicated reasons for that decline, but I think that's one of the political things that has made democracy less happy.

**Andrew:** And that links to another point you talk about, which is about involvement in civic life, involvement in democracy, and you could add involvement through things like trade unions and so on. This has been in decline as well, hasn't it?

**Francis:** So voting rates and participation have been going down on a secular basis over quite a while. It's a little bit complicated, because with the rise of the internet, I would say that it's hard to say that social interaction has been declining. There was a social scientist at Harvard, Bob Putnam, who wrote this book *Bowling Alone*. This was written in the mid-to-late 1990s, where he talked about the decline of civic association. But that was just the moment when the internet was spreading, and people were shifting their social interactions from in-person to mediated over the internet. And that's had very complicated consequences.

In some respects, the internet has been good. It's a great tool for mobilising people, and I think that it's kept people involved in politics and kept them informed about politics in ways that we expected when the internet first appeared in the 1990s. On the other hand, it's had some very toxic effects, because it turns out that you can spread good information through the internet and you can spread pretty awful information. And bad actors figured out how to weaponise it as time went on. Some of those bad actors were external, so these authoritarian countries began using it as a tool to undermine the self-confidence of democracies, but then a lot of populists and extremists in democratic countries themselves began using the internet. And right now, I think we face a pretty severe problem. In a liberal society, we assume that we're going to have a certain degree of moral relativism. We're not going to agree on when does an embryo, foetus, become a human being? I mean, it's hard to settle that question. On the other hand, we used to think that we could answer simple empirical questions like is this COVID vaccine effective? Or who won the 2020 presidential election in the United States? But it turns out with the internet we don't actually agree on these basic factual questions any longer. And so right now, if you go on Google and you type 'are COVID vaccines effective?', you'll get 10,000 hits of websites that say no, no, that's a conspiracy, don't believe what you're being told about vaccine effectiveness and so forth. And I think that it's really hard to imagine a democracy functioning well if you don't have this basic agreement about facts.

I've kind of wandered away from your question about civic engagement. I think that there has been a disengagement on the part of young people, although I do get the sense that it's beginning to change. Part of the reason for that change is that politics is now increasingly been seen as actually important, it's certainly true in the United States. In the 2020 election, we had voter participation rates that just went through the roof. And a lot of that was thanks to Donald Trump. I mean, there were a lot of people that really loved him and they turned out in great numbers, and then there's a larger number that really hate him and they turned out in really great numbers. And so we've never had such a high level of participation.

The things that are more troublesome, I think, are not these big, national political issues, but things that are more local. One thing that's happened in the US, and I suspect it's probably been going on here in Britain as well, is that local newspapers have been dying almost everywhere, right? So every community used to have one or two local papers, and everybody would actually get the bulk of their news about what's going on in their part of the country from them. And the internet has just wiped that out. You can't compete. Most newspapers actually made their money through classified ads and Craigslist just wiped that out as a source of revenue. And that means you don't get investigative journalism, you don't get any kind of detailed, more sophisticated coverage of local issues. And when that happens, people's civic participation in local events tends to deteriorate. So, there's been a lot of technological change that I think has increased the possibilities for civic engagement, and in some cases has actually increased it, but in other respects has undermined or seriously weakened it.



**Andrew:** I want to talk about a couple of other things before we open it up for questions from the audience. The third area is about trust in institutions. I thought it was very interesting that last week Gordon Brown, who was prime minister during the financial crisis, said we should have jailed some of the bankers, and people were reluctant to say that at the time. But the fact they seemingly got away with it has led to partly that decline in trust and so on. But it's across the board, isn't it, in institutions?

**Francis:** That's right. There are a lot of surveys, like the World Values Survey, that asked people do you trust your neighbours, do you trust the courts, do you trust the government, do you trust legislature? And it's almost a universal finding that levels of trust have dropped in many, many countries across the world. Part of that, I think, is actually because elites [have] screwed up. In the United States, what did you get at the beginning of the twenty-first century? Well, you got the Iraq War and you got the financial crisis, and in both cases these were elite-driven initiatives that ended up really disastrously. And so there's a good reason why people don't trust the government. But trust in other institutions in other countries has also decreased. Now, to be fair, I think that some of that decrease in trust is actually driven by good things. Part of it is the better availability of information, a.k.a. transparency. For example, in the Catholic Church, I suspect that the rate of child abuse and sexual predation on the part of priests in the Catholic Church has probably not suddenly increased in the second half of the twenty-first century. I suspect that this was going on for centuries, right? But we just know a lot more about it because there's much more information available. We know about the interior workings of political parties, of trade unions, of corporations, there is just much more information out there that elites used to be able to hide and so people would trust the institutions. And now they see the inner workings, and say yuck, this is really what they're thinking? And it's really not different, it's just that we know more. So that's a good thing, that we know more, but it's not necessarily something that brings on trust.

The other thing is that our societies have become more diverse. It used to be that in this country and in the United States and most other advanced democracies, all the big decisions were made by a pretty narrow set of white men. And in this country, they went to a couple of particular universities and they all knew each other from back then. Within that elite, there's a lot of trust, they all grew up together with very similar backgrounds. Then all of a sudden, you open up your society to women, to minorities, to people that come from very different parts of the world, and that's just one of the things about diversity, that you don't have that kind of natural trust that you have in an old boys network that used to govern the society, and that's a good thing, right? It's a good thing that these institutions have been opened up. But it's not surprising in a certain sense that you don't have that degree of trust.

And then, finally, I just think that one of the things that happens when you get an education is you become sceptical of authority. In many developing countries, you get these strongmen that are put in power by peasants that are told to vote a certain way and they don't know much about the world and so they just say, 'Yes, boss, I'll do that if you support my family,' and so forth. When you develop an educated, middle-class society, one of the things you learn is to be sceptical of authority. And the levels of education, certainly across the industrialised world, have gone way up in the last two, three generations. And so I think it's natural that people simply don't believe whatever somebody in a position of authority tells them.

The trust part is complicated. There is definitely less trust. Part of it is well-deserved, part of it, I think, is the result of these other things that have been going on in society, many of which I think are desirable. And so that's kind of the world we have to live in.

**Andrew:** The next one I want to ask you about was about the centralisation of power and how remote that power seems. You talk in the book about one of the solutions being devolution – as much as possible. Over here,

we live in a very centralised country. We have this thing called the levelling up agenda, which the government is trying to promote. But what does that mean for you...are you talking about devolving power to communities?

**Francis:** There are lots of ways that you can devolve power. The general principle of subsidiarity, which comes out of Catholic social thought, is that decisions ought to be made at the lowest possible level consistent with the decision that's being made. If you're trying to build a national electrical grid or road network, you don't want each community to be making its own decisions about how that works. On the other hand, if it's like the local garbage collection or local management of public works, that sort of thing, that is something that should stay in the hands of the community. And it's a basic democratic principle of accountability, that if the only way you can hold your political leaders accountable is by voting in a national election every few years, and you've got a problem with your local school or your local waterworks or sewerage company and that's the only way you can complain about it, it's a long route of accountability.

On the other hand, if you can vote directly for those people, and you're unhappy, then you have the information and you can act on it. And so democracy ought to work better. But again, all these things get complicated. In the United States, one of the local decisions that was made in certain parts of the country prior to the Civil War was that some citizens are going to be allowed to own other citizens. And the civil war in a sense was fought over the view that this is not something that should be left up to localities, because there's a bigger principle involved. And that is still a fight that's going on in the United States, where civil rights are something that cannot be left to local communities, because it's a basic human right.

So there is this tension between the need for centralised authority and the fact that government usually works better if it is decentralised.

**Andrew:** And the linked final part of this – as I said, we're not covering all the issues you've written about – is about national identity and about developing what you call 'a positive view of national identity'. One of the developments in this country has been the growth of an English identity recently, as the country begins to fracture a little bit.

**Francis:** I think national identity has a bad odour, especially for many liberals, because liberals believe in the universality of human rights and in theory they are just concerned about violations of human rights that take place on the other side of the world as locally, and how do you reconcile that view with the fact that you live in a nation and you're going to have greater loyalty to that nation than to nations that you don't know about? I think that you can actually reconcile the two, because I don't believe that you can have a liberal system that's not embedded in an actual state and country with territorial delimitation of the government's power, and you can't enforce rights without power. And that's what states are about.

And so therefore, you don't want a world in which any given state can enforce rights anywhere in the world. That's not going to lead to a very orderly and peaceful world. You want states to enforce rights in their own territory. And if that's the case then you have to worry about what that power looks like, how it's held accountable, what kind of legal constraints are put on, and that's why I think liberals therefore need to be embedded in particular states. And then furthermore, emotionally, although there are some people that think of themselves as citizens of the world, they're a pretty small minority. Most people are actually loyal to a particular country. And sometimes it's a region, sometimes it's a smaller unit, a city. But emotionally, I think that's the way human beings are hardwired.

So what I think is necessary is that you need to shift the grounds of national identity and make it compatible with liberal principles. You can't base it on a single religion, you can't base it on a single race, on a single



ethnicity. And that's what Viktor Orbán has done. He's said Hungarian national identity is based on Hungarian ethnicity, which I think is an exclusive and not fundamentally liberal principle. But it is possible to be loyal to an idea. So the whole French Republic that came out of the revolution is based on the rights of man and the French constitution and the French language that, in theory, is open to anybody that's a French citizen. And that's the kind of liberal nationalism that I think we actually need.

**Andrew:** One final question from me, which is about Ukraine. And you've written recently about how terrible though this is, this might be an opportunity for the rebirth of liberal democracy.

**Francis:** Well, I think that people have gotten complacent about the defence of democracy. And they fail to realise or recognise that there are big threats out there, including overt military threats. And so I think they've been under estimating the threat that Vladimir Putin's Russia posed, and I think it's become pretty clear over the last few months and weeks that his ambitions are not just limited to Ukraine. That was his initial casus belli, that Ukraine wanted to enter NATO, but as he's talked about the issue at greater length, it's pretty clear that he doesn't like the entire European settlement that came out of the end of the Cold War, that he doesn't like the spread of democracy into Eastern Europe, into parts of the former Soviet Union. And he wants to reverse that if possible. So I think that the current battle that the Ukrainians are bearing all by themselves is actually something that's being fought on behalf of all of us in a certain way. This Europe, whole and free that we celebrated at the end of the Cold War, that's really what he wants to overturn. And therefore I'm very glad that there's been a lot of solidarity within NATO and within Europe, support for the unbelievable number of refugees that are being produced by this conflict, and also, I think, military support for Ukraine, because that's really the only thing that's going to stop Putin at this point.

**Andrew:** OK, who wants to ask any questions or make a comment?

**Audience Member 1:** So you mentioned earlier that after a number of decades of liberalism, people become accustomed to it. And their ability to see what's driving liberalism starts to fade. How do we inoculate a liberal society, so that we don't just keep going through a cycle of losing and then having to build it back up again?

**Francis:** That's a great question. I'm not sure that you can inoculate people. I think that part of it is a matter of leadership, where your leaders have to constantly explain to people why it's a good thing to live in the kind of country that they live in. But quite frankly, if you look at the history of liberalism, it has come and gone because people do lose a sense of why it's important. So the liberal parties in Europe all lost out to nationalists in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century because they didn't seem to be offering enough, and it really did take the actual experience of violence and war and dictatorship to regenerate that spirit. But hopefully it's something that we can rekindle our interest in without having to go through that full cycle in the future. And I think that's one of the functions of being a leader.

**Audience Member 2:** I was wondering if you could make any predictions on the way that the culture wars, for instance in the US, are going to shake out. I guess I'm particularly concerned that the extreme right is getting a lot of traction from attacking the 'wokeness' of liberalism at the moment.

**Audience Member 3:** You begin *The End of History* by talking about Hegel's idea of the progression of history, but Hegel also famously said that you should probably wait a certain time after history before writing it. And I was wondering if you think that perhaps your book, *The End of History*, came too soon after the end of the Cold War to predict the advent of liberalism?

**Francis:** So, on the question of wokeness. In my book, I actually argue that the threats to liberalism are not just on the right. There is a threat on the left as well because there is a genuine lack of tolerance that many progressives have, particularly on issues related to race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation and so forth. And it does have a chilling effect. Being a professor at a university I can see it. [Phone rings] Oops, sorry, I'll shut this thing off. Sorry about that.

**Andrew:** Is that the university contact?

**Francis:** [Laughs] Yeah! There is a real problem with freedom of speech, and I think that some of the right is reacting to a lot of those excesses. But they're carrying it, typically, in a very crude manner, by actually trying to legislate what universities and schools can and cannot teach and that sort of thing. But I think that both of those can be genuine problems, because there is a genuine lack of tolerance.

I believe that there are two forms of identity politics. One form of identity politics is actually a fulfilment of liberal ideals, where you have a marginalised community – women, racial minorities, immigrants – that have not been allowed to participate in the broader mainstream society and have suffered from discrimination. And so the demand is basically that they be allowed to participate equal to everyone else. That's a liberal ideal. But there is a form of identity politics that says, no, no, we're basically all different, we have different lived experiences, you can't understand my experience, and I also demand to be treated where my group identity is really the essential characteristic that you're going to know about me, not what I do as an individual. That, I think, shades over into a form of illiberalism, that wants to treat people not as individuals that are independent moral agents, but really shaped in an essential way by their social conditions. And that, I think, leads to a kind of illiberal outcome. But in the culture wars, unfortunately both of these tendencies are there, and they reinforce each other, and we've got to get out of that somehow.

Now, on the question of Hegel, the actual inspiration for *The End of History* was not so much Hegel himself as his twentieth century interpreter, Alexandre Kojève, who was one of the great French teachers and philosophers of the mid-twentieth century, who had a very influential seminar in Paris that almost the entire generation of postwar French intellectuals attended. He gave this seminar in the late 1930s as fascism was rising, and he said history ended in 1806, at the Battle of Jena. And this was a rather curious assertion to make. But what it does is it forces you to think, well, obviously, that's a kind of playful idea, but what did he mean by that? And I think what he meant by that was the fact that in some sense, the ideals of the French Revolution, the rights of man, the idea of equality and liberty, were the foundational ideas of the modern world. Those are basically liberal ideas. And what the Battle of Jena did was introduce them into the Prussian monarchy and spread those ideas through the rest of Europe. And that's the sense in which history didn't end actually in 1989 or 1991. They ended much earlier than that. And I think it's an idea that I took seriously, and I think we can still take seriously, that in some sense, as I said, liberalism was born several centuries ago and I still think that it has a kind of validity, and that's why you don't have to trace the end of history to any particular year, but realise that there's been this progression over human history towards a certain way of ordering society, and the end of history is not the termination. It's the endpoint of that progression, and where we've ended up.

**Audience Member 4:** Could you tell me how you would characterise the balance between money and people? Because I think we're a bit confused about that. And when push comes to shove, which one comes first?

**Francis:** Well, I don't understand what you mean by choosing between money and people.

**Audience Member 4:** Simply, that seems to be a choice that politicians make for us quite a lot of the time. Yesterday, for example. And it seems to me to be a question that's quite useful to ask if you're not sure which way to go in terms of policy.

**Francis:** OK, well, I don't know what you're referring to, what happened yesterday.

**Andrew:** It was the Chancellor's spring statement, or budget statement. Well, it's not called a budget, but...

**Francis:** Well, I mean, there's just not a dichotomous choice between money or people where it's clear that you're supporting one or the other, because among other things, people want money and they want resources. And if you're going to support people you have to give them resources, and you have to have enough resources, and you have to distribute them fairly. It seems to me, it's those questions, and not simply one or the other. There are times when what people want is not economic. That was the subject of my last book on identity, where I argued that, actually, people have a sense of pride and they often want things, like recognition, that are not economic. And a lot of politics revolves around these struggles over recognition. Now, in that sense, you could say there's a choice between people and money – do you want to go for economic efficiency or do you want to preserve people's dignity? But in practice, it's really complicated, because among other things, if you're, let's say, you're a working-class person whose father had a job in a manufacturing industry that could support a middle-class lifestyle, and then the job gets shipped off to Asia and you lose your job, you're now working in a service industry, you're earning a third of the pay – that's an economic question. You don't have money anymore. But it's also a dignity question. Because that transition has stripped you of the kind of life that you thought you were providing for yourself and your family and your community. And so the money and the people are very much connected.

**Audience Member 5:** Thank you. You were talking earlier about the relationship between liberalism and democracy, and I would like to hear your views about applying that to the European Union, in the sense that, as a project it has been very successful in building a liberal economic order, but some might argue there's a bit of a democratic deficit. So how does that bode?

**Francis:** Now, on the question of the European Union. There are some really big institutional deficits that I think need to be fixed. You're right that... the most powerful part of the EU is the Commission, the bureaucratic part that is tasked with managing the economy, and that's what creates the single market and so forth. But the weakest parts are actually, in a way, the most important – that's foreign policy and fiscal policy. And that still remains the province of member states. And although they've been trying to push more responsibility onto the European Parliament, it's hard because the member states don't want to give up authority in those areas. And also it's not clear that the European Parliament... people don't take the parliament that seriously. They lodge protest votes there frequently because they know that it's kind of weak and doesn't really matter all that much. And I find it a little hard to imagine that you are going to get a parliament that's truly representative, that will be the centre of decision making. Now, the other really big problem is that the EU doesn't have the equivalent of purgatory, right? In the following sense, that you have accession criteria for getting into the EU that are very important in motivating countries, most recently places like Bulgaria and Romania, to fix their institutions, reduce the levels of corruption, have an independent judiciary. And then they get in and then they backslide. Or, like Hungary, that looked like it was a really successful liberal democracy when it was admitted to the EU, but then elects Viktor Orbán who does all these extremely undemocratic things, and there's no punishment. So there ought to be this holding zone, this purgatory, where you say, OK, you were in heaven for a while, but now you're in purgatory, you have to show that you're actually capable of getting back into heaven before we let you in. And that mechanism doesn't exist. It could be that with the COVID recovery funds that the EU will develop a little bit more leverage and muscle to actually force member states to adhere to its basic values. I hope that

happens. Right now it's kind of on hold because of the whole Ukraine crisis, but I do think that institutionally Europe needs that kind of a mechanism.

**Audience Member 6:** Thank you, Frank. I have so many questions, but I will limit myself to one. So, liberalism is a Western and originally European idea. And we often see it as 'the' solution. And I just wonder how much you have thought about or think that liberalism could be improved if we were able to engage more with non-western philosophies, traditions. I'm thinking of buen vivir particularly in Latin America, but different ways of thinking about organising our world in a way that is also more conscious of the rights and the longevity of the planet. We haven't touched on the climate crisis and environmental issues, but other ways which, because we're so linked in with liberalism and capitalism, that hasn't found a way yet of really prioritising the planet. So I wonder about your thoughts on that.

**Audience Member 7:** That's very fortuitous, actually, because I was also going to ask what you make of the view that the ecological crisis constitutes a specific challenge to liberalism in that it raises the issue that living within limits is not necessarily something that liberalism sort of equips us well to do, and it perhaps puts us back on the table notions of, well, does it make sense for the state to sort of purport to be neutral? Or does it need to take views on what constitutes a good life, at least in the sense of how well we distribute scarce resources?

**Francis:** So, the problem with carbon emissions and the health of the planet is a byproduct of economic growth. And I don't think that the desire for economic growth is determined by the regime type. You have many authoritarian states in history that also wanted economic growth and some of the worst carbon emitters and polluters are authoritarian countries. China is still building coal-fired plants in China. They've kind of committed to stopping that in the Belt and Road Initiative, but 90 per cent of their energy projects in Belt and Road are fossil fuel projects. So the simple fact that you are not a liberal regime does not mean that you are going to prioritise the planet... I mean, this is a kind of empirical question, but I would not be at all surprised if, in general, liberal democracies gave greater priority to reducing carbon emissions and then trying to adapt to climate change than authoritarian states did. The one area where I will concede an authoritarian state may have an advantage is in implementation, because once you make the decision that you need to reduce output or you need to make a big shift in the economy, it is easier for an authoritarian state to simply make the decision and then get the thing done. Democracies do have some problems with that – they have a hard time building infrastructure to adapt. That's partly because they're democratic – they've got a lot of stakeholders, and they have to respect people's rights, and they have to act by law, and that sometimes slows things down. So in that respect, there's a problem. I do not think, and I say this explicitly in the book, I do not think the solution to this is to move beyond national governments that cooperate, because I think that we have no experience in creating a global authority to deal with something like climate that will be both powerful enough to actually deal with a problem, but also constrained enough so that it will deal with it in a suitably legitimate and law-governed way. And that's why I think whatever solution is out there is still going to depend on national action by existing nations. But nonetheless that have to cooperate.

**Andrew:** I'm really sorry, but we are out of time for the question period. Thank you again for coming and join with me in thanking Francis Fukuyama. Thank you very much.

*This interview has been lightly edited for length and clarity. The full version of the interview is in the recording.*