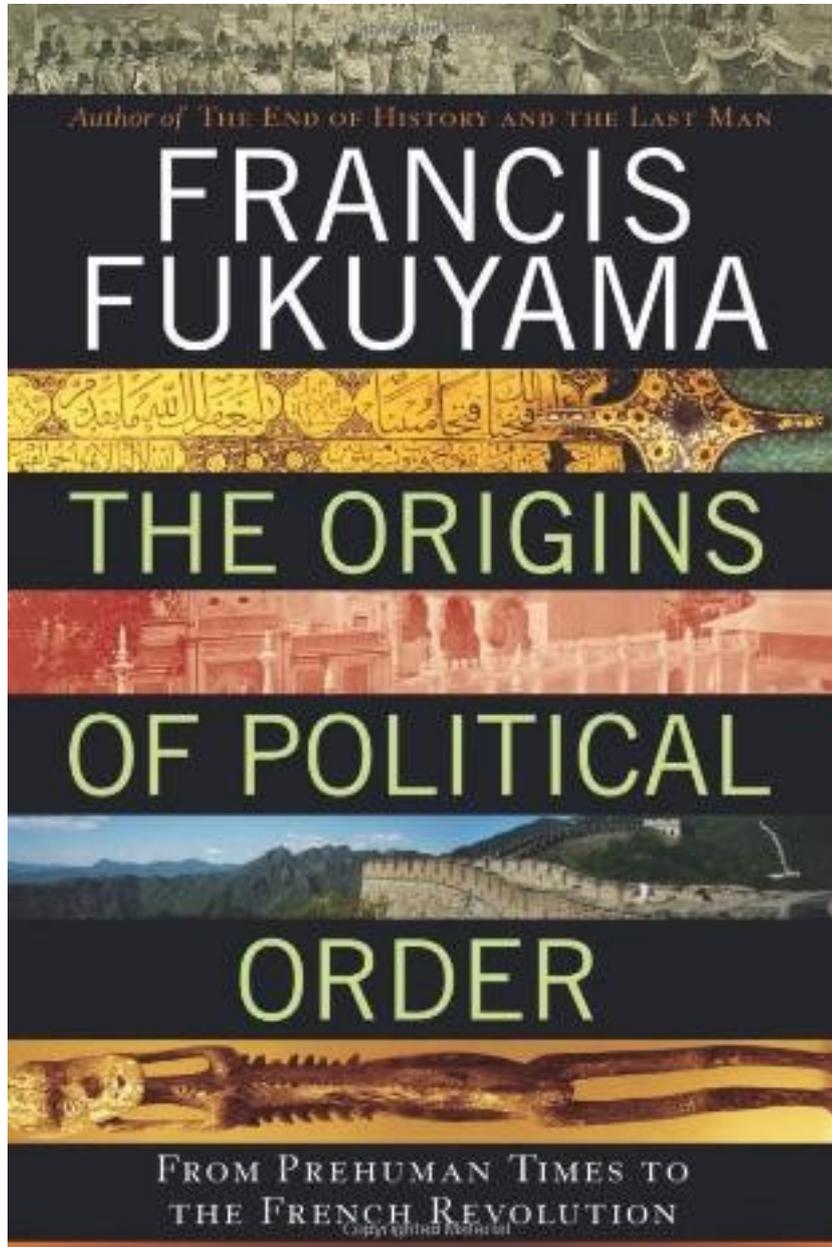

The Origins of Political Order / Francis Fukuyama

Author : EU-topías

Date : 5 febrero, 2015



The origins of political order. From prehuman times to the French Revolution, Francis Fukuyama, New York, Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 2011, 585 pp.

Dr. Francis Fukuyama, a Professor of Political Science at Stanford University and a disciple of Samuel Huntington, describes his book The origins of political order as “an History”¹.

It explains the development of political order from the earliest human societies until the French Revolution. The first major social development, in Dr. Fukuyama’s view, was the transition from hunter-gatherer bands to tribes, made possible by religious ideas that united large numbers of people in worship

of a common ancestor. Since a tribe could quickly mobilize many men for warfare, neighboring bands had to tribalize too, or be defeated”.

Furthermore, “this really came about the thinking of the problem of development”, Dr. Fukuyama says. “There has been a lot of recognition on the part of economists in a last few years that you do not get economic growth unless you have got political institutions”, proper rights, a rule of law and a government able to provide services.

“And in the case of countries like Somalia, Haiti, Afghanistan and alike, we face it also as a very practical Foreign Policy challenge”.

The question that arose then, and particularly when he was working in Asia, was: “How did anybody first developed basic political institutions?” The origins of political order tries to provide us the answer.

But most of the essay is devoted to telling the story of the state. He refers to Kojève, explaining that his assertion “still deserves to be taken seriously. The three components of a modern political order – a strong and capable state, the state’s subordination to a rule of law and government accountability to all citizens – had all been established in one or another part of the world by the end of the 18th century”.

Dr. Fukuyama defines the state very simply: “the State, he says, is all about concentrating power and using it. The rule of law is quite different.

First, the rule of law and accountability happened to evolve independently in different societies before their combination in 18th-century Britain: “China had developed a powerful state early on; the rule of law existed in India, the Middle East and Europe; and in Britain, accountable government appeared for the first time”.

Then other northwestern European countries that were influenced by the Reformation, like the Netherlands, Denmark and Sweden “also succeeded in putting together the state, rule of law and accountability in a single package by the 19th century”.

The other issue, which is more controversial, is if whether you can have non procedural accountability.

So to summarize, in Fukuyama’s mind, the State is all about power and the concentration of power, the rule of law limits that power and accountability limits that further to make sure that it corresponds to the interest of the citizens and that the reconcentration of power is only use in certain (democratic) ways.

Francis Fukuyama rejects reductionist attempts to explain political and social institutions. In his opinion, “it is impossible to develop any meaningful theory of political development without treating ideas as fundamental causes of why societies differ and follow distinct development paths”. In particular, “religion can never be explained simply by reference to prior material conditions”.

So, and as the New York Times explained, “for this reason, The Origins of Political Order, like Fukuyama’s earlier work, is at odds with the contemporary elevation of neoclassical economics as the paradigmatic social science. His intellectual affinities are with the great thinkers of the 19th-century sociological tradition like Weber, Durkheim and Marx, as well as with Hegel, whom Fukuyama tellingly identified as a social scientist in The End of History? With this sociological tradition, Fukuyama shares a view of politics as a product of history and evolution, and a rejection of the absolutism of Lockean natural rights theory and market fundamentalism, or “Manchester liberalism”. Against libertarians like Friedrich Hayek, who try to explain society in terms of Homo economicus, he says that a strong and capable state has always been a precondition for a flourishing capitalist economy”².

Presented as the first part of a 2 volumes interdisciplinary research, *The Origins of political Order* is undeniably “a major achievement by one of the leading public [American] intellectuals of our time”³.

Aude Jehan

¹ Conference at Johns Hopkins University, April 25, 2011.

² Michael Lind, “Francis Fukuyama’s Theory of the State”, *New York Times*, April 15, 2011.

³ Idem.