

Globalization

Are we at the end of history?

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It is appropriate that a book examining IR as a site of cultural practices imbued with conscious and unconscious ideologies should examine a myth that claims that ideological struggles are over. This is precisely what Francis Fukuyama claims in his famous 1989 essay “The End of History?” and later elaborates on in his book *The End of History and the Last Man* (1992). Fukuyama argues that liberal democracy as a system of governance has won an “unabashed victory” over other ideas to the point that liberalism is the only legitimate ideology left in the world. Not only are there no coherent ideological challengers to liberalism; liberalism itself is free of irrational internal contradictions which lead to the collapse of ideologies. Having no internal contradictions means that liberalism is a finished idea. For Fukuyama, all this marks “the end point of mankind’s ideological evolution” and means that liberalism is “the final form of human government” (1989: 271). Because the history of the conflict of ideas in the form of ideological struggle is now over, all that remains to be done is to spread liberal ideology throughout the world as a material way of life, through social, political, and economic institutions.

Fukuyama’s argument could not have been more timely. Published the summer before the Berlin Wall came down, Fukuyama’s essay appeared to have predicted the thawing Cold War’s final melting, a melting made possible by the absence of any credible rivals to liberalism. The supposed predictive power of Fukuyama’s myth was not the only thing that made it popular with IR scholars. If Fukuyama had predicted the end of the Cold War, mainstream IR scholars surely had not. Left bewildered and embarrassed, they looked around for something meaningful to say. Debating the insecurities of anarchy (Chapters 2, 3, and 4), for example, just wasn’t as gripping as it used to be, now that the USA was considered by most to be the uncontested global hegemon and world police officer (Brielymyer). IR scholars and their traditional theories were beginning to look obsolete. But, thankfully, Fukuyama’s myth not only foretold the death of the classical Cold War strategic paradigm, it made possible an entirely new realm of research – the study of “globalization.”

Globalization became the trendiest craze in IR theory at the turn of the century. What is globalization? That’s a good question, and one that scholars in and out of IR have had difficulty grappling with. Globalization has been described as “a term which can refer to anything from the Internet to a hamburger” (Strange, 1996: xiii). That’s because theorists disagree on just about everything regarding “globalization.” They disagree about when “globalization” started. Some date its beginning after World War II (Leyshon, 1997: 133), while others argue it is as old as capitalism itself (Hirst and Thompson, 1996: 2). They disagree about what it expresses (economic, geographic, social, political, or cultural phenomena) and whether or not one or more of these phenomena should be emphasized over the others. And they disagree about whether “globalization” is a process, an ideology (“globalism”), or a “state of being” (“globality”) (Marchand, 2000: 219). Given all these disagreements, it is not surprising that one theorist described “globalization” as simply “a floating sign of many different problematics” (Ó Tuathail, 1998: 85).

Among these many problematics, two stand out. They are two traditions of international political economy – neoliberalism and historical materialism and their expressions of globalization (Table 6.1). Neoliberal expressions of globalization are based on classical liberal economic arguments that see international economic

Table 6.1 Neoliberal and historical materialist takes on globalization

	<i>Neoliberal</i>	<i>Historical materialist</i>
Nature of international economic relations	Harmonious	Conflictual
Distribution of economic goods	All who participate in economic processes benefit	Capitalist economic processes redistribute wealth so that the rich get richer and the poor get poorer
Relationship between politics and economics	Economics <i>should</i> drive politics. Why? Because harmonious, beneficial economic processes can “spill over” and create harmonious, beneficial political processes like democracy within and among sovereign nation-states	Economics <i>does</i> drive politics. Because economic processes are conflictual, this means that political processes are conflictual within and among sovereign nation-states
Take on globalization	Globalization is good because it spreads the economic, political, and cultural benefits of liberalism	Globalization is bad because it does not result in an equitable distribution of global wealth
Globalization’s place in history	It is the “end of history”	It is the capitalist stage of history. History ends at the next stage, when socialism or communism is realized

processes as harmonious realms in which economic exchange processes like free trade spread wealth and increase the quality of life for all who participate. And economics does not only bring economic benefits, it brings political benefits as well, primarily through the spread of liberal democratic institutions in which liberty, freedom, and justice for all are to be guaranteed because the people hold political power. This is why classical liberals believe that economic processes should drive political processes.

In an era of “globalization,” classical liberal principles become neoliberal expressions of “globalization,” in which three processes occur simultaneously and for the good of humankind – economic liberalization (like free trade), political democratization (power to the people), and cultural universalization (some would say the “Americanization” of the globe; see Strange, 1996). For neoliberals, “globalization” is about the benevolent spread of liberal economic, political, and cultural processes, institutions, and practices throughout the world.

In contrast, historical materialist expressions of “globalization” have their roots in classical Marxism. For historical materialists, economic processes drive political and cultural processes. Unlike neoliberals, historical materialists regard international economic processes as being conflictual, primarily between economic classes (owners and workers). These conflicts among economic classes are what lead to historical changes in institutions, ideas, and everyday life. History, therefore, is the history of the class struggle (as Marx put it), and history will not end until the class struggle ends. That can only happen when capitalism (our current global economic system) is transcended by communist economic, political, and cultural processes.

Historical materialists generally agree with neoliberals that “globalization” is a process, ideology, and/or way of living that spreads capitalist ideas, institutions, and practices throughout the world. But historical materialists strongly disagree with neoliberals on two important points. First, unlike neoliberals they believe that capitalist economics and liberal ideology are not themselves premised on contradictions. They are not the final, complete expressions of economics and politics that someone like Fukuyama claims they are because economic classes are still at odds with one another. Second, this means that liberalism is not the final stage of history. It is not “the end of history.” Rather, it is a step on the way to communism, the real end of history. As these criticisms make clear, historical materialists don’t disagree with Fukuyama that history will have an end. They simply disagree with Fukuyama that *liberalism* is “the end of history.”

Neoliberal expressions of globalization are by far the most influential in IR theory and in policy circles. They seem to be the most “historically accurate” in the wake of the post-Cold War collapse of socialist and communist states and ideologies. They clearly complement post-Cold War theories of (neo)idealism (Chapter 3). And they inform policies that create regional free trade organizations like the European Union and the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) and that affect “global” institutions like the World Trade Organization.

There are lots of problems with neoliberal and historical materialist expressions of “globalization,” but this is not the place to debate the shortcomings and merits of each (see Herod et al., 1998). Instead, my interest lies in what these debates and disagreements about “globalization” have to do with Fukuyama’s myth “it is the end of history.” *Fukuyama’s myth cleared the ideological ground for neoliberal expressions of globalization to go virtually uncontested.* By arguing that the history of ideological struggle was over and liberalism had won, Fukuyama put liberalism itself beyond debate in two important ways. First, because liberalism had “won” out over ideological challengers, this meant that any critiques of liberalism from “old leftist” ideological traditions like socialism and communism (as well as from the “old right” of fascism) were regarded as outdated and need not be taken seriously by IR scholars. Second, because liberalism was presented in Fukuyama’s work as a finished ideology, scholarly attention should be directed away from analysis focused on possible contradictions *within* liberalism and toward analysis of the global spread of neoliberal processes, institutions, and practices that follow from the “globalization” of liberal ideology.

In this chapter, I will explore how Fukuyama’s myth “it is the end of history” makes liberalism the global stage on which international politics in an era of

“globalization” unfolds. By Fukuyama’s own account, for his myth to function liberalism must be a finished ideology with no credible external rivals. In other words, liberalism must be free of contradictions, both internally and externally. Fukuyama makes the case that liberalism has no credible external ideological threats. But, in directing our attention toward the ideological challengers of liberalism, Fukuyama deflects our attention away from liberalism’s own internal contradiction – the contradiction between its creation of boundless desires within individuals for the good life and its failure to fully satisfy or control these desires. It is only by substituting economic consumption for personal satisfaction that liberalism defers and displaces individual encounters with what Fukuyama admits is “the empty core of liberalism” (1989: 281) – its inability to deliver a meaningful life.

We see these processes of endless substitution, displacement, and deferral acted out in the 1998 film *The Truman Show*. Not only is Truman Burbank, the “on the air, unaware” star of a television program “The Truman Show,” offered a utopian world in which his material desires are met as a way to control his personal desires and keep him on the set that is his hometown of Seahaven. So, too, are Truman’s post-historical viewers offered substitutes for their desires. In place of their desire for history, they are offered “The Truman Show” – a place where history as an ideological struggle between good (Truman) and evil (the show’s producer Christof) is staged for them.

But when Truman escapes Seahaven and “The Truman Show” ends, post-historical liberalism’s ability to displace individual desires for history onto “The Truman Show” no longer functions. And this makes us wonder if Fukuyama’s promise that liberalism’s post-Cold War “triumph” over ideological challengers means we are at “the end of history.” For, if we accept Fukuyama’s argument, liberalism may have dealt with ideological challengers. But, as *The Truman Show* suggests, it has not (and I would suggest, it cannot) resolved its own internal contradiction between creating and fulfilling desires, desires that propel Truman out of history and possibly lead his viewers back into history.

To make sense of all of this, we need to examine Fukuyama’s claim “it is the end of history.” I will do this by focusing on three questions: (1) What does Fukuyama mean by the end of history? (2) What does liberalism as a post-historical ideology look like to Fukuyama? (3) How does Fukuyama appear to resolve liberalism’s internal tension between creating unfulfillable desires and attempting to fulfil them so that his myth “it is the end of history” appears to be true?

What does the myth say?

In his essay “The End of History?,” Fukuyama begins by reflecting that “something very fundamental has happened in world history” and this something is usually described as post-Cold War peace “breaking out in many regions of the world” (1989: 270). But Fukuyama laments that analyses of the end of the Cold War tend to be “superficial” because they lack a “conceptual framework for distinguishing between what is essential and what is contingent or accidental in world history” (1989: 270). Fukuyama takes as his task to investigate “a process that gives coherence and order

to the daily headlines” and, he claims, this process is “an unabashed victory of economic and political liberalism” (1989: 270).

As Fukuyama puts it, “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” (1989: 271; my italics). But while the “victory of liberalism” is an ideological victory – in that no other ideas or ideologies pose a challenge to it – its victory “is as yet incomplete in the real or material world” (1989: 271). That is why we don’t see every state in the world practicing liberal political and economic principles. But Fukuyama argues that “there are powerful reasons for believing that it is the ideal that will govern the material world *in the long run* (1989: 271; italics in the original). In other words, it is only a matter of time until liberalism is “globalized” as both an unchallenged ideology and as a material way of life.

How does Fukuyama make his argument? He does so by privileging a particular way of understanding history. History, for Fukuyama, is “a dialectical process with a beginning, a middle, and an end” (1989: 271). A dialectical process is one though which the contradiction between a dominant truth (thesis) and its opposite (antithesis) are reconciled to produce a higher truth (synthesis). This higher truth or synthesis becomes the new thesis, which will necessarily be opposed by a new antithesis. This process continues until “all prior contradictions are resolved and all human needs are satisfied” (1989: 272). From this point onward, “there is no struggle or conflict over ‘large’ issues . . . ; what remains is primarily economic activity” (1989: 272). And when we reach this point, history is over.

This way of describing history draws on Hegel’s notion of dialectical history (see Figure 6.1). For Hegel, “history culminated in an absolute moment – a moment in which a final, rational form of society and state became victorious” (Fukuyama, 1989: 271). For Hegel, this moment arrived in 1806, when, after the French Revolution, “the basic *principles* of the liberal democratic state could not be improved

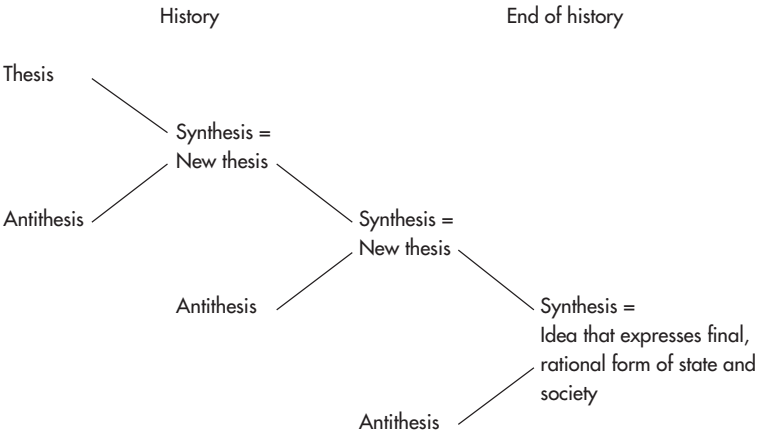


Figure 6.1 The Hegelian dialectic

Table 6.2 Hegelian and Marxist understandings of history

	<i>Hegel</i>	<i>Marx</i>
Understanding of history	Dialectical	Dialectical
Nature of dialectic	Idealist	Materialist
What clashes in the dialectic?	Ideologies	Economic classes

upon" (1989: 272). Now, as then, liberalism's "theoretical truth is absolute and could not be improved upon" (1989: 274). All that remains to be done is to spatially extend liberal principles throughout the world (1989: 272).

Many of us are familiar with this Hegelian way of thinking about history because Karl Marx borrowed Hegel's dialectic to make his argument about how contradictions among economic classes would "drag history ahead" and culminate with the realization of communism. Marx was interested in material economic forces of history. But this isn't the way Hegel thought about dialectics. Hegel, in contrast to Marx, was interested not in the progress of material well-being first and foremost but in the progress of the idea. In Hegel's dialectic, it is not economic classes that are in conflict; it is ideologies that are in conflict (see Table 6.2). For Hegel, ideology or consciousness about the world is what causes the world to change materially. As Fukuyama puts it, "consciousness will ultimately remake the material world in its own image" (1989: 274).

For Fukuyama, ideological consciousness is "the real subject underlying the apparent jumble of current events in the history of ideology" (1989: 273). In other words, it is the triumph of liberalism that made the end of the Cold War possible, not, for example, the economic collapse of the former Soviet Union that made liberal consciousness possible. Yes, modern free market economics underwrites and helps to stabilize this liberal consciousness. And so Fukuyama claims the end of history is marked by "the universal homogenous state as liberal democracy in the political sphere combined with easy access to VCRs and stereos in the economic" (1989: 275). But underwriting and stabilizing should not be confused with causing something to happen. For Fukuyama, as for Hegel, ideological consciousness – not economic materiality – is the cause of change, not its effect (1989: 273).

How can Fukuyama argue that liberalism's "theoretical truth is absolute and could not be improved upon" (1989: 274) to the point that we are now at the end of history? He does so by posing a question: "Are there . . . any fundamental 'contradictions' in human life that cannot be resolved in the context of modern liberalism, that would be resolvable by an alternative political-economic structure?" (1989: 275). His answer is no.

Fukuyama gets to this answer by considering the historical status of ideological challengers of liberalism in the twentieth century – fascism and communism (see Table 6.3). He argues that "fascism was destroyed as a living ideology by World War II. This defeat," he concedes, "of course, was on a very material level, but it amounted to a defeat of the idea as well" because no ideological movements based on fascism have survived long in the post-war era (1989: 275). Communism's challenge to liberalism, Fukuyama argues, "was far more serious"

Table 6.3 Ideological challengers to liberalism

	<i>Critique of liberalism</i>	<i>Why challenge fails</i>
Fascism	Political weakness, materialism, anomie, and lack of community of West = fundamental contradictions in liberal society	Destroyed as a living ideology both materially and ideologically by World War II
Communism	Liberal contradiction between capital and labor/owner and workers cannot be resolved	• state commitments to communism in China and the Soviet Union only rhetorical • bourgeois consumerism embraced internationally • no state offers genuine communist alternative to liberalism
Religion	Liberal consumerism means core liberalism is hollow, meaningless	Offers no universalizable political alternative to liberalism
Nationalism	Offers no generalizable critique of liberalism. Only critical of some particular expressions of liberalism through specific non-representative governments	Because it has no generalizable critique of liberalism, nationalism is not necessarily incompatible with liberal ideology

(1989: 275). Communism claimed that liberalism could not resolve its own internal contradiction between capital and labor, between the owning class and the working class (1989: 275). Fukuyama claims that “classless society” has been achieved in the United States. By this, he does not mean that the gap between the rich and the poor is not growing, but that “the root causes of economic inequalities do not have to do with the underlying legal and social structure of our [US] society” (1989: 275–6). As a result, “the appeal of communism in the developed Western world . . . is lower today than any time since the end of the First World War” (1989: 276).

But what about the rest of the world? To make the argument that liberal consciousness pervades the West tells us nothing new. And Fukuyama recognizes this, arguing that “it is precisely in the non-European world that one is most struck by the occurrence of major ideological transformations” (1989: 276). He cites the example of Japan, a country that had liberal political and economic principles imposed on it after World War II. What is important in the Japanese case, according to Fukuyama, is “that the essential elements of economic and political liberalism have been so successfully grafted onto uniquely Japanese traditions and institutions,” thus ensuring their long-term survival (1989: 276). In the case of the Newly Industrialized Countries in Asia (NICs), the evidence is even more compelling because “political liberalism has been following economic liberalism” as a result of “the victory of the idea of the universal homogenous state” and not because of external imposition as in the case of Japan (1989: 277).

Fukuyama even manages to cite communist China as an example of the triumph of liberalism because “Marxism and ideological principle have become virtually irrelevant as guides to policy,” and that “bourgeois consumerism has a real meaning in that country for the first time since the revolution” (1989: 278). As a result, “China can no longer act as a beacon for illiberal forces around the world” (1989: 278).

But, of course, “it is the developments in the Soviet Union – the original ‘homeland of the world proletariat’ – that have put the final nail in the coffin of the Marxist–Leninist alternative to liberal democracy” (1989: 278). The demise of the Soviet Union seals the triumph of liberalism for Fukuyama. As he puts it, since Gorbachev came to power there has been “a revolutionary assault on the most fundamental institutions and principles of Stalinism, and their replacement by other principles which do not amount to liberalism *per se* but whose only connecting thread is liberalism” (1989: 279; italics in the original). And so communism joins fascism as a “dead” ideology. This does not mean that Fukuyama would describe the former Soviet Union as liberal or democratic, and he is clear that this is beside the point. For “at the end of history it is not necessary that all societies become successful liberal societies, merely that they end their ideological pretensions of representing different and higher forms of human society” (1989: 280).

Concluding that fascism and communism are dead, Fukuyama looks around for alternative ideologies that might challenge liberalism in the future. He identifies two – religion and nationalism (see Table 6.3). Of religious fundamentalism, Fukuyama contends that while this may well be a response to “the emptiness at the core of liberalism,” it is unlikely to represent a political response. “Only Islam has offered a theocratic state as a political alternative to both liberalism and communism,” but because this has little appeal for non-Muslims, Fukuyama argues it lacks “universal significance” (1989: 281; for an alternative view, see Chapter 8). Nationalism, on the other hand, does not represent a clear “irreconcilable contradiction in the heart of liberalism” (1989: 281). And because nationalism is generally an ideology about independence from another group, people, or state, Fukuyama concludes that it does “not offer anything like a comprehensive agenda for socio-economic organization” (1989: 281–2).

Having considered the ideologies past and future that could challenge liberalism, Fukuyama concludes that “the present world seems to confirm that the fundamental principles of socio-political organization have not advanced terribly far since 1806” (1989: 282). That doesn’t rule out the possibility of some “new ideology or previously unrecognized contradictions in liberal societies” to challenge liberalism, but none of these were apparent to Fukuyama at the time he wrote his essay (1989: 282).

Assuming we have reached “the end of history,” Fukuyama asks what all this means for international relations. What will international politics look like in a “de-ideologized world” (1989: 282)? “The end of history” does not mark the end of material conflicts, only ideological conflicts. Conflicts will still rage in “the vast bulk of the Third World [which] remains very much mired in history” (1989: 282). But “international life for the part of the world that has reached the end of history is far more preoccupied with economics than with politics or strategy” (1989: 283). And so in the de-ideologized world, “we are far more likely to see the ‘Common

Marketization' of world politics" than we are to see the resurgence of large-scale conflict among sovereign nation-states, "international anarchy" notwithstanding (1989: 284). This does not mean there will be no conflict among sovereign nation-states. This is likely between "historical states" and "post-historical states" (1989: 285). Nor does this mean that Marxist-Leninism won't try to stage an ideological comeback (see Chapter 7), but, as far as Fukuyama is concerned, it "is dead as a mobilizing ideology" so presents little threat for dragging us back into history (1989: 285).

Overall, Fukuyama concludes that "the end of history" will be rather boring. If ideological struggles made us live risky, purposeful lives that called for "daring, courage, imagination, and idealism," the "de-ideological" age of post-history will be marked by "economic calculation, the endless solving of technical problems, environmental concerns, and the satisfaction of sophisticated consumer demands" (1989: 285–6). It will be "just the perpetual caretaking of the museum of human history" (1989: 286). All this seems to depress Fukuyama, for he writes, "I can feel in myself, and see in others around me, a powerful nostalgia for the time when history existed" (1989: 286). And he concludes by wondering if "centuries of boredom at the end of history will serve to get history started once again" (1989: 286). But, if it does, then Fukuyama cannot claim that liberalism's post-Cold War "triumph" over all ideological challenges marks the end of history.

It is easy to see how Fukuyama's description of the post-Cold War era as "de-ideological," low-conflict, and post-historical set the stage for neoliberal expressions of globalization to become the "next big thing" in IR theory. Since ideological struggles, much less large-scale political conflict, were now a thing of the past, all that remained to be done was to explore the many ways in which liberalism was being spread worldwide in economic, political, and cultural forms. Or was there?

Fukuyama supports his myth "it is the end of history" by making the case that there are no "living" ideological challengers to liberalism. While the "facts" of Fukuyama's case have received a lot of attention and are hotly debated, what goes without saying in Fukuyama's myth is that liberalism itself is free of internal contradictions. Fukuyama simply asserts this and leaves it up to fully expressed, coherent ideological rivals to make the case that he is wrong. Instead, he makes the case that they are wrong.

But what happens if we look *inside* liberalism? What if we ignore the challenges posed by "alternative ideologies" like fascism, communism, religious fundamentalism, and nationalism and simply focus our attention on what makes liberalism itself function? If we do our attention is drawn away from liberalism's would-be challengers to that unresolvable tension within liberalism – its creation of unfulfillable desires that (by definition) it can only fail to fulfill. By Fukuyama's own admission, for his myth "it is the end of history" to function, liberalism must be free not only of external challengers but of internal contradictions as well. But liberalism's relationship to the creation and fulfillment of desires always threatens to unravel not only liberalism's promises for the good life but Fukuyama's claim that "it is the end of history."

This tension is exquisitely explored in *The Truman Show*. The film is set in a post-historical era, in which economic concerns and cultural nostalgia have replaced

political and ideological struggles. What makes this post-historical world function is the success of the television program “The Truman Show” in staging history for its viewers and substituting viewers’ desires for historical and ideological engagement with their consumption of “The Truman Show.” But when Truman reaches his “end of history” by escaping Seahaven, his viewers are left with empty airtime that might represent “the empty core of liberalism” (1989: 281). And we may wonder if the ending of “The Truman Show” also marks the end of Fukuyama’s myth “it is the end of history.”

The Truman Show

How’s it gonna end? That is the question that grips viewers of the 1998 film *The Truman Show* – not for the usual reasons about cinematic climaxes and suspense but because the film *The Truman Show* is about a television program called “The Truman Show.” Nothing terribly strange about that. But there is a twist. Truman Burbank/Jim Carrey, the star of “The Truman Show,” is the only person in the world who does not know that “The Truman Show” is a television show and that Seahaven Island where he has lived his entire life is an elaborate television set. And one day he is bound to find out. When he does, “The Truman Show” (at least in its current form) will end.

How could anyone be so duped about the “reality” of his life? Easily! As Christof/Ed Harris, the “creator” of “The Truman Show” tells us in an interview, “We accept the reality of the world with which we’re presented. It’s as simple as that.” And for Truman Burbank, “The Truman Show” is the only reality he has ever known. From before his birth, Truman has been on television. His whole life – from the exciting to the mundane – has been recorded by hidden cameras (about 5,000 cameras to be exact) and transmitted non-stop worldwide as “The Truman Show.” First placed in Truman’s birth-mother’s womb, cameras were later hidden throughout Seahaven – not only in streets and houses but also in buttons, vending machines, a pencil sharpener, and even Seahaven’s moon. By the time we meet the 30-year-old Truman, the entire island of Seahaven has been built as a television stage housed in an enormous dome, including a complete town, sea, and sky. It is so big, the film tells us, that apart from the Great Wall of China, it is the only unnatural object visible from outer space.

Not only is Truman’s “natural” environment unnatural; so too is his social environment. Everyone on the show has been cast into their roles, including Truman’s mother, wife, best friend, and an entire town of neighbors, acquaintances, and strangers who inhabit Seahaven. The television viewing audience knows that all the people in Seahaven are playing roles in “The Truman Show” – all of them but Truman himself. But for Truman, he and everyone he meets and everything he encounters is real. The woman cast as Truman’s mother, for example, is the only mother Truman has ever known. Truman does not know that he was the product of an unwanted pregnancy and that his birth coincided with a pre-set airtime for “The Truman Show,” making him the child selected as its star. Nor does Truman know that he is the first person in the world to have been legally adopted by a corporation – the corporation that broadcasts “The Truman Show.”

Why go to these lengths to produce a television show? As Christof explains, "We've become bored with watching actors give us phoney emotions. We're tired of pyrotechnics and special effects. While the world he inhabits is in some respects counterfeit, there's nothing fake about Truman himself. No scripts, no cue cards . . . It isn't always Shakespeare but it's genuine. It's a life."

And watching Truman's life has glued viewers to their television sets for 30 years. As we learn from the television program "TruTalk," a "forum for issues growing out of the show," "One point seven billion were there for his birth. Two-hundred twenty countries tuned in for his first steps." "The Truman Show" is a truly global phenomena.

To emphasize the impact "The Truman Show" has on its viewing public, the film cuts back and forth between action on "The Truman Show" and scenes of its viewing public. We see viewers in the busy Truman Bar, a theme bar packed with "Truman Show" paraphernalia and dotted with televisions that broadcast only "The Truman Show." We see two elderly women clutching pillows with Truman's grinning face on them engrossed in an episode of the show. We see a man who seems to do nothing but watch "The Truman Show" while lying in his bathtub. And we see two parking attendants glued to "The Truman Show" throughout their shifts.

Why is "The Truman Show" so popular? What are audiences looking for in "The Truman Show," and what do they find?

Christof tells us that viewers find not only an escape from boredom but "the way the world should be." This – Seahaven – is the world Christof has created for Truman. Seahaven is nostalgically modeled after a 1950s American television show. Not only do the costumes and sets have a fifties feel to them, but everyone on set seems to have a fifties attitude. In this economically prosperous community, everyone is friendly and caring toward their neighbor, family life is stable, and crime is at a minimum if it exists at all. Seahaven, then, is a slice of the past made present. And because Truman lives his real life in Seahaven – his only real world – Seahaven is a living museum. Never dead or static, Seahaven is where the action is, even if that action is the tedious daily routines of an insurance salesperson. Seahaven is where living history takes place. Tuning into "The Truman Show" is like turning on history.

Seahaven is where living history takes place not primarily because it is stylistically and attitudinally a throwback to the 1950s. As in Fukuyama's explanation of history, Seahaven is a site of living history because it is a site of ideological struggle. This ideological struggle is between Truman and Christof. It is the final ideological struggle between liberalism and some form of totalitarian ideology (like communism or fascism). Truman represents liberalism; Christof, totalitarianism.

Why is such a struggle necessary in the idyllic world of Seahaven? To put it differently, what could Truman possibly want that he cannot have in Seahaven? The simple answer is freedom. Once Truman realizes he is living in a controlled environment, he does what Fukuyama says one must do when in the grips of ideological struggle. He breaks out of his own boring daily routines and lives a risky, purposeful life that calls for "daring, courage, imagination, and idealism" (1989: 285–6). But how does Truman get to the point where he wants his freedom more than he wants the world of Seahaven in which Christof claims all of Truman's needs are met? Truman gets there because not all of his desires are met.

Christof admits that Truman's desire to explore the world around him had to be controlled, for if Truman left the set, the show would be over. As Christof puts it, "As Truman grew up, we were forced to manufacture ways to keep him on the island." And so Christof offers Truman a loving family, a secure job, and a friendly town to live in rather than a life of adventure beyond Seahaven. Whenever Truman expresses a desire to leave Seahaven, this substitution of stability for adventure is activated. Truman's mother shows him family albums and has him watch the television program "Show Me the Way to go Home," which celebrates the small-town values of a place like Seahaven and which emotionally manipulates Truman to stay where he is.

But the struggle to control Truman's desire has not always been so easy. This is best illustrated in the film in a flashback in which Truman the college student falls for an "extra," Lauren, which complicates Christof's plans to have Truman marry Meryl, the character Christof has cast to be Truman's future wife.

Truman: I'm Truman.

Lauren: Yeah. I know. Look, Truman, I'm not allowed to talk to you. You know.

[Truman notices that Lauren is wearing a pin that says "How's it gonna end?"]

Truman: I like your pin. Was wondering that myself.

Lauren: Mm.

Truman: Would you wanna maybe, possibly . . . sometime go out for some pizza or something? Friday? Saturday? Sunday? Monday? Tuesday? . . .

[Lauren writes on a notepad "NOW".]

Lauren: If we don't go now, it won't happen. Do you understand? So what are you gonna do?

[The cameras lose them for a while as they sneak out of the library. The cameras discover them going to the beach together. Cut to the beach.]

Lauren: We have so little time. They're going to be here any minute.

Truman: Who are they?

Lauren: They don't want me talking to you.

Truman: Then don't talk.

[Truman kisses Lauren. A car speeds onto the beach.]

Lauren: They're here. Truman.

Truman: What do they want?

Lauren: Listen to me. Everyone knows about . . . everyone knows everything you do. 'Cause they're pretending, Truman. Do you . . . Do you understand? Everybody's pretending.

Truman [looking perplexed]: Lauren.

Lauren: No, no, no, ah, my name's not Lauren. No, no. My name's Sylvia.

Truman [confused]: Sylvia?

[A man gets out of the car claiming to be Lauren's father.]

Lauren: He's lying! Truman, please! Don't listen to him! Everything I've told you is the truth! . . . This . . . it – it's fake. It's all for you.

Truman: I don't understand.

Lauren: And . . . and the sky and the sea, everything. It's a set. It's a show.

[Father intervenes.]

Truman: I really would like to know what's going on!

Lauren's Father: Schizophrenia. It's episodes. . . . You forget it, forget everything.

Lauren: Don't do it! Don't Truman! . . . Truman, he's lying! Get out of here. Come and find me.

But then Lauren's father tells Truman that he is moving his family to Fiji, and he and Lauren exit in the car.

Truman is left on the beach with Lauren's/Sylvia's forgotten sweater, which he keeps as a memento. In future episodes, we see Truman dreaming about Sylvia while looking at her sweater, trying to construct a composite of her face from pictures in women's magazines, and expressing his desire to go to Fiji. All of this illustrates Christof's bind. He must produce desires in Truman, like the desire for a heterosexual family, in order for the show to go on. Indeed, Christof boasts in an interview that he is determined to deliver to his viewers the first on-air conception. And in the world of Seahaven, for Truman to be involved in such a conception it must take place within the confines of a legitimate union. So Truman must marry. But what Christof cannot control is who Truman wants to marry. He wants Lauren/Sylvia.

At this point, Truman doesn't follow Sylvia off the set, in part because – despite Sylvia's attempt to enlighten him – he doesn't understand it is a set. And even if he did, Christof has instilled in Truman a fear of flying and a terror of water, the natural boundary around Seahaven Island. Truman's terror of water was "produced" in the "episode" in which Truman's father was drowned in a sailing accident for which Truman feels responsible. Not only does this make Truman give up sailing. He won't take a ferry across the bay nor will he even drive his car across the bridge.

So what is Christof to do with Truman's desire for Sylvia and the emotion that creates in Truman? Displace it, of course. Immediately after Lauren's/Sylvia's exit from the show, Truman's mother is scripted with an illness, and Truman must remain in Seahaven to care for her. And in place of Lauren/Sylvia, Christof gives Truman Meryl, who Truman is encouraged to marry on the rebound.

What does all this tell us about the worlds of "The Truman Show" and *The Truman Show*? How do they make sense of their worlds, and what do they say is typical and deviant in those worlds? It is important to ask these questions for both the television program "The Truman Show" and the film *The Truman Show* because the ability of each world to function is related to the smooth function of the other.

Let's start by answering these questions for the television program "The Truman Show." "The Truman Show" makes sense of the world by celebrating history. While on the surface the show's celebration of history is stylistically and attitudinally nostalgic, more fundamentally the show's celebration of history is ideological. Or, to combine the two, "The Truman Show" is nostalgic for ideology. It celebrates the ideological struggle between good and evil, between an "on the air, unaware" Truman and his creator and controller Christof. Truman and Christof

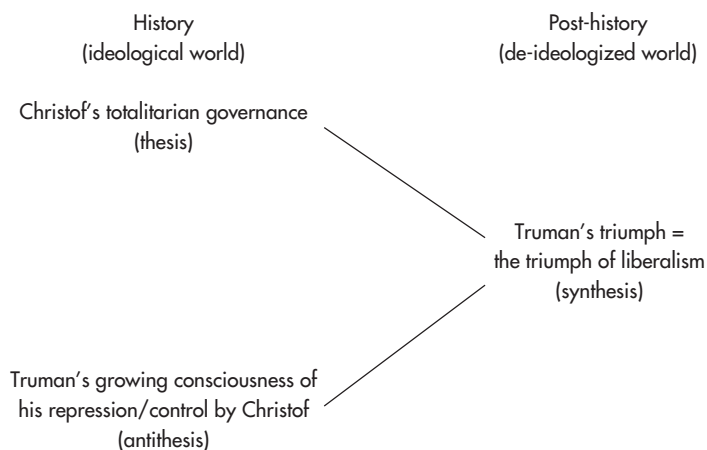


Figure 6.2 The dialectical struggle in “The Truman Show”

represent different ideological positions. Truman represents the desire for freedom and the right to make choices for his own life (a desire for liberalism fully expressed), and Christof represents the desire to maintain totalitarian control over Truman’s life and world. Truman’s and Christof’s ideological positions are locked in a dialectical contradiction (see Figure 6.2).

What is typical in the world of “The Truman Show” is for Truman to be blissfully ignorant of his situation. A typical day is one in which Truman has yet to awaken to the ideological struggle for his freedom from Christof that awaits him. Such typical days are produced for Truman by Christof by containing Truman’s desires within the utopian world of Seahaven, usually by substituting the category of what Truman wants (a wife and a loving marriage, for example) for the specific thing/person Truman wants (Lauren/Sylvia). So Truman gets a wife, for example, but that wife is Meryl, not Sylvia.

What is deviant in the world of “The Truman Show” is for Truman to become ideologically aware and to ultimately exit his prison, thereby exiting history. What leads to Truman’s ideological awakening is Christof’s inability to fulfill Truman’s desires. Loyal viewers (who seem to be everyone outside of Seahaven) know that Truman’s ideological awakening is imminent. Knowing this, they know the answer to the question “How’s it gonna end?” “The Truman Show” ends with Truman’s “unabashed victory” over Christof’s totalitarianism, a victory driven by Truman’s unfulfilled desires (Table 6.4).

What about *The Truman Show*? How does it make sense of the world? What does it say is typical and deviant in that world? To answer these questions, we must look beyond the world of the television program “The Truman Show” and think about the relationship in the film between the television program and those who watch it. If “The Truman Show” the television program represents a nostalgia for ideology and is therefore the place where history takes place, what does this tell us about how the viewers of “The Truman Show” are positioned historically? It tells us that they are positioned in a post-historical, de-ideological era. And, as Fukuyama

Table 6.4 What is typical and deviant in the historical world of the television program “The Truman Show”?

Typical	Truman is unaware of his ideological struggle with Christof because his desires are contained within the utopian world of Seahaven
Deviant	Compelled by unfulfilled desires, Truman becomes ideologically aware and frees himself from Christof and from Seahaven

tells us, that must mean these viewers live in a world in which liberal capitalist ideology has triumphed over all challengers.

Think about it. We never see any conflict – ideological or otherwise – in the world beyond “The Truman Show” that isn’t about “The Truman Show” itself. The only mention of politics and political struggle occurs when Sylvia (Truman’s true love) phones into the program “TruTalk” to berate Christof for his imprisonment of Truman. Beyond that, there is no politics in the film. It is “The Truman Show” that creates any sense of politics for its viewers as nothing else in the film can or does.

If the world beyond Seahaven is the world of post-history – free of ideological struggle and politics as they would be understood in an historical world – then this post-historical world is also a place where desire cannot trouble this de-ideological world in the ways that Truman’s desire troubles and ultimately ends his ideological world. Put differently, there are no internal contradictions within the post-historical, de-ideological world of the viewers that cannot be resolved from within liberal capitalism. From the point of view of someone like Fukuyama, this is because the viewers of “The Truman Show” are free, whereas Truman is a prisoner.

That does not mean that we don’t see the viewers of “The Truman Show” express desire all the time. They do, and they do so in relation to the television program. In addition to expressing their desire for the world of “The Truman Show” by watching it, viewers of “The Truman Show” literally buy it. Everything on the show is for sale – not just the products the cast use (which are plugged in the show through product placement advertisements) but the clothes they wear and the homes they live in. All this can be ordered from the Truman catalogue. For the viewers of “The Truman Show,” Truman is not just a character in a television program. Truman – or should we call him “Tru(e)man” – is a commodity. Like any commodity, he can be consumed. Consuming Truman seems to make his viewers happy.

Like Truman’s desires, then, the desires of the viewing audience of the show are encapsulated within the confines of the world of Seahaven. So long as these post-historical viewers have an outlet for their “politics” and their “desires” – the ideologically nostalgic space of Seahaven and the economic ability to substitute the political ideology of “The Truman Show” with economic products from “The Truman Show” – then their desires for history as the history of ideological struggle are met.

This is what is typical in the cinematic world of *The Truman Show* – for the televisual actions of “The Truman Show” to fill any nostalgic longings the viewers have for politics and ideology through their daily practices of consumption (either by watching “The Truman Show” or by purchasing products from it). Like Truman’s

Table 6.5 What is typical and deviant in the post-historical world of the film *The Truman Show*?

Typical	“The Truman Show” is the space in which its viewers consume history as the history of ideology (by watching the ideological struggle between Truman and Christof and by owning a piece of that history though the purchase of goods from “The Truman Show”)
Deviant	There is no space for viewers to safely project their desires for history and ideology because “The Truman Show” goes off the air permanently

world in which desires are satisfied with substitutes (families, fiancées, friends), the world of this viewing audience has their desires for history and ideology satisfied with consumable substitutes (viewing time and show memorabilia). What is deviant in the world of *The Truman Show* is for there to be no space – no Seahaven or Truman Burbank’s life or Truman catalogue – onto which viewers can safely project their desires for history and ideology (Table 6.5).

And, of course, this is precisely where the film leaves us. When Truman exits history, his post-historical viewers are left with nowhere to project their desires for history. Certainly, they can fill the empty airtime by changing channels (as the parking attendants do in the film’s final scene), but where else will they find “real history” as the genuine struggle of a genuine character with a genuine totalitarian in control? Nowhere. As Christof told us, that is why “The Truman Show” was staged in the first place and has had a growing audience ever since – because it is real. And that means there is no substitute for “The Truman Show.”

All this has to make us wonder, with Truman’s history over, might viewers’ desire for history now be fulfilled with a return to ideological struggle – not in the form of a televisual substitute but in less apparently mediated ways? Or, to put it somewhat differently, is the end ever really the end?

Liberalism’s internal contradiction, or is the end ever really the end?

The Truman Show aptly displays an unresolvable contradiction within the ideology of liberalism. Liberalism forever attempts to fulfill the desires it creates for individuals by offering them substitutes. These substitutes are often (but not always) economic. Whether this is “the economic good life” in “The Truman Show” or the ability to consume “the ideological good life” for viewers of “The Truman Show,” these substitutions generally satisfy individuals for a while. But ultimately, they fail. The trick to making liberalism work – to making liberalism function – is to delay any sense of disappointment its subjects experience when economic desires fail to satisfy personal desires. Capitalism does a very good job in helping liberalism succeed on this score because the message of capitalism is that economic enjoyment can equal personal fulfillment so long as one keeps on consuming.

The Truman Show does not only remind us that these substitutions are necessary. More importantly, it reminds us that they are limited. There are limits to

how happy Christof can keep Truman, no matter how hard he tries. And there are limits to how long Truman Burbank can keep his viewers satisfied. Yes, most of them cheer for his liberation from Christof. But when Truman achieves his “unabashed victory” over Christof, where does that leave his post-historical viewers? It leaves them wallowing in the “emptiness at the core of liberalism” (Fukuyama, 1989: 281) searching for something to fill it (even if initially only by changing channels). What we don’t know – and what it seems no one can control – is what form attempts to fill this empty core will take.

Leaving desires unfulfilled – whether they are for “The Truman Show” or for something else – is a problem for liberalism. In the film, a post-“Truman Show” era is a dangerous one, for it is one in which there is no safe space onto which Truman’s viewers can project their desire for something to fill the boredom of post-history and “the empty core of liberalism” (1989: 281). This is dangerous because for liberalism to function as an ideology apparently free of internal contradictions, such a space must exist.

What does this tell us about Fukuyama’s myth “it is the end of history”? It tells us that it only appears to be true so long as liberalism’s claim to be free of internal contradictions *appears to be* true. What our detour through the film *The Truman Show* tells us is that what it takes for liberalism to appear to be free of internal contradictions is the endless deferral of individual encounters with liberalism’s empty core. All this suggests that, instead of writing about “the end of history” in which liberalism is triumphant, maybe Fukuyama is writing instead about liberalism’s apparent triumph – one that depends on us knowing about but never experiencing its empty core. And Fukuyama’s own myth “it is the end of history” – a myth that he evidences by directing our attention away from liberalism’s internal contradiction and toward alternative ideological challenges – actually participates in liberalism’s process of deferring our encounter with its empty core.

What does all of this mean for international relations in an era of “globalization”? It means that those determined to study liberalism in a post-Cold War era might be better served not by investigating what alternative ideologies might crop up to challenge liberalism’s apparent global dominance but by asking questions like in an era of “globalization,” how will liberalism attempt to control and defer our encounter with its empty core? Or, to put it somewhat differently, how does liberalism now attempt to control our desires in ways that escape our notice?

As the protests against the World Trade Organization talks in Seattle in 1999 suggest, these are not unimportant questions. Protesters around the world (but especially in the industrialized West) offered something like a carnival of opposition to global capitalism (using art and performance art mixed with more traditional forms of demonstration), the very global capitalism that gave these protesters “the good life.” What they objected to was not only how global capitalism’s promise of the good life for some (Western industrialized states) comes at the expense of others (developing states) but also how empty liberalism’s offer of economic well-being in place of personal desire is (“the empty core of liberalism”). While the former point of protest is an old Marxist complaint, the latter one requires no alternative ideological challenger to bring it into focus.

Examples like these remind us of the necessary oversights in Fukuyama’s myth “it is the end of history.” It is not just a coherent ideological challenger that

can (in Fukuyama's terms) drag us back into history. It is liberalism's own internal contradiction – that makes us want total freedom but can offer us only economic freedom in its place – that creates historical and ideological struggle as well. And, even though Fukuyama chose not to focus on it when he wrote his essay in 1989, even he admits that this is a contradiction that has been at the core of liberalism from its creation.

Suggestions for further thinking

Topic 1 Globalization

Even though IR theorists cannot agree about what globalization is, they do agree that it is vitally important to our understanding of contemporary international life. Globalization is not a concept that has implications only for what we consider to be the traditional international political economy debates (between liberalism, Marxism, and mercantilism). Globalization impacts on what we regard as the traditional domain of “politics.” For example, IR theorists hotly debate what globalization does to the sovereign nation-state. Does the state “wither away” in an era of globalization, or do forms of state control simply change their form? What is the role of new technologies like the internet in the processes of state control/state retreat? If the territorial state is a thing of the past because of globalization, what (if anything) is taking its place? Is the state being replaced by a truly global cosmopolitanism, for example? Or is globalization nothing more than the (not so) benevolent spread of US hegemony? These questions defined the cutting edge of IR research at the beginning of the twenty-first century.

Kofman and Youngs (2003) take up these debates about the state, while Baylis and Smith (1997) situate globalization debates in relation to IR theory more generally. For an unabashed liberal defence of globalization, see Micklethwait and Wooldridge (2000). Reading this text in relation to more critical texts on globalization (Herod et al., 1998; Jameson and Miyoshi, 1998; and Hay and Marsh, 2000) is a good way to spark debate.

Suggested reading

John Baylis and Steve Smith (eds) (1997) *The Globalization of World Politics*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Colin Hay and David Marsh (eds) (2000) *Demystifying Globalization*. New York: St Martin's Press.

Andrew Herod, Gearóid Ó Tuathail, and Susan M. Roberts (eds) (1998) *An Unruly World? Globalization, Governance, and Geography*. London: Routledge.

Fredric Jameson and Masao Miyoshi (eds) (1998) *The Cultures of Globalization*. Chapel Hill, NC: Duke University Press.

Elenore Kofman and Gillian Youngs (eds) (2003) *Globalization: Theory and Practice*, 2nd edition. London: Continuum.

John Micklethwait and Adrian Wooldridge (2000) *The Future Perfect: The Challenges and Hidden Promises of Globalization*. New York: Times Press.

Topic 2 The uses of history

History is another concept that we all seem to understand and accept as given. But, as Fukuyama's myth "it is the end of history" demonstrates, even if we think we know what history *is*, we don't necessarily grasp what history or histories *do*. How does history, and temporality more generally, function in narrative accounts of international politics? What work does history do in IR theory? How do critical understandings of history and temporality help us to better approach IR theory? Using a text like Ermarth's (1992) as a general introduction to critical understandings of history is helpful in critically reading how classic IR theory texts (like Modelski, 1987, or Gilpin, 1983, for example) use history. Considering how history is used generally in IR theory, it is even possible to argue that IR theory debates are debates about history/temporality as much as if not more than they are about geography/spatiality, concepts that have more often occupied critical IR theorists (Weber, 1998). For more on the uses of history, see Chapter 7.

Suggested reading

Elizabeth Deeds Ermarth (1992) *Sequel to History: Postmodernism and the Crisis of Representational Time*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Robert Gilpin (1983) *War and Change in World Politics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

George Modelski (1987) *Long Cycles in World Politics*. Seattle: University of Washington Press.

Cynthia Weber (1998) "Reading Martin Wight's 'Why is there No International Theory?' as History," *Alternatives* 23: 451–69.