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A Critical Review of Francis Fukuyama's 'Identity': Examining the Flaws and Limitations of its Arguments

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Introduction

The book titled *Identity: The Demand for Dignity and the Politics of Resentment* written by Francis Fukuyama was published in 2018, exploring the emergence of individual and collective identities shaped by ideologies and cultural factors. The book received mixed reviews with some praising its insights while others criticized its oversimplification of complex issues. Despite this, it gained significant attention and sparked debates around the world due to its analysis of the factors behind the decline of the left and the rise of the right.

In this review, we will delve into Fukuyama's interpretation of identity including its historical and contemporary significance and how it has affected politics and society. We will examine the book's structure, which includes sections on the origins of identity, the role of technology in shaping identity and the impact of identity on democracy. We will also explore how

Fukuyama's philosophical ideas translate into practical solutions for addressing the challenges posed by identity in today's world.

The emergence of individual and collective identity

Fukuyama's argument is rooted in the idea that the modern concept of identity emerged with the notion of an inner and an outer self. He argues that the radical view that the inner self is more valuable than the outer self is the product of both a shift in ideas about the self and the rapid evolution of societies under the pressures of economic and technological change. Fukuyama contends that the rise of identity politics is a product of this evolution, which has created a situation in which individuals demand public recognition of their worth.

One of the key themes of Fukuyama's argument is the relationship between globalization and the rise of identity politics. He contends that the growth of economic interdependence among nations has led to a shift in political institutions and that the liberal world order has failed to benefit everyone equally. He argues that an elite defined by education has emerged and that a huge amount of disruptive social change has taken place. Although huge middle classes have arisen in countries such as China and India, the work they do has replaced work that had been done by older middle classes in the developed world. He also highlights the 2008 Great Recession contributed to a "democratic recession," in which the aggregate number of democracies fell from their peak in virtually all regions of the world.

Fukuyama argues that the Arab Spring of 2011 disrupted dictatorships throughout the Middle East but the hopes for greater democracy did not come to fruition and civil wars ensued. He also points to the two electoral surprises of 2016, Brexit and the election of Donald Trump, as evidence of the rise of identity politics. He also writes that voters were concerned with economic issues, particularly job loss and deindustrialization. At the same time, he argues that large-scale immigration, which was seen as taking jobs from native-born workers and endorsing long-established cultural identities, has produced significant populations of people who feel left behind by globalization.

Fukuyama identifies the politics of resentment as a key driver of identity politics. He argues that a political leader has mobilized followers around the perception that the group's dignity has been affronted, disparaged or otherwise disregarded. He contends that this carries far more emotional weight than people simply pursuing their economic advantage. Fukuyama cites the example of Black Lives Matter, which has an identity that is not being given

advantage recognition by the outside world or by other members of the same society. He argues that identity politics is a common phenomenon based on nation, religion, ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender and that it reflects the view of modern times that the authentic inner self is intrinsically valuable, while the outer society is systematically wrong.

The author challenges the economic theory that human beings are "rational utility maximizers" and the unit of account is an individual or a social group. People cooperate with one another, as seen in the Nash-balance, but the nature of "utility" is a person's utility function, which represents individual preferences. He points out that the problem is that this economic theory has little predictive value if preferences are not limited to the material self-interest.

He also mentions that Daniel Kahneman and Amos Tversky's theory of human motivation divides the human psyche (soul) into the desiring part, which corresponds to individual preferences and the calculating part, which is the rational maximizer. The third part of the soul, thymos, acts independently and determines the judgment of the world. People crave positive judgments about their worth or dignity, both inside and from society.

Identity defined by ideologies

One of the key concepts that Fukuyama explores in *Identity* is expressive individualism. He argues that this philosophy, which emphasizes personal expression and fulfillment, has become increasingly dominant in Western societies. According to him, this trend began with philosophers such as Immanuel Kant who believed that individuals were "uncaused causes" capable of determining their own destinies. This idea was later developed by Friedrich Nietzsche who argued that the highest form of artistic expression was value creation itself.

Fukuyama suggests that individual choice in areas outside of morality began to expand with the market economy and general social mobility. However, he notes that not everyone is a Nietzschean superman seeking to revalue all values. Human beings are intensely social creatures whose emotional inclinations drive them to want to conform to the norms surrounding them.

While Fukuyama's analysis of expressive individualism is insightful, it overlooks some of its limitations. For example, the concept of expressive individualism assumes that people are rational and autonomous actors who are able to make choices based on their own preferences. However, this view neglects the fact that individuals are also shaped by their social and cultural

contexts. As such, the emphasis on individual choice can be seen as a product of the Western cultural tradition rather than a universal phenomenon.

Moreover, his analysis fails to account for the negative consequences of expressive individualism, such as the erosion of traditional social structures and the rise of consumerism. By emphasizing individual choice and self-expression over the collective good, expressive individualism can lead to social fragmentation and alienation. In this sense, it can be seen as a double-edged sword that has both positive and negative aspects.

Fukuyama also discusses the role of nationalism and religion in contemporary politics. He argues that nationalism is a doctrine that political borders ought to correspond to cultural communities with culture defined as a set of shared beliefs and practices. This view is based on the work of social anthropologist Ernest Gellner who argued that "*modern man is not loyal to a monarch or a land or faith, whatever he may say, but to a culture.*" (pp. 58.) According to Fukuyama, nationalism has become a central force in contemporary politics with many people identifying strongly with their national or ethnic group.

His analysis of nationalism overlooks some of its limitations. For example, nationalism can be used to justify exclusion and discrimination against minority groups. Moreover, the emphasis on cultural homogeneity can be seen as a form of essentialism that ignores the diversity and complexity of human identity. By defining people solely in terms of their national or ethnic identity, nationalism can promote narrow-mindedness and prejudice.

Fukuyama also discusses the role of religion in the light of contemporary politics. He argues that religion is an important source of identity for many people and that it can be both a force for good and a force for evil. He notes that religion can provide a sense of community and moral guidance, but that it can also be used to justify violence and intolerance.

He also argues that religion still plays a critical role in shaping human identity, but its importance has decreased with the rise of modern secular societies. He contends that the Enlightenment was a turning point in human history as it led to the creation of secular and liberal democracies that separate church and state. However, Fukuyama notes that religion has not disappeared and that its decline in the West has been accompanied by the rise of identity politics.

He also suggests that the Islamic world presents a unique challenge to his theory of secular modernization. He notes that many Muslims do not accept

the secularization of society and the separation of religion and politics. Instead, they seek to revive Islamic law and governance, which presents a fundamental challenge to the liberal democratic order. This has led to conflicts in many parts of the world, including the Middle East and Southeast Asia.

Factors behind the decline of the left and the rise of the right

Fukuyama questions the factors behind the decline of the left and the rise of the conservative right. According to him, the problem of the left from the beginning has been that it wasn't able to mobilise in the name of the homeland in the West at a fundamentally national level (the '48 revolution), while in the Middle East it was primarily religion that was able to integrate social movements with a left-wing sentiment. In this way, class conflict was pushed into the shadows as time passed. Following the fall of the Soviet Union and social democracy and the crisis of the welfare state, it was definitely decided that left-wing ideas could no longer mobilise broader masses. The left is also criticised for its conceptual approach, which does not focus on strengthening social solidarity and resolving the conflict between capital and labour, but rather on much smaller and more specific groups, such as homosexuality and transgenderism.

By opposition, right-wing populist nationalist policies have been gaining popularity since the 2000s. Fukuyama argues that this is not primarily due to growing global income inequality and lack of resources at the individual level, but rather to a lack of isothym (the human aspiration for equal recognition). He points out as an example that the abolition of the income gap between genders is not primarily an economic demand on the part of the female population, but rather a quest for equal recognition. The poverty issue is more about the fear of losing status and dignity than about actual deprivation. From this point of view, it is not enough merely to achieve well-being in a given society, but the achievement of well-being is of much greater importance. The reason being that one's happiness depends on one's relative status rather than on the absolute. (This refers to Beck's *Risk Society, The Displacement of the Social Class in Relation to Other Groups*). The idea of a basic social income is seen along these lines as a necessary but not sufficient means of mobilizing the declining middle class on the part of the political left.

Right-wing, national and conservative policies deliver slightly more for a shrinking middle class. And that is called identity. It is based on the assumption that the middle class with its higher economic status, higher education and

greater theoretical capacity to organise could still be politically mobilised, but since it no longer has a working class consciousness, identity is the only thing that can mobilise it. To use Tocqueville's example, the French Revolution did not break out because it was so unfortunate for the peasants. The lower classes did not then, and do not now, have the strength to organise because they were too busy making a living. The real reason, therefore, was the middle class's fear of being outclassed by the upper classes of the peasantry and of being pushed down. The middle class consciousness still retains the peculiar honour of being an important member of society, doing productive service. However, more and more people are faced with the fact that they are sliding downwards and no longer feel the sense of class that is the basis of their identity and herefore losing their identity. This is where the populists come in, saying that it is enough to be Hungarian, Finnish or white, thus identity is grounded in belonging to a group, which is only possible if there is a group who are not us. This dichotomous categorisation, in turn, leads to the essentially vertical social conflict between state and citizen becoming horizontally inter-group e.g. reds and blacks in America. Alternatively, it remains vertical, where those below are excluded and those above are condemned. In conclusion, right-wing populist parties have greater social support today because they can appeal to the middle class, which was one of the most significant voter base in the golden age of bourgeois democracy, both in terms of numbers and receptiveness to democratic processes.

Fukuyama also mentions the extension of self-esteem, which is a positive attitude towards oneself and one's abilities. Initially, in religiously integrated societies individuals did not have the freedom to have their own self-esteem. However, with the emergence of psychotherapy, the new reformation aimed at liberating human self-esteem, thus targeting the top of Maslow's pyramid of needs. One's self-esteem is the basis of one's happiness. Self-esteem, however, depends on the validation of other people, either by what is the essence of human beings, which Rousseau considered to be good in everyone (liberal approach) or by having certain special traits e.g. black, white, female (conservative populist approach).

The difficulty the author sees is that liberalism has overstepped its boundaries and on a subjective level. The collective experience (lived experience) lived by an individual or community is more relevant than objective factors. Initially, the social movements of the 60s were only isothym needs (equal recognition, equal rights). Nowadays, it has become more and

more megatonim. So we are better for what we are, we deserve more for what we are, we should rule (e.g. white American men), which are mainly ethnic and minority group specificities e.g. color, religion. These aspirations are seen on both the political right and the left. It is just that the left is going towards smaller, more specific groups and therefore cannot achieve as much support, which of course is reflected in its political power. Fukuyama sees the solution to the culture war in the creation of identities that encompass broader social groups, as he believes that identity cannot be circumvented. However, he does not give examples of the identities that could be used to create these macro groups.

Interpretation of identity

In Western societies, people have gained many rights through laws, but societal divisions can create smaller groups with unique interests. Integrating these groups into a common identity can be difficult. The Arab Spring crisis, along with a lack of foreign support for identity, has led to migration to the European Union. Weak and unclear national identities in religious countries like those in the Middle East have also been problematic. However, well-developed national identities, like those found in Japan, Korea, and China, can be helpful in restoring a country after a crisis. National identity is not based solely on ethnicity and can be peaceful and conforming to diversity. Fukuyama identifies six reasons why national identity is important, including providing physical security and power, better representation in government, a stronger national economy, higher trust levels, equality, and the foundation of liberal democracy. However, populist parties are reviving classical nationalist identities, which goes against the American Constitution and forces the nation to believe it. Nations must give up some sovereignty to save their interests and create a better international chance. People are sovereign in liberal democracies, and without understanding this, there is no democratic choice in meaningful questions.

National identity is a complex and multifaceted concept that can be shaped by various factors as the author highlighted in the previous chapter, entitled *Stories of the Peoplehood*. According to Fukuyama, there are four types of national identity, including those built on ethnic cleansing and border defense, uniting a country after a border change, assimilating minority populations, and creating a new identity that fits all diverse societies. Rules, laws, education, and art can also shape national identity.

The European Union was created to avoid war in Europe, but it struggled with national identity issues in its early years. Some countries had scars from past conflicts and not all members felt they had control in the union. The Greek financial crisis and immigration also contributed to identity problems. Muslim immigrants faced difficulty assimilating, which led to hate and strengthened right-wing political movements.

The United States has a history of successful assimilation, but some Americans reject the creedal identity and emphasize race and religion. Identity politics have complicated efforts to create a common national identity based on acceptance and tolerance of diversity. Ultimately, the culture, rather than ethnicity or religion, is what matters for national identity.

When the philosopher goes into practice

Identity is a universal need that demands recognition and the lack of it can lead to resentment. In Eastern European countries, liberal democracy must be fought for because it is not automatically granted. Society is increasingly dividing into smaller groups based on individual experiences, leading to confusion over identity. However, this confusion is a positive development as it allows for greater freedom and the opportunity to discover one's true identity. Unfortunately, this situation also makes people vulnerable to leaders who promise recognition and greatness to specific communities. Globalization has increased the visibility of diverse groups and recognition is crucial for their acceptance. Multiple identities can be conflicting and changeable, leading to societal divisions. Although identity politics can be divisive, we must respect each other's dignity to uphold democratic values. Creedal nations and democratic values are needed to merge small groups based on trust and citizenship. The right-wing has turned to ethnicity and religion, which threatens to divide societies further. The European Union must liberalize identities by law and use rights rather than blood inheritance for naturalization. Dual citizenship is problematic due to conflicting military or political interests. The United States defines citizenship by beliefs, not ethnicity. The European Union is moving towards pan-European ways, which may occur outside of EU institutions.

According to Fukuyama, Americans must fight for their national identity based on constitutionalism, law, and equality, which includes both left and right-wing perspectives. He believes that victimizing identity politics is incorrect and that fragmented groups cannot be used for political goals.

Instead, immigrants should be assimilated through common schools to promote unity. Fukuyama argues that the European Union has diverse communities living next to each other and that France is an exception because it has a creedal identity, but there are law problems and politicians should defend the country's identity.

Fukuyama also asserts that all people have the right to citizenship but not without obligations. Citizens must be loyal and responsible for their community and keep its rules. He suggests that the European Union must defend its borders, while America doesn't need a wall, as it has the law and administration system to handle problems. Fukuyama argues that illegal immigrants in America are mostly assimilating with work and family, without documentation, and deporting or forcing them out could be impossible or totalitarian. Instead, the law must be changed to let people join the American identity, or its traditional way will be lost.

The author believes that mass media and the internet are chances for democratic ideas, freedom, and diversity, but they can also be used as weapons against democracy by spreading false information. He suggests that identity is not given by birth and can change, integrate, or divide, but it can also motivate us in political ways. In conclusion, Fukuyama argues that American creedal identity is the key to solving problems, pushing back populism, and promoting a democratic welfare state, which both center-left and center-right parties can follow. However, he acknowledges that economics is a complex factor that could affect it.

Conclusion

To conclude, our critical review of Francis Fukuyama's *Identity* has analyzed the book's strengths and weaknesses in detail, utilizing spiral thinking to evaluate his arguments from multiple angles. Although Fukuyama's work has been highly regarded, we have identified limitations in his analysis, including his narrow focus on individualism and lack of attention to cultural and historical factors that shape identity. However, we acknowledge the importance of Fukuyama's contributions to political theory and philosophy and believe that his ideas have stimulated crucial discussions on identity politics, nationalism, and democracy. Our review aimed to provide an objective analysis and promote professional debate on these issues. We recommend that readers engage with Fukuyama's work critically, using our review as a starting point for further reflection and analysis. Ultimately, this will help foster a more

informed and nuanced debate on the challenges facing contemporary society, identity politics, and liberal democracy.

Francis Fukuyama (2018): Identity. The Demand for Dignity and the Politics of Resentment. Farrar, Straus and Giroux.