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► **To cite this version:**

Michel Wieviorka. A Critique of Europe. *New Literary History*, 2012, 43 (4), pp.687-702.  
10.1353/nlh.2012.0042 . halshs-00789134

**HAL Id: halshs-00789134**

**<https://shs.hal.science/halshs-00789134>**

Submitted on 15 Feb 2013

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A Critique of Europe

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Can the European Union be revitalized—or salvaged, at the very least? And if so, can ideas about cultural and historical identity play a significant role? Not long ago, such questions would have hardly seemed relevant, as candidate nations scrambled to join a European Union that grew from six to twenty-seven member states in less than half a century. During the recent economic and fiscal crisis, and particularly since 2011, however, a growing number of people, even within the founding nations of the EU, have spoken out against a project they consider inadequate for coping with the economic problems of the Old Continent, while also criticizing the euro, its common currency. Opponents of European unification have not only stressed matters of policy, criticizing what they consider the ineffectiveness of Europe’s social and economic protocols; they have also, especially critics on the Right, stressed issues of moral and cultural value, history, and national identity. And indeed, when it comes to “values,” are the supporters of European unification not at somewhat of a loss, given that Europe’s appeal to moral and ethical convictions registers, at best, less strongly than that of any individual nation? Perhaps the European debate has simply reached a state of imbalance, with partisans of the EU project—who are only able to rely on reason and economic proposals, even if combined with a moral argument—squaring off against their opponents, who leaven their economic critique with an emphasis on identity.

The EU originally arose from two essential beliefs. The first was a profoundly humanist moral principle: in order to avert the return of war and atrocity, and to prevent nations from killing each other (as they had done twice during the past half century), the best course of action would be to unite the nations in the creation of a European community. In the words of Robert Schuman, one of its founding fathers, the EU would henceforth render war “not only unthinkable but also materially impossible,” as he declared on May 9, 1950, which became Europe Day.

And whereas the long-range, utopian aims of the project conveyed that this community would be political, a sober, more realistic examination of the situation demanded that the project proceed step-by-step, beginning with economic integration. This was the founders’ second belief. The first act of European unification was the creation of the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC), which was inaugurated in 1951 by six countries: Germany, France, Italy, Belgium, the Netherlands, and Luxembourg. The idea was to create a common market for coal and steel, as well as a rational organization for the scale of production in each of the countries that signed the treaty. A European space thus began to take shape among states that had just survived two

massive wars. The two resources historically tied to wartime industry were to be jointly managed by countries that had until recently been mortal enemies.

Europe later expanded and grew stronger; with the creation of the Euro, it became a monetary as well as economic union, sketching out a political structure through a series of treaties. The cultural dimensions of this expansion have never been out of the picture, but the techno-bureaucracy that established itself has focused consistently on economic priorities. When the EU does take culture into consideration, therefore, it does so because, as its official documents indicate, “Europe’s cultural and creative industries [are] important sources of revenue and jobs (over eight million people), [and thus] the EU runs support programmes for some cultural industries, encouraging them to grasp opportunities offered by the integrated EU market and digital technologies.”<sup>1</sup> Yet it is also true that the EU provides funding access to nonindustrial cultural organizations as well, especially to promote cultural development in poorer regions. It supports music schools; it helps restore and preserve theaters; it claims to promote intercultural dialogue—a questionable aim<sup>2</sup>—and each year it designates two cities as “European capitals of culture,” providing support for a variety of initiatives.

The present moment has been an especially instructive and challenging one for a Europe that aspires to be, above all else, both moral and economic: this was a Europe that believed, to put it more precisely, that it could put economy at the service of morality, given that its original purpose was to promote peace and take action to prevent war. The crisis it has undergone since 2008 has been, we might say, a painful, full-scale test of its ability to weather a major storm. The awarding of the Nobel Peace Prize to the European Union in October 2012 does not significantly modify this issue.

## **I. The Stakes of the Crisis**

This crisis first surfaced as an extension, or globalization, of the U.S. financial crisis. In 2007-2008, in fact, it was a matter of facing up to the catastrophic consequences of the U.S.-based financial model of subprime loans and “securitization”: that is, the stock market collapse, the Lehman Brothers bankruptcy, and so forth. But then the crisis seems to have mutated, in spite of the fact that the financial and banking system appeared capable of pulling through, thanks to the intervention of the state and, in Europe, of financial institutions as well. It has since become the crisis of the member states of the EU, and, by extension, a crisis of Europe itself.

Greece, followed by Spain and Italy, gave the impression of countries unable to repay their debts, obliged to borrow at increasingly exorbitant rates, and subsequently at risk of sinking further into impotence and imminent chaos. At this point European solidarity was put to the test. Beginning with Germany, the fiscally stronger nations declared that it was unacceptable for those countries in great financial difficulty not to generate their own initiatives; southern European countries needed to be tough and take drastic measures in order to receive aid from the European Union as a whole.

A debate with clear political stakes began to take shape: intellectuals and political leaders maintaining their support for European integration were pitted against those expressing criticism or skepticism toward it. In the absence of a truly political union, how could the project of building an economic and monetary Europe—which also aspired to wielding moral and humanistic authority—be any less unrealistic than its weak cultural foundations would indicate?

Since then, two opposed ways of taking political stock of this situation have come into relief. The first involves drawing a straightforward lesson from the debate: since an economic and financial Europe can only exist under the aegis of a political Europe—and since the latter prospect hardly serves as a source of inspiration—we should return to “Westphalian” principles,

so named after the treaties of 1648 that proposed to organize Europe on a national basis.<sup>3</sup> This perspective has at times taken a radical, nationalist, xenophobic, and even racist turn. We have seen this in the discourse of nationalist-populist parties, whose paradigmatic expression may be the National Front in France, though this is not the only form of such discourse: there are leftist versions of this phenomenon as well. Indeed, such thinking also relies on the analysis of economists known for their open-mindedness, such as the Nobel laureates Joseph Stiglitz and Paul Krugman. These figures are by no means hostile to European integration; yet the difficulties in Greece, and subsequently in Spain and Italy, led them to assert in 2012 that Europe has no need for the euro. On numerous occasions, and in the mainstream media, they have touted the benefits of doing away with the common currency in order to dismantle the deadlock to which, they claim, Europe's reliance upon the euro has led.

A second point of view has sought instead—with increasing difficulty—to uphold the project of a united and politically integrated Europe, backed by a common currency and striving to achieve further integration in spite of current difficulties. To date this remains the position championed by Angela Merkel and Francois Hollande, in particular; it is also the prospect that reassures the leaders of Greece, Italy, and Spain, the countries most exposed to the European financial crisis at the time this essay was written.

## II. The Nation vs. Europe

The first position described above reveals the political impact of an economic and financial crisis that has affected the European continent far more than other parts of the world. It suggests that far from offering protection, Europe is a source of weakness for national economies. This view also benefits from a powerful cultural resource: the idea of nationhood, reinforced by the crisis, continues to be charged with deep historical significance. For three centuries—a longer period in some cases, shorter in others—the nation has been the principal framework within which it is possible to conceive social and political life, as well as the concepts of past and future, the exercise of reason, and the recognition of a collective cultural existence.

The idea of nationhood took on full force in Europe during the nineteenth century, falling into two major, often radically opposed, categories: the political and the cultural *völkisch*.<sup>4</sup> The “civic” nation was thus to be distinguished from the “ethnic” nation, with, for example, the “French-style” nation of Ernest Renan—who spoke of it as a “daily plebiscite” and thus inseparable from citizenship and territorial birthright (*jus soli*)—set off against the historical, “German-style” nation of Johann Gottfried von Herder and Johann Gottlieb Fichte, which conflated culture with a hereditary bloodright (*jus sanguinis*). These two conceptions are, in fact, often intertwined.<sup>5</sup> Even so, the surge in national-populism in Europe since the early 1980s, while borrowing from both agendas, is clearly marked by a powerful nationalist inclination that more strongly resembles the “German” tendencies than the “French” ones.

National-populism thrives in a number of European countries: the National Front in France, the Freedom Party (PVV) in the Netherlands, the Jobbik in Hungary, the Northern League in Italy (recently weakened by revelations about the corruption of its leader, Umberto Bossi), the Vlaams Belang in Belgium, and similar groups in Norway, Austria, and elsewhere. This tendency fuses socioeconomic critiques of Europe with the call for a certain kind of cultural being, an identity. It adamantly attaches itself to the nation, both to defend it and to deploy its legitimacy against the outbreak of unbridled financial and marketplace power authorized by the EU. National-populism denounces immigration, agonizing about the presence of Islam in Europe; it speaks up for the “little guy” against “the Man,” voicing criticism of establishment elites, traditional political parties, and the Brussels bureaucracy; and it advocates the defense of national identities and

other homogeneities that are threatened, most of all, by the open policies of diversity and multiculturalism.

There is no shortage of available literary and historical references for propping up such nationalist campaigns. Any nation can present itself as an essence: as a singular, unique entity endowed with a language, a past, a music, a poetry, a set of values, and a body of traditions, which are all more or less invented. An extreme case of this is “Padania,” the mythical nation of northern Italy championed by the Northern League. This is how right-wing nationalists in Europe generally, though with individual modifications, construct a discourse that fuses the rejection of Europe with the call for the end of the euro, on the basis of a logic that purports to be economic and social and yet which, at the same time, highlights the prominence of cultural identity, and, if necessary, religious identity as well. The rejection of European integration thus comes to hinge upon a total discourse, since it brings together political, economic, social, and cultural dimensions all at once. During her campaign for the French presidential election of 2012, for example, National Front candidate Marine Le Pen vowed to restore France’s independence in all domains, criticizing “hyperliberalism” and “globalism” and promising to abandon the euro, with its overbearing protectionism. At the same time, however, she ran for office as the spokesperson of the very poor, the underprivileged, and the working classes, whom she claimed had been forgotten by the Left and were threatened by deindustrialization in France.

Pro-European discourse, by contrast, has encountered far greater difficulty in bringing about this turn toward a total discourse. It can certainly have recourse to history, and it can even take the form of a religious turn, especially in highlighting Europe’s “values” and “Christian roots.” Yet this has also allowed the EU’s most conservative supporters to push the discourse rightward, implicitly rather than directly opposing Turkey’s entrance into the European Union and attacking Muslim immigrants. This aspect of a European discourse about and for Europe also lacks the vibrancy, the historical depth, and the literary substrate characteristic of national discourse; it is, moreover, divisive, since there are many supporters of European unification who do not recognize themselves in such an image of a Christian Europe. Leftist groups, in particular, cannot accept such a strong insistence on Christian sources and values, since it neither corresponds to their political orientation nor reflects the real history of the continent. Moreover, right-wing nationalists identify more readily with Christianity (whether Catholic, Protestant, or Orthodox) than do the defenders of Europe. In the end, the decline of Christianity in Europe and the secularization of its population offer little in the way of momentum for those who might wish to found Europe upon such an idea.

We must therefore downplay Christian values as a viable topic. Europe’s integration and recovery does not have recourse to cultural and historical resources that are as powerful as those available to its opponents. The debate is ideologically if not politically lopsided. It is thus important here to clarify the deficiencies and weaknesses that can account for this disparity.

### **III. Reason and Humanism**

Since the 1980s, the very framework of the nation-state has been called into question, due largely to economic globalization, as well as the awareness that the world in which we live has changed. Some have begun to abandon “methodological nationalism” in favor of the notion of a “methodological cosmopolitanism,” as the German sociologist Ulrich Beck describes it in Cosmopolitan Vision.<sup>6</sup> We should stop studying social and political phenomena solely in the context of the nation-state, according to this approach, and we should instead “think globally,” basing our analyses and reflections on the global dimensions that increasingly shape our individual lives, as I have also suggested elsewhere.<sup>7</sup> For the many intellectuals who mistrust the concept of the nation-state (such as the German philosopher Jürgen Habermas, for whom

globalization and cultural diversity alike defy the nation-state's characteristic model of integration), the project of European unification offers a new conceptual framework, at once rational and humanist.<sup>8</sup> This framework makes it possible to sidestep the shortcomings of nationalism, yet without dissolving intellectual and cultural life into an aimless, undifferentiated mass. Social thought can instead lay claim to the great Enlightenment tradition that Marx and Engels endorsed.

Admittedly, it is one thing to defend a European structure which already exists, however threatened by nationalism; it is quite another thing to promote such a structure in the abstract—from a purely philosophical standpoint, without having necessarily criticized the idea of nationhood—as was the case in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Yet we must admit that Europe can boast of a distinguished humanist past. Is it not legitimate to identify Europe with the universal values of right and reason, offering a framework for exploring forms of historical and cultural unity that would defy nationalism, as well as champion humanistic principles such as human rights?

Along with ancient Greece, Europe has been a cradle of democracy, a space in which many progressive political ideas have been forged, beginning with the Enlightenment. The creation of the EU has made it possible—so far—to put an end to the major warring oppositions that led to the Second World War, and even to exorcise some of their ghosts, at least until the genocidal horrors in the former Yugoslavia. Without laying claim to a monopoly on such values (that could be challenged by the United States), the EU can be rightly said to embody the principles of progress, democracy, and humanism, and thus to seem to deliver a weighty and very legitimate message to the whole world. Europe can identify with the universal. But this identification, aided by the presence of an economic community, has never been especially powerful.

Throughout the years of the Cold War, the major figures of European intellectual life took sides with one camp or the other: with the United States, and thus with the marketplace, democracy, and capitalism; or with the Soviet Union, and thus with planned development and communism. This type of opposition weighed far more heavily on Europe than any disagreements for or against European unification, a project that remained predominantly economic, rather than political, diplomatic, or military. In France, for example, intellectuals sided with Raymond Aron or Jean-Paul Sartre far more than they were interested in siding with Europe.

Then the Berlin Wall fell, prompting the American political scientist Francis Fukuyama to proclaim—not without arrogance and self-indulgence—the triumph of democracy and the marketplace, as well as the “end of history,” as he wrote in his famous article of that title, published in the journal The National Interest in 1989. Europe emancipated itself from the geopolitical overdetermination that had overshadowed it during the Cold War. It could now be seen as a means of resisting unbridled globalization and the overarching triumphalism of neoliberalism and the global marketplace, while also authorizing an open-plan economy notable for its humanistic outlook and its dedication to human rights. A properly European thinking could now take hold. Intellectuals from the European part of the former Soviet empire have contributed substantially to this kind of optimism, most notably the former protesters and dissidents of Poland, Hungary, and Czechoslovakia, such as Václav Havel and Adam Michnik. It became possible to think of Eastern Europe as an integral and significant part of Europe as a whole, as a humanist Europe turned toward the future, and to move away from the past images associated with the existence of “another Europe,” to cite the title of the beautiful book by the Nobel laureate Czesław Miłosz. In freeing itself from the Soviet straitjacket, Eastern Europe breathed new life into a unification project that was still in the process of developing, reinforcing the values of peace, freedom, citizenship, and democracy central to its formation.

From an economic standpoint, the period that saw the end of the Cold War and the collapse of the Soviet Union also witnessed the triumph of liberalism and neoliberalism, whose optimism enabled the formation of a pro-European political philosophy eager to emancipate itself from all forms of nationalism. Europe could now provide a frame of reference for various emancipatory projects, as well as for social justice, democracy, and modernization. It could also avoid subjecting itself to the dictates of the marketplace—and here of course we find Jürgen Habermas, who was among the first to propose adopting a European Constitution that would strengthen the civic dimensions of the Old Continent.

Europe has made it possible to reconcile universalism with ideas about cultural context. But the further removed we are from World War II and the atrocities of Nazi and fascist nationalism, and the more that Cold War-era tensions continue to dissipate, the more that a project grounded in the legacy of the Enlightenment loses its bearings. Indeed, this project has struggled to find its rightful place in an intellectual environment that has given it little room. Moreover, it has tended to brush aside the specter of war and mass violence; and the atrocities of the former Yugoslavia prompted no strong movements toward a specifically European intervention. Likewise, whereas in the lecture cited above Jürgen Habermas calls attention to the concerns sparked by the difficulties of German reunification after the fall of the Berlin Wall, the possibility he raises of a new German threat to world peace has elicited little response. And last but not least, in 2003 Europe missed a unique opportunity to revive itself on moral grounds similar to those that had brought about its birth fifty years earlier, by expressing its refusal of war. Public opinion, virtually everywhere in Europe, opposed military action by the United States against the Iraq of Saddam Hussein. And even if certain heads of state (starting with Tony Blair and José María Aznar) chose to support George W. Bush's venture, a powerful moral movement could have been formed, at the European level, that would have refused to support a war, or to allow a war to be planned and then conducted, when everyone well understood that this war was justified with the aid of mendacious arguments by the United States.

I have already alluded to the strength of even moderate or temperate forms of nationalism: there is no need to reiterate this point, except to mention that it has intensified and radicalized since the 1980s, shaped by hate-mongering political groups (targeting differences, immigrants, and so forth), as well as by widespread popular racism and fears about the future. Such tendencies arose in several European countries well before the European crisis of 2008: in France, the National Front began its rise in 1983, in Flanders (Belgium) the Vlaams Blok (which became the Vlaams Belang in 2004) took off about the same time; the Northern League in Italy dates from 1989, and so forth.

In this respect, the widespread social transformations that emerged during the late 1960s have likewise intensified. This period marks the end of the classical Industrial Age. We are witnessing major changes in immigration and emigration, a phenomenon on the rise around the world, with unprecedented human traffic. And in Europe, countries such as Spain, Italy, and Portugal are rapidly becoming immigration societies and no longer emigration societies, whereas Germany and France have seen a shift from labor-based immigration towards settlement-based immigration. Since these changes have begun to take place, we are seeing the rise of values often referred to as “postmaterialist,” a term coined by the American political scientist Ronald Inglehart to describe individuals who no longer value material goods as much as they value their personal autonomy or quality of life.<sup>9</sup> At the same time, there has been an obvious decline of Marxist and revolutionary ideologies.



#### IV. The Pressure of Diversity

Other phenomena contributing to the shrinking intellectual space for pro-European thought are worthy of consideration. A primary factor here is the logic of fragmentation and diversification that characterizes all European countries. For example, the old, pre-Westphalian project of ensuring homogeneity through the reconciliation of religion with the nation—cujis regio, ejus religio—is increasingly contradicted by actual facts. New or reestablished religions, often imported from elsewhere, are taking root and taking hold throughout Europe. Islam, in its various forms, is reappearing in Europe some five centuries after its expulsion from Spain and Portugal; U.S. churches have introduced new forms of Protestantism, such as Pentecostalism and evangelicalism. Such migrations bring cultural differences along with them.

At the same time, the circulation of cultural production has become intense, global, and immediate. This is what the Indian-American anthropologist Arjun Appadurai has shown us in his work on culture and its attendant “imagined communities”: a cultural imaginary, shaped by media such as film, inscribes itself within diasporic forms that are broadcast instantly throughout the world, rather than resting within the confines of the nation-state.<sup>10</sup> Studies of the Internet and other new communication technologies and networks, such as the work of the Spanish sociologist Manuel Castells, reveal the same phenomenon.<sup>11</sup> Cultural production is now made up of incessant, perhaps even instantaneous, processes that operate at every level.

This enables all sorts of borrowing and recomposition, as well as endless forms of cultural hybridization—not to mention an overall increase in inventiveness. In France, hip-hop is a cultural import brought over from the United States; it was adapted mainly in working-class, North African immigrant neighborhoods, where it has become a particularly striking form of cultural expression. The surprising encounter here between the logic of top-down marketing—which might qualify as a form of North American cultural imperialism—and an underground practice of self-affirmation exercised by dominated or excluded artists reminds us that the paths of creation and innovation are unpredictable. It also indicates the extent to which such paths are now global and planetary in scope, even if they take place locally.

Overall, Europe’s intellectual, literary, and artistic life is influenced by a confluence of internal factors (social transformation, self-improvement, and the capacity for generating difference) and external factors (immigration and the global circulation of information, ideas, and culture). This life functions on a variety of levels, from the most narrowly local to the mostly broadly global, without expressing much interest in the concept of Europe. The Japanese sociologist Chikako Mori makes this point in her study of the function of writing in France’s working-class suburbs; Mori describes the vibrancy and dynamism of immigrant literature and poetry, which show few thematic ties to the idea of Europe.<sup>12</sup> In the working-class French suburbs, where French sociologists and anthropologists have only seen violence, rage, despair, crime, social problems, trafficking in all its forms, the failure of republican institutions, etc.—and where they could only conceive of the inventiveness and cultural creativity of “young immigrants” in terms, at best, of hip-hop and “tagging”—the necessarily decentered gaze of their Japanese colleague reveals a literary space that has produced writings of great quality that are far removed from the idea of Europe, and yet also from the trappings of French identity.

The demand for recognition, the affirmation of identity, and the more or less uneven trajectory of immigration can all lead to a desire for integration within the national community that echoes the critical discourse of multiculturalism: minorities demand “integration”—that is, to be recognized in their differences—without having this difference impede upon their assimilation into the national community. Thus, throughout Europe, immigrants and their children increasingly have double and sometimes triple nationalities. These same claims and assertions can also lead to serious dissatisfaction, to feelings of rejection or exclusion that may prompt them



to search for other reference points, whether religious, diasporic, transnational, cosmopolitan, or even communitarian. Racism and discrimination, in particular, help shape such logics, insofar as they confine their victims to identities which can, in turn, offer responses to stigmatization and discrimination: having been treated as racially separate and inferior, certain immigrants have internalized these stigma, and proudly flaunt differences once considered the basis of their inferiority—as is sometimes the case with religious differences, for instance. This is one of the mechanisms that has greatly contributed to the success of Islam in Europe. And in every such case, the place or function of Europe is negligible.

## **V. The Critique of Universalism and the End of Western Hegemony**

Europe has witnessed the darkest of atrocities, as in the case of Nazism, and it remains capable of reprising such events, as we saw with ethnic cleansing and the genocidal massacres in the former Yugoslavia between 1991 and 2001: two to three hundred thousand deaths, and over a million displaced persons. Europe nonetheless remains that part of the world most readily identified with moral and ethical values that could conceivably form the basis for a universal message, and it remains a haven for many who flee persecution and violence elsewhere in the world. The United States has also made important philosophical and political contributions to this kind of message. But in today's increasingly multipolar world, neither Europe nor the countries of which it is composed are perceived any longer as imperialist or hegemonic. The same cannot be said of the United States, which retains its image as a dominant superpower; exercising a military superiority that is difficult to challenge, the United States wields a "hard power" that complements its "soft power"—that is, its capacity for ideological and cultural influence, exercised through mass media, music, cinema, and consumption patterns.

More than any other part of the world, then, Europe could thus embody universal values, starting with human rights. Both within and beyond the confines of the EU, however, there are more and more people who take issue with such universalism. Some, speaking from a position that owes much to Marx (himself an opponent of abstract universalism), criticize the artificiality, even the chicanery, of this tendency to highlight emancipatory categories that do not correspond to actual practices. Others emphasize its ideological character. According to the American historian-sociologist Immanuel Wallerstein, for example, universal values are the mask behind which lurk various forms of domination: the ideology of white supremacy over people of color, of men over women, of Westerners over Africa and Asia, and so forth.<sup>13</sup> Critics also highlight the ignorance and arrogance of Europeans and Americans who claim to know everything, and decide everything on the basis of universal values, as if the West had a monopoly on the invention of justice and democracy. Thus the Nobel-Prize-winning economist Amartya Sen has shown, for example, that India and Africa have long contributed to our definitions of democracy, and that the forms of justice to which so-called Western countries should pay closer attention already exist in non-Western traditions, or are brought in by religions not necessarily dominant in the West.<sup>14</sup>

Whereas it would be wrong to minimize the contribution of the West, and of Europe in particular, when it comes to democracy and human rights, it is equally unacceptable to remain blind to Western arrogance and ignorance when it denies or undervalues other contributions, other conceptual possibilities. This observation should not lead us to abandon the notion of universals altogether. Rather, it invites us to rethink the very notion: that is, to reformulate the universal and perhaps, even more broadly, the idea of modernity. It is in this sense that the late Israeli sociologist Shmuel Eisenstadt, among others, proposed the concept of "multiple modernities" (the title of his 2002 book) to account for the diversity of contemporary forms of modernity. The first wave of novelty, he argues, came from Japan, a country that managed to fuse the contributions of Western modernity with the preservation of its own traditions.<sup>15</sup> This

argument has generated (and continues to generate) considerable attention from social theorists, many of whom retort that there is but a singular modernity, even while they accept the idea that there are numerous paths to modernization.<sup>16</sup>

The problem is not—or not simply—that there are antimodern values that can be opposed to the universal values of the West (on behalf of the whole of Asia, for instance, and Asiatism, or any of its individual countries and thus on behalf of Chinese, Indian, or Japanese thought). If the West loses its near-monopoly over definitions of modernity and universal values, then it becomes difficult to identify Europe as their sole proprietor. Not only is Europe threatened by a severe economic crisis, in other words, but it is also losing its capacity to embody human rights and humanism more fully than other parts of the world. It no longer generates the literature, artistic forms, intellectual life, or moral and ethical guidance that put it on the forefront, as was formerly the case. This does not necessarily imply the permanent loss of such status, but instead reminds us of the imperatives required to maintain it: namely, for Europe to propose a radical reform of universal values that would take globalization into account, and which would remain attentive to the claims of other political philosophies and distant cultures. By breaking with its ethnocentrism, and heeding the spirit of humanist values that characterize it, Europe could thus make a modest contribution to the ambitious reformulation of universalism itself.

When the West's moral and ethical hegemony is challenged from both within and without, Europe is the first to suffer, at least symbolically. This is the case when chaos, dictatorship, and mass violence come to defy the West and draw attention to its impotence, when force, diplomacy, and justice cannot be used for good, in spite of the international institutions in which the West plays a major role, and in spite of the work of NGOs, which often emerge from such institutions.

## VI. The Idea of Democracy

As we can readily imagine, it is difficult to promote the idea of a political Europe capable of making diplomatic and military decisions—of contributing to the peaceful resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, for example, or resolving other armed conflicts throughout the contemporary world, whether in Africa or the Middle East. Europe, moreover, is a region where the health of democracy itself is at stake. Granted, during the 1970s it rid itself of two dictators, Francisco Franco and António de Oliveira Salazar, who managed to survive the end of the Second World War, as well as the colonels of the Greek military junta. Furthermore, the various totalitarian regimes of Eastern Europe disappeared throughout the late 1980s.

Even so, since the 1980s a number of European countries have seen the rise of substantial, enduring political forces based on national-populist ideologies that are often xenophobic and racist, and which are deeply critical of established political parties and the party system. Electoral abstention also remains a major phenomenon throughout Europe, reflecting a lack of interest among voters, who have either simply abandoned politics altogether, or who consider what politics offers to be ill-suited to their expectations.

Long before its collective unification, Europe was a political laboratory characterized by an exceptional inventiveness. It gave birth, for instance, to social democracy, and in general the role of political representation has been a resolutely democratic one. But is Europe today being threatened by what the British political scientist Colin Crouch and others have theorized as “postdemocracy”?<sup>17</sup> The appearance of democracy has been saved, from this point of view, but has political power not in fact been hijacked by the media, by experts, pollsters, and lobbyists, those very forces that prevent political representation from functioning? Moreover, not only is this diagnosis likely to be imposed on each European country, or at least put forward as a blanket hypothesis, but Europe itself, in its overall functioning, is also equally susceptible to the charge

of having adapted to such a condition of postdemocracy. According to this logic, power has become technocratic; well out of the hands of the citizenry, it is subject instead to the pressures of all sorts of interest groups, rather than to the demands of the population it claims to represent. Though by no means new, this view of things is very popular among national-populists, as we have seen. It likewise characterizes the leftism positioned “to the left of the Left”; it was featured, for example, in the discourse of the Left Front in France during the campaign of its leader, Jean-Luc Mélenchon, during the 2012 presidential election.

Under such circumstances—even if this criticism is sometimes unfair and remains blind to the efforts of the European Community to develop a cultural or communicative politics—it does indeed seem that Europe has exhausted its ability to inspire a truly dynamic program that goes beyond mere economics, coming from the bottom up, through its citizens. Europe’s cultural and intellectual life suffers from a lack of grassroots inspiration, despite the efforts of writers, artists, and scholars to promulgate it. For many years, especially in times of war or its aftermath, writers rallied in support of Europe, whether in dreaming of a single European nation or conceiving of a Europe of Nations. Such figures include, among others, Dante, Rousseau, Victor Hugo, and Ernst Jünger. There is now a European Writers’ Parliament, created at the initiative of José Saramago, the 1998 Nobel Laureate in Literature. Such initiatives frequently remind us of Europe’s importance from an intellectual point of view, as was the case with the recent call for European authorities to help forge a Europe of “actively employed citizens,” and to end the “top-down approach that currently prevails in Europe, a Europe of elites and technocrats,” a call which I cosigned with Ulrich Beck and Daniel Cohn-Bendit.<sup>18</sup> But we must admit that the scope of such efforts remains limited.

The European economy is in bad shape. Its growth rate is weak; its monetary system is slipping; its currency, the euro, is in peril; its financial institutions are ill-equipped. And neither Europe nor the world has developed in such a way as to make it possible to even imagine how to compensate for economic and social problems on a cultural, moral, or intellectual plane, in ways that might somehow jump-start the EU machine. The days when the desire to prevent war drove European unification are gone, for now; and no other moral imperatives have succeeded it. In The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism (1904), Max Weber showed that religion, specifically Protestantism, was the source of capitalism in his time, and thus that noneconomic motives could influence economic actions considerably. It is unclear today what manner of noneconomic motives—whether religious, moral, or ethical—could offer new inspiration for those who wish to continue building Europe, or at least to prevent its decomposition. When it comes to saving Europe, we appear to have recourse only to reason, rational reflection, economic reasoning, and technical competence. In these anxious and difficult times, this is not likely to be sufficient.

Translated by Jonathan P. Eburne

## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> Europa.eu/pol/cult/indexen.htm, official website of the European Union.

<sup>2</sup> See the debate by Nasar Meer, Tariq Modood, Pnina Werbner, Will Kymlicka, Geoffrey Brahm Levey, and Michel Wieviorka, in “How Does Interculturalism Contrast with Multiculturalism?” in special issue, eds. Nasar Meer and Tariq Modood, Journal of Intercultural Studies 33, no. 2 (2012): 175-96.

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<sup>3</sup> Signed on October 24, 1648, the Treaty of Westphalia ended the two wars that were ravaging Europe, the Thirty Years' War and Eighty Years' War. They are the source of the international system that regulates a sustainable Europe remodeled on the basis of sovereign nation-states and international law.

<sup>4</sup> See especially Louis Dumont, Essais sur l'individualisme: une perspective anthropologique sur l'idéologie moderne (Paris: Seuil, 1987).

<sup>5</sup> For a general discussion, see Wieviorka, La démocratie à l'épreuve. Nationalism, populisme, ethnicité (Paris: La Découverte, 1993).

<sup>6</sup> Ulrich Beck, Cosmopolitan Vision (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2006).

<sup>7</sup> See my Neuf leçons de sociologie (Paris: Robert Laffont, 2009). See also Evil (Cambridge: Polity, 2012).

<sup>8</sup> See Jürgen Habermas, "Is There a Future for the Nation-State?" in The Inclusion of the Other: Studies in Political Theory, trans. Ciaran Cronin (Cambridge: Polity, 2005).

<sup>9</sup> See, for example, Ronald Inglehart, Culture Shift in Advanced Industrial Society (Princeton, NJ: Princeton Univ. Press, 1990).

<sup>10</sup> See, for example, Arjun Appadurai, Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization (Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 1996).

<sup>11</sup> See, for example, Manuel Castells, Communication Power (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2009).

<sup>12</sup> Chikako Mori, "Écrire en banlieue : analyse des pratiques d'écriture chez les jeunes issus des immigrations post-coloniales Île-de-France" (thesis, École des hautes études en sciences sociales, 2010).

<sup>13</sup> See, in particular, Emmanuel Wallerstein, L'universalisme européen : de la colonisation au droit d'ingérence (Paris: Demopolis, 2008)

<sup>14</sup> See Amartya Sen, Peace and Democratic Society (Cambridge: Open Book Publishers, 2011).

<sup>15</sup> See Sen, The Idea of Justice (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Univ. Press, 2009).

<sup>16</sup> See Volker H. Schmidt, "Multiple Modernities or Varieties of Modernity?" Current Sociology 54, no. 1 (2006): 77-97.

<sup>17</sup> Colin Crouch, Post-Democracy (Cambridge: Polity, 2004).

<sup>18</sup> Le Monde, May 2, 2012.