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'Europe, for example'

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The Philosopheme

The continental philosopher Rodolphe Gasché was once paid the not very friendly tribute of expounding philosophical texts 'with an undertaker's *gravitas*'.² Not very friendly perhaps, but wittily apt. Writing on Derrida at a time when deconstruction seemed to many to be a species of flamboyant literary criticism, Gasché insisted on 'restoring [deconstruction's] rigorous meaning against its defenders as well as against those who argue against it'.³ His mode was a form of precise exegesis and scholarship that maintained itself in relentless opposition to what he perceived as the lightweight indulgence of literary playfulness.

His rigour was philosophical, but the jibe against him was that it was of the type "mortis". Something similar might be felt on reading Gasché's most recent work, a long study on the theme of Europe in phenomenological thought.⁴ Here as before, the accent is on an inquiry that is conducted 'in as precise a manner as possible', tackling this 'philosophical topos' through a 'methodologically sound, scholarly investigation'.⁵

Gasché wants to champion an approach that would be a model of, as he puts it, "'serious", that is, philosophical discussion'.⁶ However, scholarly though it is, sober though it is, passionless or disinterested it is not. Gasché's "seriousness" takes its

¹ Luisa Passerini, *Memory and Utopia: The Primacy of Intersubjectivity* (London: Equinox, 2007), p. 107. Naturally, I could have cited this title from a thousand sources, and this one may even be more problematic than most since Passerini may herself be citing this from another source, since (although there are no quotation marks in the English text) the sentence finishes with a citational reference. I cite this little formula in turn from Louisa Passerini's text to acknowledge my gratitude to her for her tenacious and passionate engagement with the question of Europe's identity. I would also like to take this opportunity to thank Oisín Keohane for his subtle and thoughtful responses to my own thinking, both here and elsewhere.

² Geoffrey Bennington, 'Deconstruction and the Philosophers (The Very Idea)', in *Legislations: The Politics of Deconstruction* (London: Verso, 1994), p. 14.

³ Rodolphe Gasché, *The Tain of the Mirror: Derrida and the philosophy of reflection* (London: Harvard University Press, 1986), p. 182.

⁴ Rodolphe Gasché, *Europe, Or the Infinite Task: A Study of a Philosophical Concept* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009).

⁵ Gasché, *Europe, Or the Infinite Task*, p. 4.

⁶ Gasché, *Tain of the Mirror*, p. 1.

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bearings from an intensely critical perception of what passes for scholarship and theoretical judgement in the vicinity of his chosen ‘topos’. In his early work it was certain ‘literary critics’ who felt the full force of his rebuke. As he got underway his writing became suddenly and explosively charged with disdain and contempt, the gloves came off, and Gasché launched against the ‘feeble’ work of those he regarded as both naïve and simplistic.⁷

And so it is too with his new ‘study of the evolution of the notion of “Europe” in phenomenological thought’.⁸ What he calls the ‘astute’ reader, ‘the philosophically, and especially the phenomenologically, schooled reader’, will understand that such a study is irreducibly concerned with philosophy itself, and with some of its most central issues: ‘universality, rationality, apodicticity, responsibility and world’.⁹ However, these issues, bearing as they do on everything ‘shaped by the demand to transcend whatever is particular’ connect equally irreducibly (and with the concept of “Europe” as the leading theme), immediately and inescapably with what Gasché perceives as the utterly inadequate (especially philosophically inadequate) work on Europe that stands in ‘opposition’ to his own inquiry: work that can only conceive these “values” (‘universality, apodicticity, responsibility and world’) as ‘Eurocentric’, and which always insists that ‘European rationalism’ far from transcending its situation ‘is situated, and hence relative...and particular’.¹⁰ Here again, the impetus for Gasché’s discussions seems to be a sense of the profound failure of a currently dominant discourse to do justice to the complexity of issues, in this case concerning ‘the thought of Europe’.¹¹ The academic reflex of our time on this theme, with its historicism and pan-politicism, calls for a counter discourse that is philosophically and especially phenomenologically informed. Europe is not to be construed simply in terms of ‘the continent and its history’, not simply, then as ‘a geographical and political entity’.¹² On the contrary, for Gasché it is absolutely crucial that we

⁷ Gasché, *Tain of the Mirror*, p. 1.

⁸ Gasché, *Europe, Or the Infinite Task*, p.5.

⁹ Gasché, *Europe, Or the Infinite Task*, p. 4.

¹⁰ Gasché, *Europe, Or the Infinite Task*, p. 8.

¹¹ Gasché, *Europe, Or the Infinite Task*, p. 9.

¹² Gasché, *Europe, Or the Infinite Task*, p. 16.

acknowledge, in a rigorous engagement with what we understand by “Europe”, ‘something else as well’.

And then, perhaps surprisingly, he also immediately admits ‘one does not exactly know what this is’.¹³

This “confession” of not-knowing, so untypical of most academic writings, is in fact a very classically philosophical, especially phenomenological, gesture. Coming reflectively to terms with phenomena that are both (in some way) known and (in some other way) ‘not exactly known’ is the form of clarification that phenomenologically inspired philosophy takes. The starting sense of unclarity in such a case, the not exactly knowing that is at issue here, is one which contrasts sharply with the state of pre-theoretical ignorance that comes before making discoveries or building theories in science, and for the phenomenological philosopher it is precisely this contrast which brings into view the contour of a distinctively philosophical question. Ludwig Wittgenstein’s discussion of philosophical questions in his *Philosophical Investigations* presents St Augustine’s condition of estranged empuzzlement in the face of the question of time (“What is time?”) as paradigmatic.¹⁴ With an explicit rather than merely casual focus on time Augustine confesses that ‘if no one questions me I have no problem; if I am questioned I am at a loss’.¹⁵ ‘This could not be said about a question in natural science’, Wittgenstein notes.¹⁶ Martin Heidegger’s conception of our starting unclarity with respect to the question of Being (“What is the meaning of ‘Being?’”) has a fundamentally similar shape: it concerns something which is, in one way, ‘closest and well known’ but, in another way, ‘the farthest and not known at all’¹⁷. Heidegger’s effort at phenomenological clarification is thus oriented towards bringing something that is, as he puts it, in ‘an egregious sense’ ‘hidden’ (note that

¹³ Gasché, *Europe, Or the Infinite Task*, p. 16.

¹⁴ Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1958), §89. It may come as a surprise to see Wittgenstein cited among phenomenological philosophers, but he is recorded as saying as much himself: ‘You could say of my work that it is “phenomenology”’ (Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Recollections of Wittgenstein*, ed. Rush Rhees, Oxford: OUP, 1984, p. 116). I defend this way of looking at his work in detail in the opening chapter of Glendinning, *In the Name of Phenomenology* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2007).

¹⁵ Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, §89.

¹⁶ Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, §89.

¹⁷ Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1962), p. 69.

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what it is to be hidden in this way, this egregious sense of being hidden, is itself something hidden in the way that philosophical matters for thinking are hidden) into some kind of thematised relief, to “let us see” it in the very way in which it shows itself.¹⁸ Significantly, the Augustinian reference that Wittgenstein draws on to illustrate the sense of something that can be ‘hidden’ both in view of and despite its (unthematized) ‘familiarity’¹⁹ also belongs to Heidegger’s elaboration of this point, although the issue has (on the face of it) shifted. He (Heidegger) cites Augustine’s avowal of estrangement from his own being: ‘But what is closer to me than myself? Assuredly I labour here and I labour within myself; I have become to myself a land of trouble and inordinate sweat’.²⁰ The theme may appear to have changed but the experience of empuzzlement in the face of a question is the same.²¹

And something similar should hold, Gasché is claiming, with the question of Europe. Here too there is some sort of unthematized, pre-reflective understanding, something already available that can make it possible to get an investigation underway, but also (we need to avow at the outset) a kind of opacity and non-knowing too, a non-knowing that calls not for new knowledge – whether this would concern (what we think we understand already as) Europe’s accomplishments or its failures, nor even new information concerning (what we think we understand already as) Europe’s ‘location, culture and history’²² – but an effort to find one’s way about with a concept or idea concerning which it is not ‘immediately clear to what content such a concept or idea is assigned’.²³ “Europe”, in short, is ‘something like a philosopheme’.²⁴

¹⁸ Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p. 59.

¹⁹ Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, §129.

²⁰ Cited from St Augustine’s *Confessions* in Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p. 69.

²¹ In one respect the shift of theme is fairly superficial since Heidegger, like Augustine, regards a certain way of being in *time* as characterising the *fundamental* meaning of a finite existence (see Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p. 38). On the other hand, the condition of empuzzlement that Heidegger is particularly concerned to voice relates to the *absence* of a felt puzzle, in our time, with respect to the question of the meaning of Being. Hence while Augustine expresses reflective disorientation with respect to a question which, once raised, is immediately experienced as a problem, Heidegger’s disorientation includes a certain bafflement at the absence of such immediate bafflement. The phenomenological problem in Heidegger’s case has a relation to history not experienced in Augustine’s. I am grateful to Oisín Keohane for highlighting this contrast. The case of Europe discussed in this paper will be closer to the case of the question of Being than the question of time.

²² Gasché, *Europe, Or the Infinite Task*, p. 16.

²³ Gasché, *Europe, Or the Infinite Task*, p. 17.

²⁴ Gasché, *Europe, Or the Infinite Task*, p. 17.

Gasché's wanting to construe the question of Europe as calling for a distinctively philosophical and especially phenomenological study could, perhaps, have retained a studied indifference to what it understands as its 'opposition'. And for the most part that is exactly what Gasché does. However, as I have indicated, the horizon of his inquiries includes that opposition and a desire to confront it. Indeed, at the very moment where his text declares the necessity to restate the question of what we already *mean* and *understand* by "Europe", he identifies a stubbornly dogmatic discourse that stands squarely in the way of such an inquiry:

Undoubtedly, there are many who confidently pretend to know exactly what Europe has stood for, and continues to stand for – namely a hegemonic phantasm and moribund worldview. By depicting Europe and the West as a homogeneous power of domination over the rest of the world, postcolonial criticism of European imperialism, and its construction of non-European cultures, knows perfectly what Europe is. Indeed it knows it so well that it indulges in the same lack of differentiation of which it accuses the West in its relation to its others.

It thus turns Europe into the blind spot of its own discourse.²⁵

I don't suppose that Gasché takes an especially close eye on everything that goes on in postcolonial criticism today; no more in any case than he did literary criticism in the 1980s. So the charge of presenting as homogenous something rather differentiated and complex might be turned against him. However, just as his earlier critique of literary criticism hit a nerve, so his rounding on postcolonial criticism today seems to me a timely if somewhat hazardous intervention.

In this paper I hope to show why a philosophically informed approach to the question of Europe interrupts at least one *doxa* that underlies the orthodox thought of Europe as the site of a 'moribund worldview'; namely, the construal of Europe, in an undifferentiated kind of way, as dominated by a political culture that is fundamentally compromised by a (seriously and straightforwardly) egregious but often implicit 'racial theory', 'raciology', or by an underlying 'racial metaphysics'. In this paper I intend to show why this kind of matter-of-course understanding is

²⁵ Gasché, *Europe, Or the Infinite Task*, p. 16.

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inadequate, and point the way towards a more rounded and judicious conception of Europe's entanglement with racism.

The Metaphysics of Europe

We would do well not to pretend to know where the politics of racial supremacy begins and ends, or what it might mean to be free of it. But we do know that it has flourished and indeed still circulates in Europe.

Gasché's question, however, is whether we know so well what we mean when we say that it has been and is *in Europe* that it has made its way? Do we mean simply: it (racism) at some more or less traceable time became a widespread conviction for many human beings inhabiting a certain location in global-territorial space, at a certain time coming to dominate the worldview of a particular 'geographical and political entity'?

In my view, we should not be content with approaches that assign a purely geographical and political meaning to Europe. For example, if we are asking about the *coming into being* of Europe, then it seems clear that we are concerned in this case not only with the coming-to-be-named of a particular region of the global surface but also the *becoming-European* of a certain *world*. The idea of the "coming into being of Europe" that I am appealing to here, involves the emergence and elaboration of a distinctive understanding of the world.²⁶ And the heirs of this understanding have their being in this European world, whether they like it or not, and indeed whether they know it or not – and, moreover, whether, geographically speaking, they are "in Europe" or not. It is the very element of their historical existence, fundamental to the localization of their being, fundamental to their being-in-the-world and the meaning of their "I am".

²⁶ An understanding of the world contrasts here with an understanding of the globe; the former includes an understanding of the significance of our lives or the meaning of our being, the latter is something one learns in geography classes at school. So-called "globalisation" is always better framed as a phenomenon of the world-wide-ization of a world.

It is for this sort of reason that it was as a figure of a distinctive “*spiritual*” configuration, *a configuration of spirit*, that phenomenologists have attempted to construe “Europe”. And in doing so, as Jacques Derrida notes, they ‘no longer assigned [it] a geographical or territorial outline’.²⁷ Gasché’s assault on postcolonial criticism aims at a tendency he finds in it consistently – constitutively – to occlude in any question of Europe its distinctively philosophematic character. We shall not.

This European world, ‘in its ruinous blindness forever on the point of cutting its own throat’,²⁸ has indeed proved a fertile ground for racist construals of human differences, and it launched colonialist and neo-colonialist adventures abroad which were forever on the point of cutting the throat of every other too. Certainly. But how are we to delimit this European world? And on what *terrain* does it become accessible? If “Europe” is not only the name of a region of the global surface but something like, for example, ‘the unity of a spiritual life, action, and creation’²⁹ then perhaps the point or place of departure for what we are seeking is less a matter of researching opinions on territorial questions (a kind of questioning that rather evidently presupposes that ‘spiritual life’ in question) but finding a way of reading or making legible the ‘configuration of spirit’ that belongs to Europe. In his biography of Flaubert, published in 1971-2, Jean-Paul Sartre points towards the kind of analysis one needs here:

Flaubert writes for a Western world which is Christian. And we are all Christians, even today; the most radical disbelief is still Christian atheism. In other words it retains, in spite of its destructive power, schemata which are controlling – very slightly for our thinking, more for our imagination, above all for our sensibility. And the origins of these schemata are to be sought in the centuries of Christianity of which we are the heirs, whether we like it or not.³⁰

The horizon of Sartre’s “we” is explicitly occidental. It is also a rather unrefined and insufficiently nuanced, imprudent, schematization. Nevertheless, to his credit Sartre

²⁷ Jacques Derrida, *Of Spirit: Heidegger and the Question*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), p. 120.

²⁸ Martin Heidegger, *An Introduction to Metaphysics* (London: Yale University Press, 1959), p. 37.

²⁹ Edmund Husserl, cited in Derrida, *Of Spirit*, p. 120.

³⁰ Jean-Paul Sartre, 1979. *L’idiot de la famille* vol. 2, p. 2124 (trans. Robert Denoon Cumming).

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leaves space for non-Christian ‘schemata’ in this inheritance, especially ‘for our thinking’. And although this will also require further, more prudent, analysis, I think we should reserve a special place for (at the very least) a distinctively *Greek* conceptual legacy in this world-formation. Along with that Greek legacy, we might then appropriate his reference to ‘the centuries of Christianity’ to make a start in specifying the decisive ‘schemata’ of a distinctively European world. What is at issue here is not simply the history of a specific region of the globe, but the emergence of what Heidegger would call the clearing or lighting [*Lichtung*] of the “there” [*Da*] of a determinate historical *Da-sein*: the opening and holding in sway of a world marked by a distinctive form of understanding, imagination and feeling – the *localization* of the *cogito* of European subjectivity.

When asked how a philosopher might construe Europe, Emmanuel Levinas replied with the formula ‘Europe is the Bible and the Greeks’.³¹ To put this in the terms Sartre uses, Europe is the *phenomenological event*, still not over, of the Graeco-Christian schemata. With these above all (but, of course, not only with these) we are *homing-in* on the basic structural articulations of the world-understanding that is the clearing, the “there”, the *somewhere where I am* of *European Da-sein*.

The task, then, is to provide some kind of reading of the schematic traces of this old cultivated place. And if we are serious about talking about *European metaphysics* in this context then it surely bears stressing or at the very least acknowledging that the metaphysics in which the ethnocentrism *and* the anti-ethnocentrism, the Eurocentrism *and* the anti-Eurocentrism of our epoch has its place of birth, is not racial and regional but, in its dominant formation, profoundly humanist and cosmopolitan in character. That is, it is constituted on the basis of a particular conception of the *universal* humanity of “Man”, in terms of a distinctively *human* distinction, and hence in terms of a *philosophical anthropology* that would claim to be prior to any *empirical science* of human differences. Filling out (but not rounding out, and this remains an issue) the Levinasian formula somewhat, Heidegger, in the opening chapter of *Being and Time*, identifies the ‘sources’ of the event (still not over)

³¹ Emmanuel Levinas, *Is it Righteous to Be?*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001) p. 182.

that brings “we Europeans” into being, the ground or, better, the *archē* of the understanding of what *we* are that belongs to ‘*we...in our time*’ (note the fateful equivocation in the “we” there), in terms of ‘an orientation thoroughly coloured by the anthropology of the ancient [Greek] world [the conception of Man as the *zōon logon echon* (*animal rationale*)] and Christianity [the conception of Man as made in God’s image]’.³² Following Heidegger, I will refer to this orientating occidental anthropology of ‘our time’ as ‘humanism’.³³

The History of Spirit

Heidegger characterizes humanism as that tradition of more than one tradition in which what it calls “Man” is defined by setting it off as one kind of entity present in the world among other entities. Of course, human beings are not then simply equated with mere things in the world or even with other living creatures. On the contrary, “Man” is accorded a specific and special difference or dignity: “Man” is the animal endowed with the capacity to reason or for language; or “Man” is the *ens finitum* made in God’s image.

According to Heidegger, philosophy in the modern (post-Cartesian) period has inherited the essential features of this classic humanism. That is, modern philosophy too conceives human existence primarily in terms of the presence in the world of a natural creature which is then accorded a distinctive and distinguishing trait (reason, consciousness, language, culture, tool use, etc).

³² Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p. 48. As Stephen Mulhall notes, the Christian anthropology also represents “us” as ‘reaching yearningly beyond our creaturely existence’ and this desire for transcendence is retained in Heidegger’s ‘idea of Dasein as transcendent’ (Stephen Mulhall, *Philosophical Myths of the Fall*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005, pp. 46-7). If we add that the possession of the “logos” remains in view with Heidegger’s conception of the constitution of Dasein’s “there” as characterised primordially by ‘discourse’ (Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p. 172) it becomes clear that his ‘fundamental ontology’ does not so much ‘detach’ itself from the tradition or reject it as ‘radically rethink’ it (Mulhall, *Philosophical Myths of the Fall*, p. 47).

³³ This is a term Heidegger comes to use more frequently after *Being and Time*, especially after the writing of the ‘Letter on Humanism’ (prepared for publication in 1947) but the idea is not new to the later writings. Heidegger’s own position is (by his own admission) an original kind of (and hence rethought) ‘humanism’ (Heidegger, ‘Letter on Humanism’, *Basic Writings*, ed., D.F. Krell, London: Routledge, 1993, p. 245); a position evident in his saying of classic humanism that it did not set man’s ‘*humanitas*’ too high but rather ‘not...high enough’ (Heidegger, ‘Letter on Humanism’, pp. 233-4). In this essay, by humanism I mean the classical humanism that Heidegger works through but does not endorse.

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Thus the metaphysical heritage of Europe, the onto-theology which is more than merely "from" Europe but which is inseparable from the becoming-European of a world, inseparable from the *Da-sein* that, for every European, is "mine", is marked precisely by the way it *rejects* every fully *naturalistic* idea of Man – and hence *rejects* every biologicistic (racial) determination of the human and of human differences – and proposes that 'this insufficient definition of Man's essence [must and can] be overcome or offset' by adding on to it the idea of Man having 'an immortal soul'; or by 'adjoining a mind to the human body' and saying that we are a thinking thing, a rational being or a self-conscious subject or whatever.³⁴

I am contrasting this classic humanist metaphysics (which is in no way beyond question) with a naturalistic metaphysics of the human in order to call into question the idea that the European world is to be thought on the basis of the racism that made its way there. For if one is a classic humanist it is clearly *unthinkable* that there could be immutable (or, if one is modishly Darwinian about glacial changes in such matters, given for all intents and purposes) 'racial types' that might be positioned on a linear inferior/superior scale. That racist construal will always contrast with the humanist view that all *morally significant* human differences are reducible (since we are all, for example, made in the image of God or are all rational - and hence free - creatures). As we shall see, classic humanists were not in the least averse to constructing *hierarchies of development*, and no doubt this prepared the way for racial naturalizations of the worst kind, but this European humanism entailed an *ethnocentric history of the world* in which no human group was considered 'beyond reform'. The liberation of the humanity of Man in history, the emancipation or de-alienation of rational subjectivity, is something available to all. This view may be deeply and problematically ethnocentric, but it is not a thesis of racial superiority, it is not a raciology or racial metaphysics. On the contrary, it explicitly contradicts the racist assertion that some human 'types' are inherently (or to all intents and purposes inherently) inferior to others and always will be (or to all intents and purposes always will be).

³⁴ Heidegger, 'Letter on Humanism', pp. 228-9.

The classic 'worldview' "in" Europe, indeed, *the* dominant European understanding of *what we are* – and ultimately this is of course an understanding that European phenomenology wants radically to rethink and that the Heideggerian 'analytic of *Dasein*' is precisely intended, not without its own problems, to accomplish³⁵ – is as a creature with special potential and 'dignity', a creature with a special destiny, a creature with something other than a merely natural history. And even if the dominant European construal of this history has been profoundly ethnocentric (European humanity as the *avant garde* in all this humanist teleology) the anthropology is genuinely universal in character: the universal "essence" of the human is a "potential", a *potential-for-being* shared by every human being. And in (as) history, we (all humanity) are (on this understanding that is distinctively, particularly, exemplarily European) on our way to actualising this potential as fully rational, spiritual beings. 'Even the Papuan', as Edmund Husserl so problematically puts it.³⁶

This non-exclusion of the supposedly 'primitive' human beings of Papua New Guinea shows well quite how double-edged European humanism is. The humanist vision of the history of humanity as the movement towards the realisation of an ideally human end for all humanity, is a history in which "Man" increasingly becomes (makes himself) what he already was potentially: peaceful, rational and free. History is thus a movement of transition from a (lowly) origin to a (higher) end: from animality to humanity; nature to culture; war to peace; instinct to rationality; superstition to science; servitude to freedom. And all humanity *can* belong to this movement. On the other hand, however, participation in this movement of the history of the world is not conceived as evenly distributed over the whole of humanity at once or as a whole. On the contrary, human beings around the world are identified as being at

³⁵ The argument here is that racism presupposes a biologism or naturalism of human differences. With respect to the metaphysics of classic humanism, I think the contrast is clear. However, as I have indicated, the metaphysical account of Man – which supposes that naturalism can be overcome by *adding* a distinctive trait to the human animal – is not itself beyond question, and in Heidegger's thought the difference of Man (qua *Dasein*) is construed in terms of access to Being. In this account our animality is rethought on the basis of our humanity; the later is not thought (additively) on the basis of our animality. The worry is, of course, that this inversion of the direction of determination opens the possibility of a "thought of race" that is *not* biologicistic. And, with Derrida, in *Of Spirit*, we might ask at this point whether, "by thus inverting the direction of determination, Heidegger is alleviating *or* aggravating this "thought of race"?" Given the traditional opposition to classic humanism, the temptation is to think that the thought of race cannot really do without the biologicistic recourse. Derrida's suspicion is that Heidegger's overcoming of classic humanism opens a new path, or new legitimation, of a thought of race even as it closes the ones freed up by classic humanism.

³⁶ Edmund Husserl, cited in Derrida, *Of Spirit*, p. 121.

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different stages of development on a fundamentally *linear* trajectory. Here, for example, is Hegel’s depressingly familiar verdict on human existence in sub-Saharan Africa (what he dismally calls ‘Africa proper’):

Africa proper, as far as History goes back, has remained shut up; it is...the land of childhood...enveloped in the dark mantle of Night... The Negro exhibits the natural man in his completely wild and untamed state... At this point we leave Africa, not to mention it again.³⁷

If it is Africa proper that remains ‘in the condition of mere nature’ and stands only at the threshold of History proper, it is Europe that is furthest along the path toward the proper “end of Man”.

So, without doubt, the metaphysics of Europe marks Europe itself out as a special place (“spiritually” special, *special in the order of spirit*). However, even a classically Eurocentric thinker like Hegel resists the idea that the peoples of this territory should be considered anything more than contingently well-placed to be at history’s head. Indeed, Hegel’s claim is that it is largely climatic and geographical differences and not human differences at all that are responsible for Europe becoming the main stage of ‘the drama of the World’s History’. Geography matters for this History of Spirit insofar as it does or does not provide a certain existential comfort for human inhabitants: in either ‘the glaring rays of the sun’ or in ‘the icy frost’ human beings never get beyond eking out a survival. So ‘the true theatre of History is’, he argues, limited to ‘the temperate zone’ – and, he says, specifically to its ‘northern half’ whose continental form displays, as he puts it, ‘a broad breast’.³⁸

The idea of an historical advantage accruing from such a form may seem far-fetched, but Hegel’s basic point is that the great landmass of the Eurasian continent provides a space suitable to the formation of deeply and increasingly interconnected social

³⁷ G.W.F. Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of History* (London: Bell, 1894), pp. 95-103. Hegel keeps his word here.

³⁸ Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of History*, p. 84. This kind of climatology has a long history in European metaphysics, going back at least to Aristotle. In the *Politics*, (Book VII, section 7, 1327b, pp 19-34), for example, Aristotle contrasts both cold and icy ‘Europe’ and hot and despotic ‘Asia’, with the environment of the Greeks (‘the Hellenic race [*genos*]’) which, in the middle, is of intermediate character. It would appear that the weather seems especially good wherever Spirit makes its way. I am indebted to Oisín Keohane for the Aristotelian example.

lives in a way that stands in contrast to the more fragmented lands of the southern half of the temperate zone. Immanuel Kant had said something similar in the context of his own elaboration of a 'universal history' with a 'cosmopolitan purpose': it is the close trading links that have developed 'in our continent' which prepared the way for the world-historical developments which were taking place there.³⁹

I am not saying that any of this is free of ethnocentric or Eurocentric prejudices.⁴⁰ Not at all. However, it is crucial to see that the metaphysics of Europe is not a raciology, not a theory of racial superiority. Rather it unfolds as a humanist anthropology in which the particularity of the peoples 'in our continent' is understood in terms of *a world-historical movement of transcendence of every ethnic particularity*: the movement towards the global realization, the globalization or world-wide-ization, of an ideally human form of life. This is, first of all, a philosophy of the human distinction, a metaphysical humanism.

This History, has a history. And its path has not run smooth. On the contrary, the humanist anthropology that underpins it is no longer in good shape. As we pass from a largely conceptual issue of the contrast between humanistic and biologicistic conceptions of human differences, to more speculative historical questions about the transition in Europe from one to the other, we will begin to see why.

Hegel, like every classic thinker of the history of the world is keen to stress that the history he is narrating itself has what might be called a rational intelligibility: it is a history that has definite stages each preparing the way to a next step from a definite origin on the way to a definite end. However, this narrative structure is not held only to express a rational movement – the unfolding of reason in (as) history – but, equally, demonstrates what Hegel calls the 'religious truth' of this teleological development; namely, that 'a Providence controls it'.⁴¹ The history of the world,

³⁹ Immanuel Kant, 'Idea for a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Purpose', in Hans Reiss (ed.) *Kant: Political Writings* (Cambridge: CUP, 1991), p. 48.

⁴⁰ Jacques Derrida rightly describes Kant's text on universal history as being, despite the radically cosmopolitical intent, 'the most strongly eurocentered text that can be' (Derrida, 'Of the Humanities and the Philosophical Discipline. The right to philosophy from the cosmopolitical point of view (the example of an international institution)', *Surfaces* 4:310, 1994, p. 10.

⁴¹ Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of History*, p. 13.

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universal history, is presided over by God, and the ultimate plan of God is nothing short of the 'ultimate design of the world'.⁴²

So the History of Spirit, the teleology of reason, has always also been a religious history, an historical theodicy. European humanism is onto-theology. However, for reasons that are not in fact external to this theodical vision, the historical unfolding of this European world has had its political mainstream at an increasingly conspicuous distance from traditional Christian institutional powers.⁴³ Moreover, and following what Derrida calls 'the Marxist *coup*' or 'blow' during the course of the twentieth century, and 'the history of totalitarianism' that is inseparable from it,⁴⁴ it is increasingly rare to find efforts to frame the trajectory of history in terms of a theodicy in which 'the History of the World is...not only not "without" God, but is essentially His Work'. The 'good news' announced by Francis Fukuyama certainly found a ready audience after the fall of the Berlin Wall,⁴⁵ but the residual traces of a strictly theodical conception of history went for the most part unremarked.⁴⁶ Nevertheless, and all this being said, even if theodical histories are no longer enthusiastically endorsed, the classic Graeco-Christian schemata of Europe as the exemplary figure of the ideal form of a "properly civilized" society has definitely not gone away.

There is a temptation to meet any such Eurocentricism with an opposing anti-Eurocentrism, and so to regard the world-wide-ization of the European world not as the (noble) movement of Spirit but as the (imperialism) of a hegemonic Power. Indeed, the becoming-world-wide of the European world is often identified with, and in many approaches simply reduced to, the hegemonic internationalization of neo-liberal techno-capitalism. However, while it would be absurd to deny the colonizing capacities of modern technological and capitalist economies, we need to

⁴² Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of History*, p. 17.

⁴³ That the history of the Graeco-Christianisation of the world is also a history of *secularisation* is central to Hegel's account of world history. See Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of History*, p. 53. I explore this link further in Glendinning, 'Japheth's World: The Rise of Secularism and the Revival of Religion Today', *The European Legacy*, 14:4, 2009, pp. 409-426.

⁴⁴ Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx: State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning and the New International* (London: Routledge, 1994), p. 97.

⁴⁵ Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man* (London: Penguin, 1992), p. xiii.

⁴⁶ A notable exception here is Jacques Derrida, who attends carefully to this continuity in the opening chapters of *Specters of Marx*.

acknowledge that the “globalization” we are witnessing today is a process that has a deep historical intelligibility as well as an economic and political one: namely, as the Christianizing or Pagano-Christianizing of the world. And we (and among us, I include here both those who still content themselves with reaffirming or celebrating a certain European history and those who still content themselves with opposing it) are all Christians, all Graeco-Christians.

Europe Beyond Itself

The classic European discourse of the History of the World was, as we have seen, fundamentally *a theological history of the origins and ends of Man*. In our time, the theological account of human *origins* has been largely displaced in Europe by *natural* histories. And that naturalistic turn does not leave the old idea of the *ends* of Man in good shape either. On behalf of those who inhabit the European world I have been describing in this paper, the British philosopher David Wiggins speaking of our time as ‘a time after Darwin’ puts it like this:

Unless we are Marxists, we are more resistant [today] than the eighteenth- or nineteenth-centuries knew how to be [to] attempts to locate the meaning of human life or human history in mystical or metaphysical conceptions – in the emancipation of mankind, or progress, or the onward advance of Absolute Spirit. It is not that we have lost interest in emancipation or progress themselves. But whether temporarily or permanently, we have more or less abandoned the idea that the importance of emancipation or progress (or a correct conception of spiritual advance) is that these are marks by which our minute speck in the universe can distinguish itself as the spiritual focus of the cosmos.⁴⁷

What we are witnessing here is nothing short of a changeover in the default understanding of the world and the signifiante of our lives: a movement of

⁴⁷ David Wiggins, ‘Truth, Invention and the Meaning of Life’, *Needs, Values, Truth* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1987), p. 91.

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naturalization that intervenes in every discourse on human history and human differences of European origin. Indeed, this movement is fundamental to the emergence of biologicistic racial theory from within the tradition of classic humanism. As Heidegger notes, the point of departure for a humanist metaphysics already invites a certain naturalistic – and so in principle biologicistic – rendering: ‘In principle we are still thinking of *homo animalis* – even when...this is later posited as subject, person or spirit’.⁴⁸ Racial theory in Europe would thus emerge in the effort systematically to forge a thoroughly scientific and hence naturalistic anthropology. Human differences, still understood on the linear model that belonged to universal history (in which, in fact and in principle, all human differences were conceived as contingent, labile and destined for eventual elimination), were now conceived as natural and (‘for all intents and purposes’) fixed. The old, historically cast, ethnocentrism becomes enshrined in a new and fully naturalised anthropology of human differences.

This is the movement of the world ‘after Darwin’ But our today is a time after Auschwitz as well as after Darwin.⁴⁹ And in this time the idea that European responsibility might be compatible with the violent colonization and conquest of supposedly “inferior” peoples is no longer remotely credible. In the absence of either mystical or metaphysical conceptions of a final end of Man which would ground it, classic European humanism struggles to make its way too. Nevertheless, in the wake of the wave of the changes that are usually identified with the ‘social modernization’ that Jürgen Habermas takes to have gone ‘hand in hand’ with European secularization,⁵⁰ a certain *cosmopolitan* ideal – in which the idea of the dignity of every other is retained in the democratic principle that *each one counts one* – is still able to present a powerful foil to biologicistic theories of racial purity and supremacy, theories which are now largely (though not exclusively) confined to the most extreme voices of

⁴⁸ Heidegger, ‘Letter on Humanism’, p. 227.

⁴⁹ As John Gray notes, the first and no doubt most ‘peculiar achievement’ of the movement of naturalisation in our understanding of the world that the Enlightenment inaugurated ‘was to give genocide the blessing of science and civilization. Mass murder could be justified by faux-Darwinian ideas of survival of the fittest, and the destruction of entire peoples could be welcomed as a part of the advance of the species’ (John Gray, *Black Mass*, New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2007, p. 62).

⁵⁰ Jürgen Habermas, ‘Religion in the Public Sphere’, *European Journal of Philosophy*, 14:1 2006, p. 2.

revolutionary nationalism.⁵¹ Here again, however, we should see that the resources for a political alternative to racist nationalisms also have their origin in the European, that is to say onto-theological, philosophical tradition. As Derrida noted in a lecture at the University of Sussex in 1997, cosmopolitanism is a political outlook

which comes to us from, on the one hand, Greek thought with the Stoics, who have a concept of the ‘citizen of the world’, and also, on the other hand, from St. Paul in the Christian tradition, where we find another call for a citizen of the world as, precisely, a brother. St. Paul says that we are all brothers, that is, sons of God. So we are not foreigners, we belong to the world as citizens of the world.⁵²

Of course, as I stressed earlier it would be unwise to think one knew where racist ideas begin or end or what it means to be free of them, and nothing changes overnight on this terrain. Nevertheless, it can now be seen that the *classic* cosmopolitan desire for a universalizable culture of European Civilization, a desire based on a metaphysics of human differences that was inherently vulnerable to the worst forms of racial naturalisation, also freed the space for a movement of egalitarian, *democratic* cosmopolitan desire, and hence for a new hope: the hope for what one might call a ‘universalizable culture of singularities’.⁵³

Some might think that *Europe*, more than anywhere, ought not to try to advance itself as promoting a universalizable culture of *anything*. However, it is not at all obvious that such a link to a proposed example can or should be altogether avoided. For example, it has been argued by Louisa Passerini that a new European subjectivity would be acceptable only if it were to abandon ‘the illusions of grandeur and hegemonic expectations of the old subject’. On this view, Europe should forgo every gesture of universalizability and learn to live ‘within its own limits’ and ‘to accept its own particularity’, ‘for example’ as ‘a cultural region’ among others.⁵⁴ Fine, but even this

⁵¹ The movement of naturalisation can also be turned against racial theories and raciology, and it is clear that modern genetics, for all its reductive ambitions, has no place for ‘race’ in its theories at all.

⁵² The text of the lecture can be found at <http://www.livingphilosophy.org/Derrida-politics-friendship.htm>

⁵³ This phrase appears in the expression of a hope still worth having in Jacques Derrida, ‘Faith and Knowledge’, in J. Derrida and G. Vattimo (eds.), *Religion* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1998), p. 7. I discuss the transition from classic to democratic cosmopolitanism in more detail in Glendinning, ‘Japheth’s World’, pp. 418-422.

⁵⁴ Passerini, *Memory and Utopia*, p. 107.

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attempt to get Europe to draw in its horns clearly fails to escape the universalist logic of the example. Not only would such horn-drawing be regarded as universally fitting – there is absolutely no call here for some other ‘cultural region’ to take up the position of ‘the old subject’ of Europe and to cultivate hegemonic expectations in Europe’s stead – but the very question of what a ‘cultural region’ is seems clearly inseparable from the European example. Europe as a cultural region among others? Oh yes! A *cultural* region – no doubt about it! *Very* cultural in fact (think of all those works of European literature, its art and music, its theatre, architecture, cuisine, sport, and so on). Europe, a cultural region? Yes, yes! *Par excellence*, yes! Indeed, isn’t the opposition between nature and culture itself one of the basic schemas of the European worldview? And, in any case, don’t we now say ‘culture’ where not so long ago we said...‘spirit’?

As Gasché puts it, those who are happy simply to denounce as ‘Eurocentric’ certain ‘ideas (such as universality, apodicticity, self-responsibility, and so forth),⁵⁵ those who understand Europe primarily as a geographical and political entity or cultural region and who would set themselves in ‘opposition’ to investigations of Europe as something like a philosopheme, are ‘defeated’ by the fact that this idea ‘is shaped not only by the fundamental demand to transcend whatever is particular but also that which still tinges this idea itself with particularity’⁵⁶. The thought of Europe as a regional culture, for example, is still the thought of a European example. One advances... towards the other when one undertakes to close upon oneself in an exemplary way.

The main argument of this paper is pitted against an anti-Eurocentrist *doxa* that associates Europe with a ‘moribund’ – because profoundly racist – worldview. However, understanding Europe as an exemplary philosopheme invites us not only to think of “Europe” from the point of view of philosophy, but reciprocally to shed light on the very ambition to ‘know one’s way about’ that, as a response to estranged empuzzlement with something familiar, inaugurates philosophy. And perhaps what Europe has to teach us here, above all, is that the implicit *telos* of such an ambition – the aim of finally achieving complete clarity – is, from the start, slated to disappointment.

⁵⁵ Gasché, *Europe, Or the Infinite Task*, p. 8.

⁵⁶ Gasché, *Europe, Or the Infinite Task*, p. 8.

Rounding out the Levinasian formula, and doing so by precisely refusing a final turn of the delimiting screw, Derrida puts the point as follows:

One should more prudently say “Greek, Christian and beyond”, to designate those places towards which we are still timorously advancing: Judaism and Islam, [to be included] at the very least... However, above all, and starting from and still in Nietzsche’s wake, [to designate] the entire passage beyond whose movement bears his name. That is to say, everywhere where a tradition thus tends of itself to break with itself.⁵⁷

This Nietzschean ‘passage beyond’ is *inside* Europe’s identity: it does not indicate a break from it, nor does it suggest that what has been adduced so far as inside this identity (the Greek, the Christian) is a merely preliminary gesture that needs an “and so on” tagged onto the end of an otherwise only partially completed list, to be completed later when all the facts are in (though quite rightly Derrida prefers a more judicious acknowledgement of influences). Rather, it indicates a kind of fundamental or irreducible readiness for taking a risk with itself, an openness for the change in heading, for the dis-placement of itself beyond itself – but remaining faithful to itself in that movement. For this reason, the ‘passage beyond’ is never a movement that simply rejects the European heritage or that wants simply to destroy it and move on to something completely different, but a movement which, in the name of Europe, for example in the name of “we good Europeans”, aims to propel it in a new direction out of (i.e. both ‘from’ and ‘beyond’) its own sources: not to destroy the heritage but to give it a future.

This, finally, may be what lodges a dimension of not-knowing into every understanding of ‘the idea of Europe’; it is what, makes Europe a philosopheme. On this construal, the apparent “lack” of a “completely thematisable identity” is not a shortcoming to be “overcome” by a more rigorous or powerful analysis.⁵⁸ On the contrary, it helps us see that with this philosopheme a certain beyond of a

⁵⁷ Jacques Derrida, *Politics of Friendship* (London: Verso, 1997), p. 103.

⁵⁸ It is in this vein that Stanley Cavell seeks from philosophy ‘an acknowledgement of human limitation which does not leave us chafed by our own skins’ (Stanley Cavell, ‘The Availability of Wittgenstein’s Later Philosophy’, *Must We Mean What We Say*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976, p. 61.) He does not get caught up in issues concerning, for example, the colour of this skin, however.

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thematisable understanding of Europe’s identity – though that task should in no way be foregone – is also what we need to save: that ‘beyond’ belongs *inside* its present identity.

Just in this case? Perhaps the example of Europe is not just one example among others. Geoffrey Bennington’s reflection on the example with which we began, the example of our understanding of *time*, seems to invite and welcome *countless* substitutions. But the example of Europe seems especially fitting. Here, exemplarily, the sort of not-knowing that we saw Gasché affirming against postcolonial certainties far from being reducible through further research or investigation

should perhaps be read less as a preliminary gesture, recognising a difficulty that philosophy will then confront and resolve (so that the natural telos of any philosophical explanation of time [for example, or of Europe, for example] is to overcome that not-knowing and replace it with clear and explicit knowledge), and more as a positive or affirmative claim: perhaps time [for example, or Europe, for example] is such that my knowledge of it can only ever be of the order of non-knowledge, or a ‘knowledge’ that fades or disappears when questioned or called upon to present itself in the form of a theory or a thesis.⁵⁹

The point here is not simply that future experiences or discoveries might lead us to revise any theory or thesis we have hitherto come up with. Rather (and to paraphrase Bennington once more), even the very best, most attentive, rigorous and painstaking thought of Europe, will not, even in principle, lead us to a ‘triumphant conceptual clarity’ regarding it, but will rather ‘produce a complexity in thought that, *beyond* what understanding we can (and should) nevertheless aspire to, *calls for something*’.⁶⁰ Calls for...what?⁶¹ Nothing one says here will be immune to the very limitation it is trying to come to terms with. However, what seems central is that finding oneself (necessarily) unequal to the task of achieving a yearned for, once for all, complete conceptual clarity (knowing *what Europe is*, for example) tends only to accentuate

⁵⁹ Geoffrey Bennington, ‘Reading Time’, *Other Analyses*, (e-book, 2005), pp. 6-7.

⁶⁰ Bennington, ‘Reading Time’, p. 5. (Emphasis mine).

⁶¹ Bennington suggests that what it calls for is ‘something of the order of *enactment* or *confession* or *witnessing*’ (Bennington, ‘Reading Time’, p. 5). This is a somewhat disparate order and I have attempted to boil it down somewhat in the main text.

rather than diminish a sense of one's responsibility, *now*, to respond to that task.⁶² 'What are you going to do TODAY?', Paul Valéry pointedly asks at the outset of his "Notes on the Greatness and Decline of Europe".⁶³ Taking up the challenge some fifty years later, Jacques Derrida wagers that 'we *today*' want 'a completely new "today" of Europe';⁶⁴ a today in which one no longer finds it remotely adequate to respond to Europe today by indulging in either *Eurocentric* back-slapping and self-congratulation or *anti-Eurocentric* avowals of guilt and self-accusation.⁶⁵ Beyond these 'exhausted programs', Derrida finds, nevertheless, that the traditional conceptuality of 'all European discourse about Europe'⁶⁶ – that is to say, the humanist discourse of Man and the end of Man that has been the theme and thesis of this paper and which supplies the very 'language of our language',⁶⁷ as Derrida puts it, for thinking Europe today – does more than offer an unforgettable resource for our own thinking, but 'right along with' that inherited conceptual resource, *right inside that heritage*, an irrecusable responsibility 'imposes itself on us'; a responsibility to 'make ourselves the guardians of an idea of Europe'.⁶⁸ Not, he emphasises, the guardians of a specific regional culture, one distinctive human community among others, 'but of a difference of Europe that consists precisely in not closing itself off in its own identity and in advancing itself in an exemplary way toward what it is not'.⁶⁹ To be this new advancing guardian, this new *avant guard* for an idea of Europe, is never an exclusively or exhaustively theoretical or ideational affair. It means 'to take risks, to stick one's neck out'.⁷⁰ It means 'taking the lead in taking an initiative and sometimes even to go on the offensive'.⁷¹ It means getting caught up with Europe, for example.

⁶² This is the logic at work, I think, in the transition Wittgenstein makes in (the notoriously obscure) remark in the *Investigations* from the impossibility of bringing philosophy peace to nevertheless 'now' demonstrating a method (§133).

⁶³ Paul Valéry, *History and Politics*, New York: Bollingen, 1962, p. 228.

⁶⁴ Jacques Derrida, *The Other Heading*, Indiana University Press, 1992, p. 12.

⁶⁵ 'Am I taking advantage of the "we" when I begin saying that...we *today* no longer want either Eurocentrism or anti-Eurocentrism' (Derrida, *The Other Heading*, p. 13. See also p. 26.

⁶⁶ Derrida, *The Other Heading*, p. 27.

⁶⁷ Derrida, *The Other Heading*, p. 28.

⁶⁸ Derrida, *The Other Heading*, p. 29.

⁶⁹ Derrida, *The Other Heading*, p. 29 (emphasis in original).

⁷⁰ Derrida, *The Other Heading*, p. 49.

⁷¹ Derrida, *The Other Heading*, p. 49.

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