

EUROPE OF CULTURES: TECHNOCRACY OR TELEOLOGY?¹

EUROPA DAS CULTURAS: TECNOCRACIA OU TELEOLOGIA?

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Abstract: The article discusses the idea of European unification, a common project that plunges its roots in a travel accident that occurred in the north of France in 1706. Induced by this unforeseen event, the aim of establishing permanent arbitration and ties of cooperation between nations sovereign powers to prevent future dissension is a milestone in European history. The theme is relevant insofar as the project for the unification of Europe comprises an ideal that has shaped European politics and society for centuries. The initial attempt to create a form of supranational political integration remains fundamental for the European Union today, but it cannot be purely and simply reduced to criteria of a geopolitical, macroeconomic

or technocratic nature. Faithful to its ecumenical and cosmopolitan tradition, Europe always finds itself again every time it sees itself in others. The article seeks to expose and discuss how far the deepening of the “Europe of the culture(s)” configures the teleological horizon of a task that coimplicates the hermeneutic, political and religious dimensions in the construction of the “common European home”.

Keywords: European unification. Permanent Arbitration. Political and Economic Cohesion. Cultural Integration. Teleology. Hermeneutics. Politics. Religion.

Resumo: O artigo aborda a ideia de unificação europeia, um projecto comum que mergulha as suas raízes num acidente de viagem ocorrido no norte da França em 1706. Induzido por esse evento imprevisto, o desígnio de estabelecer uma arbitragem permanente e laços de cooperação entre nações soberanas para evitar futuras dissensões constitui um marco na história da Europa. O tema possui relevância na medida em que o projecto de unificação da Europa comporta um ideal que tem moldado a política e a sociedade europeias durante séculos. A tentativa inicial de criar uma forma de integração política supranacional, continua a ser fundamental para a União Europeia de hoje, mas não pode ser pura e simplesmente reduzida a critérios de natureza geopolítica, macroeconómica ou tecnocrática. Fiel à sua tradição ecuménica e cosmopolita, a Europa sempre se reencontra consigo cada vez que se revê nos outros. O artigo procura expor e discutir em que medida o aprofundamento da Europa da(s) cultura(s) configura o horizonte teleológico de uma tarefa que coimplica as dimensões hermenêutica, política e religiosa na construção da “casa comum europeia”.

Palavras-chave: Unificação Europeia. Arbitragem Permanente. Coesão Política e Económica. Integração Cultural. Teleologia. Hermenêutica. Política. Religião.

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In one of the most fascinating chapters of *Les métamorphoses de la Cité de Dieu* (1952) - entitled "The Birth of Europe" - its author, Étienne Gilson, traces the historical emergence of the ideal of European unification to an event that is difficult to ignore because of its anticipatory nature:

The United Europe was born in France, almost two hundred and fifty years ago, as a result of a vehicle accident. During the winter of 1706, a priest was traveling the roads of Normandy when his litter toppled over, broke, and left him in the mud. The accident was trivial (...). While they repaired the vehicle, our ecclesiastic reflected on the causes of the adventure and, as soon as he returned home, he wrote a *Memoir on the Repair of the Roads*, which was to be published in Paris (...) in 1708. "I had just put the last coat on that *Memoir*," he tells us himself, "when a project came to my mind (...) which, by its great beauty, wounded me with admiration. (...) I feel the more inclined to deepen it, the more I consider it (...) advantageous to sovereigns, <i.e.> the establishment of a permanent arbitration between them to end without war their future dissensions. I do not know whether I am mistaken, but there is a foundation for the hope that a treaty will be signed someday and that it will always be possible to propose it to one or other of the interested parties, when it is easy for each of them to see that, after all, they will have much more advantage in signing it, than in not signing it. It is with this hope that I give myself with ardor and joy to the highest enterprise that can arise in the human spirit. (*Idem*, *The Evolution of the City of God*, translated by João Tôrres, pg. 173).

Without yet guessing the outlines of what would start to be drawn in the cosmopolitan utopianism of a *pax perpetua* ensured by the arbitration of an international and supra-state power (whose legacy would materialize, a couple of centuries later, in the institution of the League of Nations, and later on in the UN), Charles-Irénée Castel - such was the name of our unfortunate cleric (better known as the *abbé de Saint-Pierre*) - had just thought to himself something truly foreshadowing: a pact of multilateral cooperation which, by the interconnection between a reciprocity of interests and mutualization of benefits, was to inspire, from the middle of the 20th century onwards, the ideal of integration of states and regions. It was a multilateral cooperation pact that, through the interconnection between a reciprocity of interests and mutualization of benefits, would inspire the ideal of integration of sovereign states into a European Community in the mid-20th century. Despite the practical consequences that the eccentric priest senses in his sudden reverie, he is not alone - and not for the first time either - in traversing untouched territory: on the horizon of his expectations also coexist the visions of a few theoretical precursors who, with a greater or lesser degree of reflexive awareness, anticipated, so to speak, the dawn of this unifying endeavor.

Strictly speaking, the idea of a united Europe had been in the minds of some people between the end of the 16th century and the beginning of the 17th century. In 1623, a certain

Émeric Crucé published a treatise entitled *Le nouveau Cynée*, in which he proposed, by way of a panacea, the institution of a multilateral pact as a *conditio sine qua non* of a “general concord” based on which the foundations could be laid for a free trade area between the Catholic peoples of Europe at that time. Admittedly, the advocacy of “peaceful confederations” had its deepest roots in the Middle Ages, but in a century that more or less ostentatiously believed that it had already cut its ties with that earlier period, it was perfectly understandable that such a medieval heritage was found quite underestimated. Without rejecting it, however, Crucé seeks to reconfigure it into a political worldview that conceived peace treaties more in the pragmatic sense of keeping the incessant hostilities between nations on *standby* than with the chimerical purpose of eradicating from human interaction its irrepressible conflictualism. By advocating the supranational management of a continuous and active “peace-making” effort (an effort always aware of the symmetrical probability of “belligerent activation”), whose effectiveness and success would depend on the multilateral adoption of a single currency and harmonized measurement standards, Crucé sets a kind of theoretical precedent for a possible “confederative right”: in its light, it is easy to see to what extent the amplifying effect of a federated and interdependent mutualization (with almost nothing to lose and much to gain, insofar as the “other” is included “with me” and integrated as an opportunity) always advantageously overlaps with the reducing effect of a sovereignist and self-sufficient introjection (with almost nothing to gain and much to lose, insofar as the other is seen “against me” and repelled as a threat). The idea was not exactly original, but it contained a promising potential for applicability that did not go unnoticed by the more attentive minds of its time.

For this purpose, let us go back a quarter of a century. In 1598, immediately after negotiating the terms of the Peace of Vervins, which put an end to Spain's military involvement in the Wars of Religion in France, the monarch Henry IV attempted to make politically operational what Crucé had only managed to achieve in theory: to establish a “general concord” based on a pact between states that he called the “European Society”. With some diplomatic ingenuity and a sudden luck, this form of “peaceful coexistence” - which took the highly fluid dynamics of social bodies as an analogous matrix of the extremely volatile dynamics of international relations - allowed sovereigns with different and opposing religious beliefs to cohabit a common space for some time, without any hegemonic intent. The next step was more than predictable: if the model seemed to work reasonably successfully on a micro-scale, why not organize a similar social body, applying the same model on the scale of reality with greater territorial extension and political heterogeneity, formed by all the European nations? If

Maximilien de Béthune (Duke of Sully) - Henry IV's minister who recorded his main political ideas in his famous *Mémoires* - is to be believed, the French monarch had a sufficiently clear perception of the “European Union” to be communicated to and approved by all “Christian sovereigns”, seeking, through this strategic appeal for a return to a common religious cradle, to transcend the inevitable impasses caused by the secession of the “Protestant” creed. The “grand design” - as Henry IV's unifying project was known in the political jargon of the time - met four unconditional and inalienable requirements

1° to keep intangible the interests of each state about what they had already conquered by then;

2° to ensure a monetary contribution from each State to the common expenses of all, based on a principle of proportional contributions;

3° to ratify the union of all European states in the form of a supranational Council of 60 representatives;

4° to host this Council in one of Europe's “central” cities, for example, Nancy, Metz, Cologne, or - a supreme irony of fate - Strasbourg.

In other words, in the space of just over a century, a cleric, an intellectual, and a sovereign all helped to provide a kind of primordial “critical mass” based on which the common consciousness of a united Europe was to be prospectively shaped. Even before it was appropriated by Eurocrats more or less dazzled by its status, the aspiration for European unification ran through an entire epoch marked by the apotheosis of Reason and the Enlightenment. Figures such as Castel, Crucé, and Henri IV cannot, therefore, be dissociated from the “rationalist” and “enlightenment” fervor that animated the spirit of their times: Like the majority of the literate class who frequented and promoted circles of scientific, philosophical and artistic debate and dissemination, our cleric belonged in Paris to a group of scholars who, gravitating around Bernard de Fontenelle, read Descartes, feeling therefore enabled and qualified to apply the Cartesian method to the problems of politics, even if no indication had been theoretically elaborated by the philosopher in this respect.

Such a desideratum, however, should immediately raise a question: will the quest for a “European construction” have to remain captured by the image that Enlightenment rationalism returns to it in the mirror of its certainties, beliefs, and expectations, to the point of dissolving the contours of a process whose “physiognomy” was being shaped in a broader and simultaneously deeper horizon? This would be reductive.

The quest for a Europe whose identity is rooted in the *ethos* of a “common home” or, if you prefer, in the *pathos* of a “common destiny”, does not always reveal the unexpected origin of the mythological gesture that personifies it. But what should we expect, then, from a reality whose name comes from that mythical Phoenician princess who, while playing on a beach, is kidnapped by Zeus metamorphosed as a white bull, and carried by him on her back to Crete, where, after a loving union, three children are conceived, among whom is Minos, the representative paradigm of that Minoan-Cretan civilization that will insinuate itself in the proto-history of Greek culture?

It is perplexing that unaware of its peripheral and eccentric cradle, the motto of a “European identity” has served and continues to serve - it remains to be seen at what cost - as a poorly disguised motive for projects of fractured political-economic domination (in the light of polarised, axial or variable geometry models), of obsessive technocratic domestication (through exogenous, corrective and punitive supervisory mechanisms), or of deluded ethnocentric enclosure (in view to obstruct migratory flows that are perceived by society as a threat).

One thing is certain: “- World peace cannot be safeguarded without creative efforts commensurate with the dangers which threaten it. The contribution which an organized and living Europe can make to civilization is indispensable to the maintenance of peaceful relations...”

When Robert Schuman uttered these words on 9 May 1950 as a prelude to a Declaration which is considered to be the origin of the European Community, the then French Foreign Minister was thinking mainly of “coal” and “steel”. Without the binding creation of a common market that would reconcile the emerging interests of the countries possessing these two resources in an Economic Community (ECSC), it would be difficult for Europe to recover from the post-war debris that had unforeseeable and immeasurable consequences. Without this urgency to cooperate and gradually become more and more inclusive, all the “creative efforts” to revitalize a continent whose wounds had not yet healed would therefore be in vain. It was therefore vital and decisive to make all Franco-German coal and steel production subject to a High Authority, in an organization open to other European countries, following the spirit of the declaration.

Although the pacifist and integrationist assumptions of the Schuman Declaration remain genetically valid today, they really have long since been overtaken by the inertia of their circumstance. Actually, if on the one hand, it is clear that the pursuit of a common goal “through

concrete achievements which first create a solidarity *de facto*” (ibid.) has been gradually emptied of its original programmatic impetus, on the other hand, it has not gone unnoticed that there is strange amnesia among political actors (be they elected representatives or career technocrats) concerning the only factor that could confer a minimum of cohesion on this **teleological design of cooperation in solidarity**, namely the **integrating potential of culture**.

Perhaps this deficit of cultural memory may explain, in our opinion, why the longed-for process of European integration has fallen far short of its most promising intentions. Unable to find the equilibrium between an extensive enlargement of specific idiosyncrasies (of agglutinative and “growthist” logic) and an intensive deepening of common matrixes (of symbiotic and “sustainabilist” logic), the illusion was created that the aggregating dynamics which allowed adding country after country to the original founding nucleus would be more than enough to dispense the politically involved societies from deepening their multiple and reciprocal senses of belonging, representation and interaction with the others (and not despite them). A judicious deepening incentive could well, together with a corresponding willingness to enlarge, have helped to consolidate the much-vaunted “inter-European cooperation in solidarity”, without this necessarily resulting in an inconsequent and dangerous annulment of different cultural idiosyncrasies. However, the truth be told, this was nothing more than a daydream. The process of a common-building house (*oikos*) was now systemically captured by an economy (i.e. a “house management”, *oiko-nomy*) in the wake of a subtle *salvific theology of growth* (of industrial leverage at first, of agricultural protection soon after, of exchange harmonization and monetary unification later and, finally, of a free and global movement of people, goods, services, and capital), but now constrained, from an architectural point of view, by a political and constitutional structure whose communitarian nature often poses problems when it comes to its transposition and applicability in the various national legal systems (see, for example, the successive revisions of the European Union treaties and the hesitations as to whether to opt for a model of sharing or transferring power between the member states, or the frustrating inoperability to stabilize criteria and equalize citizenship rights in increasingly heterogeneous and entropic democratic ecosystems).

This means that, without a *design* for **deepening identity through culture(s)**, the construction of Europe was limited to the thickening of its geo-political, techno-bureaucratic, and macro-economic volumetry, leaving the ideal of cohesion in solidarity - evident in the visionary spirit not only of Robert Schuman but also in the visionary spirit of other founding fathers such as Jean Monet, Winston Churchill, Alcide De Gasperi, Konrad Adenauer, Joseph

Bech, Johan Willem Beyen, Walter Hallstein, Sicco Mansholt, Paul-Henri Spaak and Altiero Spinelli - awaiting a Godot that never came and most probably never will.

In either way, the fact remains that, despite its labyrinthine, oscillating, and erratic wanderings, Europe manifests, as George Steiner well elucidated, a peculiar sense of spatiality through which any human experience can travel and, therefore, manufacture the cultural physiognomy of its landscape:

metaphorically, but also materially, this landscape was shaped, and humanized, by feet and hands. As in no other part of the globe, the coasts, fields, forests, and hills of Europe, from La Coruña to St. Petersburg, from Stockholm to Messina, took shape, not so much due to geological time as to historical-human time... (*Idem, An Idea of Europe*, p. 28).

Now, what makes it possible to “mold” - to use Steiner's luminous words - the identity of Europe is, paradoxical as it may seem, embryonated in that decisive dimension that was being, if not expurgated, at least neglected by those who were politically expected to take care of its gestation, precisely the **culture**.

Thus, in addition to the aforementioned Enlightenment influence – which provided the critical spirit of philosophical and scientific rationality, the emancipatory dynamics of social and political achievements, and the cosmopolitan élan of cultural and artistic interaction, among others – there are three components of a European cultural proto-genesis whose trail was gradually blurred and which should be emphasized: 1) the Cretan culture, 2) the Athenian culture or, more extensively, Greco-Roman culture and 3) Christian culture.

Andrés Ortiz-Osés exposes each of these moments admirably, mentioning, regarding the (1) Cretan cradle, that Europe displays a feminine and matriarchal ballast, not so much due to the mythological origin of its name (which we have already mentioned above), but mainly because of the religious preponderance of a Mother-Goddess, by which the island of Crete was called “motherland” (i.e. *matria*, and not “fatherland”, *patria*, as would later occur in other contexts), as well as by the fact that the respective Labyrinth – where the fateful Minotaur (archetype of the dark and indomitable forces of nature) wandered – mimics a mother-cave: in this sense, “Europe does not have a patriarchal birth, but a matriarchal one, since it comes from an island in the middle of the Mediterranean ruled by the Goddess, and not from the head of Zeus, like later Athena and the Athenian culture. Cretan culture translates the rationalization or Europeanisation of Egyptian culture: opposite Crete is Alexandria. Crete is the domain of myth

and symbolic imagination, of the Eastern exuberance contained in the West, as shown in the precious frescoes of the Palace of Knossos” (in *Idem, Europa: origenes culturales*, pg. 16).

As far as the (2) Athenian cradle is concerned, Europe, according to the author, reflects from it a rational (*lógos*) and political (*pólis*) configuration under the aegis of Athena, a goddess no longer of matriarchal origin (paleo-Mediterranean), but born from the head of Zeus - a divinity endowed not only with paternal (protective) instinct, through the Nordic influence of the Indo European cultures, but above all with regal (subjugating) power, through the oriental influence of the Mesopotamian cultures; progressing southwards as far as Crete – where Theseus enters the Labyrinth to face the Minotaur and emerges from it thanks to the thread offered by his passionate Ariadne – the Athenian cosmovision imposes on the pre-existing matriarchal structuring a patriarchal and regal order based on a model of organisation which through the abstraction of the pre-politicised meaning of tribe and the pre-rational intelligibility of myth, will culminate in the long and subtle metamorphosis of the state of Reason into the reason of State as the political paradigm of Europe (itself a city-state by antonomasia). However, the Reason bestowed by Athens is aporetically ambivalent, since, on the one hand, it promotes the democratic overcoming of the tribal and irrational element, When the Greek ethic of politicising “good-life in view of the common good” meets and merges with the Roman pragmatism of administering “the public interest in view of the general interest”, thanks to the normative mediation of law, state reason then acquires an abstract character that autocratically seeks to impose and perpetuate itself indefinitely “from above”: in this sense, “in Athens, we witness the transition from an ancient naturalistic Goddess-dominated worldview to an Olympian worldview dominated by Zeus/Jupiter. The proud Greek *Logos* is founded on the repression/oppression of symbolic myth, namely passion (*pathos*). However, a great mediation is needed between passion and reason, *pathos* and *logos*, (...) < realized> by Christianity as a foundational European religion, with its dark shadows and its bright luminosity” (in *ibid*, pg. 17).

Concerning, finally, the (3) Christian cradle, its great contribution is polarised around the notion of person, understood in its radical intersubjective and relational dimension, aiming precisely the core of the axiological dimension of the Gospel, in the light of which strangeness, rejection, and indifference not only expose and test the believer's faith before the vulnerability of the “other”, but also demand from him the pressing task of including him in solidarity in a “fratria”, that is, in a common “brotherhood”: in this sense, “Christianity proceeds from Mediterranean Judaism, synthesizing both the Mediterranean matriarchal background and the

Hebrew patriarchal background. But the originality of the original Christianity of Jesus of Nazareth consists in going beyond and co-implicating the homeland in the fraternity of the common/communitarian sense - Church - as a universal fraternity. The Christian God is no longer the Mother Goddess of the Mediterranean, nor the Father God of the Old Testament, but the God-in-the-hand: the incarnation of God in the open humanity of Christ. Christianity is a religion born in the Near East, but reborn in Rome and spread throughout the Roman Empire, making it the religion of the Empire, with its imperial heritage, but of a temporal empire converted into a spiritual one (...). The origin of Europe is fundamentally the result of a combination between Mediterranean *eros* and Indo-European *reason*, between orthodox southeastern Catholicism and central Nordic Protestantism, but it must become a fraternity between the matriarchal and the patriarchal. Dionysian and Apollonian, the heart and the reason. At the center or in the middle of virtue is the mediation of contrasts, north and south, cold and heat, abstraction and passion.” (in *ibid*, pg. 17-18).

That said, more than a concept or an eidetic representation, Europe is, as it turns out, entrusted with the mediational task of interweaving seemingly irreconcilable extremes, polarities, and tensions. How? Through the discursive communion of a *logos* which, ever since Aristotle, has been concretized as the r(el)acional sign of the *zoon politikon* (in *Politics*, I, 2, 1253a 2-3) and, under the influence of Christianity, as the “incarnate” possibility of “cohabitation-in-difference” (*oikoumene*). Without disregarding the metaphysical gesture that seeks to capture an essence for it - whether understood as substantial unity, conceptual definition, universal principle, or abstract notion - Europe will only appropriate this task to the extent that it recovers the wonder and perplexity of discovering (or should we not rather say inventing?) itself as a problem that, *ab ovo ad mala*, continually challenges and mobilizes it in its historical becoming. And when an achievement is given to thought in this way, the **teleological bid of its development** condemns to failure any vague attempt to capture it as a constituted *a priori* and, therefore, unquestioned and unquestionable.

However, what gives “Europeanness” a common matrix, a certain air of family, can be attested in the “text-in-action” of a “being-in-becoming” whose self-interpretation depends on the critical conjunction of two poles: on the one hand, of **pragmatic-existential expectations that teleologically establish the giving of meaning to the event flow**; on the other hand, of **symbolic-normative representations that legitimate politically the participatory citizenship and the representative power**, thanks to the **cultural mediation** of a horizon of individual (personal) or collective (community) belonging. It happens, however, that the cultural

intercomprehension of a European identity is marked by a radical ambiguity: if, on the one hand, it seems to arise from the will to give itself a name according to what it “is” or “should be” (as Eduardo Lourenço well intuited in his work *L'Europe Introuvable: jalons pour une mythologie européenne*, namely in the chapter *De l'Europe comme culture* (*ibidem* pp. 21-29); on the other hand, it seems to delay *ad aeternum* this very attempt, offering, at best, the challenge of surprising ourselves in what “is becoming”.

If this is the case, the threshold where Europe projects itself in search of this “already-wanted” and “not-yet-acquired” identity will close as soon as it ceases to offer itself as a sphynx challenge of multiple itineraries and crossroads or, if we prefer, as a sign of that Gordian knot that Jacques Derrida, in *L'autre cap*, formulates in a provocative dichotomy: “either to return to a Europe that does not yet exist, (...) or to return to a Europe of the origins that would, in short, need to be restored, recovered and reconstituted during a great reunion party” (*ibidem* pp. 14-15).

Whenever thanks to the ecumenical and globalist dynamics, Europe has been challenged to see itself in the “others” and vice versa, the **cultural gesture of seeking for itself a name that assigns it something to do** is already paradoxically offered like **teleological horizon of all its possible achievements**. Despite the multiple nexuses that intertwine in an ecosystem of sovereign states capable of interacting in the pursuit of common interests, Europe does not crystallize into an essence, it is not reduced to a sum of parts, and it is not exhausted into a functional whole. Let us, therefore, leave aside the Europe of maps and bureaus. It is not exactly the geopolitical and technocratic sense what should we worry about.

If, according to Eric Voegelin, political experience is reflected in the way each human community orders the symbolic representations of its noetic, historical, and societal self-understanding (see *The New Science of Politics: an introductory essay*, 1952), it seems legitimate to ask what symbolically shapes the **cultural self-understanding** of a certain “Europeanness”. As far as Europe is concerned, the urgent question has to do, after all, with

(...) the unity of spiritual life, acting, creating: **with all the finalities**, interests, cares, and efforts, **with the finalistically produced formations**, the institutions, the organizations. Their individual men act in multiple societies of various levels, in families, tribes, and nations, all intimately and spiritually connected (...) **in the unity of a spiritual form**. To persons, associations of persons and **all their cultural achievements** must be accorded, thereby, a character that binds them universally.

This luminous excerpt from Edmund Husserl's *The Crisis of European Humanity and Philosophy* (*ibid.*, 319) exposes with remarkable depth what the German philosopher sensed as the **teleological meaning of the spiritual figure we call Europe**. Polarised by this **end (telos)**, Europe is not something that is properly prescribed in deontology or inscribed in an orthodoxy. In this sense, nothing determines what Europe 'must' or 'should be'. Rather, it is an experience that is conscious of itself as an inner kinship of a “having-to-do”, of an ecumenical experience that integrates multiform and multifarious cultural idiosyncrasies in the “concrete universality” - according to the felicitous expression of Joaquim Cerqueira Gonçalves in his text “L'Europe des cultures, des pensées e de la pensée” (*ibidem*, pg. 68) - of a welcoming and inclusive way of a “inhabitation” which consists in “being-home-for-the-other”. By the way, and after all, our common European home.

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