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# EUROPE OR PHILOSOPHY

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## *abstract*

*In his essay on "Europe or Philosophy" the author wonders whether 'this' Europe is at least evoking the philosophical complexity of the notion of Europe. For instance, according to the author, talks of preserving Europe's identity imply a tragic amnesia of Europe's constitutional difference. Europe is a Topos-Atopos, a place without place, without a map of cultures, languages, ethnicities, as it exists as a paradoxical entity. Specifically, in the face of global migration flows, attempts to think of a European nation-state with borders make no sense. Now, just when we were thinking we had reached the threshold of the political unity, opposing forces, prejudices and aversions of all kinds - theoretical and practical, philosophical and political - are getting the better. But these opposites are endemic and Europe hosts opposites from the beginning. We are discovering that the attempt to reduce this tension of opposites, the will to impose a union to the opposites is a sort of original violence. Perhaps the only way of redemption is to be found in the acknowledgement of differences and even conflicts, instead of coercing these into a single, unrealistic entity.*

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## *keywords*

*Philosophy, Europe, Conflict, Relation, Identity*

Hamlet is without doubt one of Europe's most revealing symbols. Just like Hamlet, Europe is *undecided* about its own roots. The father appears firm and very sure, but the mother? Is the father alluding, perhaps, to a crime he has committed, to some betrayal? To the son is forbidden to act as another Orestes and yet how will he be able to detach himself from womb? Metaphor aside, how can Europe decide for one of the spiritual currents that nourish its origins without "betraying" the others? How can it define itself on the basis of one of its "possible" without being considered "culpable" with respect to all the others? Europe is the Undecided always called on to decide. Just like Hamlet, it cannot escape its destiny that forces it to take action, to the drama of action that *de-cides*. But no decision will eliminate the *insecuritas*, no decision has ever arrived safely in port.

Europe is "suspended" in its own geographic configuration. It is a place that from era to era seems necessary to redefine. This trait already resounds in the Greek term *topos*. In fact, *topos* does not indicate a "container" where to accumulate different elements however distinct, but the extreme limit, the *eschaton*, where these same elements arrive in their movement. Therefore, one recognizes the place only when one reaches the "threshold", its limit, that is, there where it is made *cum-finis*, near, close, contiguous to the other from itself, where it reveals something *communis* with the other. Europe is there where it "touches" the extraneous, the stranger. Europe can try to know itself only there where it encounters, in every sense, the wonderful-frightening (Greek: *thauma*) of the stranger. Its idea of place, we could say, is *centrifuga*! Until it reaches its "xtreme" ("stremo"), which can change from era to era, Europe is not. (Dante calls Byzantium the "xtreme" of Europe). Therefore, it is possible to say that Europe is the place where one invents history, where historical becoming becomes the essential trait of beings, because a process, a becoming is the same place as Europe. And yet, therefore, Europe remains an "inadequate" name for the thing, because Europe cannot be reduced to a state of beings, and escapes univocal denotation. Europe is always a name which is a sign for what Europe *will be* or wants to be or must be. Since it does not have a determined origin, its figure is presented historically as task, imperative, un-definable, which does not mean at all *sine fine*! In order to understand Europe it is necessary first of all to determine its *direction*. Towards where does it look? Where does it mean to arrive? "Reversing" the way that Phoenician Europe has traversed, abducted by Zeus, it is to the East that Europe has always aimed, either to differentiate itself from it, or with nostalgia, or with a spirit of conquest. The Mediterranean was supposed to be the sea among *its* lands. It is the same direction taken by the *translatio imperii* from the first Rome to the second Byzantium, to the third Moscow. The

*polemos*-relation with the immense Land of Asia was at the centre of the problem of European “identity”. The age of discovery, the age in which the logic of discovery is established, changes direction and the *sense* of Europe. One moves towards the West, transgressing the ancient boundaries marked by Hercules, always in order to reach the East. But the East is reached by “erasing” that earthly dimension that dismayed and seemed insurmountable. By sea, on that “house” which is the ship, ever since the ephemeral Athenian empire, European man has reached the East. He discovers it though a “mean” which for him is foreign to the essence of Asia, and precisely for this reason he believes that he can make it his own. The immense expanse of the sea is felt to be rich with promises. Only its rule guarantees the conquest. To rule only lands means to be prisoners of the sea. The last and decisive *translatio imperii* is from the Mediterranean (already “in crisis”, already no longer *ours*), to the great island in the Atlantic, lady of two oceans and bridge between them.

Only because this *translatio* works out of its center functions, Europe becomes completely *civitas futura*, a community in *itinere*, since we expect in the future the “true” solution to problems and contradictions. A-oikos, extraneous to any fixed dwelling, son of poverty that always compels to search, and of those ways, of those means that make possible to attain the goal, the philosophic-scientific *eros* had already appeared. Rome, in its turn, even though always preserving its own roots in the *urbs*, displayed its own essence as *mobilis*. The Roman *civitas* exists only as always enlarging, as *augescens*. And yet only now (and under the great theological sign of Augustinian history) Europe shows itself as non “containable” *spirit*, as a will to power territorially undeterminable, as project of a will to planetary conquest whereby, paraphrasing Hegel’s *Logic*, every determination is removed, overcome the very moment it is posited.

Can there be gods where there are no borders? Jünger asked himself this question. Can the sacred be there where the very idea of border (Hegel again) is only a moment overcome in the very act of thinking? Europe’s “secular” status, the European Political, must also be considered under this aspect. The “boundaries” between sacred and profane are shaken from their foundations. The Christian religion could appear to Romanticism as well as to Idealism, in all their variations, the ultimate or “absolute” religion precisely because, after all, a *non religion*, “liberation” of the abstract separateness between the secular and the religious, *fides et ratio*, progress of the earthly (and marine!) *civitas*, and the Dantesque “infuturing” (*infuturarsi*) to the Pauline “politeuma en ouranois”. Even in Erasmus resounds the nostalgia for the Ancient God-Terminus, but the herm is a two-faced Janus which unites the opposites, peace and war, rather than differentiating between them. Europe has become almost synonymous of an irenic hope of reconciliation with the purpose of counter-attacking the rampant Ottoman offensive during the XV century. But within the very breast of this hope brooded even more lethal contradictions (and, in their sign, tragically, one ought to gloss Italian humanism), that Machiavelli mercilessly laid bare. European identity was and is an identity in *conflict*. Europe’s agony (of which María Zambrano will speak) signifies the *being agonic* of Europe.

How could anyone “leave in peace” who has no peace within himself? The pacifists’ appeals to peace, as if to make peace meant, precisely, “to leave in peace”, demonstrate that they ignore the essence of European “identity”. It is an “ek-static” existence in every sense, to communicate, to open oneself up, to con-vince.

To wish that it may be expressed differently means inventing the impossible (*legni d’acciaio*). The difficulty consists in making peace *through* its agonic essence, in discovering a sense of peace that is not antonymic to the will to communicate and con-vince, which is always and necessarily to wound and be wounded.

Power is knowledge (to have the “idea” of everything, to occupy a place from which one can gather a panoptic view) and knowledge is power. To care for the soul means, first of all, and

well beyond any spiritual aura, to care for that organ that makes possible to see and foresee, to plan and to discover. It is the discovery, the ability to discover that in the end gives legitimacy to the conquest. Nevertheless, I don't know myself simply when I make my stare sharp and clear. I know myself only in the eye of the other, when I see myself *recognized* by the other. Knowledge is power but in the sense of reciprocal acknowledgment. I attain my "identity" only when the other *freely* acknowledges my worth. If it were not done freely, his acknowledgment would not mean anything. Deep in its soul and in the intentionality it expresses, Europe does not only want knowledge-power or power on those who are forced to acknowledge its power. Europe passionately desires that it be the value of the other's freedom to testify to its own value. Is this the *impossible*? Is it impossible that this burning desire does not end up by being carried out as "liberation", as eradication of the other from every place, imposition of our idea of freedom and our form of rationality and knowledge, liberating intolerance?

Let us leave for the moment this question open and let us ask instead: the idea of this strong bond between knowledge and power (*Kennen-Können*) does it tarry on the shoulders of "heroic idealism" (Zambrano) of the European philosophical tradition, of its claim to attain unassailable Truths? But our philosophy (which is without doubt "the original phenomenon of Europe" as Husserl has remarked) elaborates a conception of science that even though resting on unquestionable principles insofar as they are self-evident interprets it and lives it essentially as endless research. If the truth of principles is unconditioned, science develops and is conceived as infinite horizon of tasks. It attributes to any "factual" truth which is arrived at, from time to time, the character of mere approximation. Therefore, this is its "vocation" (the *Beruf* of European science), to prevent the imposition of a non inviolable border. What changes in the course of its affirmation as paradigm of rationality is not at all this open and experimental character but the pure epistemic claim (from Plato to Husserl) that a radical difference exists between the theoretical *Haltung*, the love of research in which is realized the love for *sophía*, and the techno-practical dimension. In Kant technology is still conceived as mere *application* of the laws established by the science of nature, a science moved exclusively by the *pure* having-to-know-to-discover. But the *desecration* (whether *Entwertung* or *Entzauberung!*) of this purported "purity" does not occur only through the Nietzsche-Heidegger "line" but also, and maybe above all, through the actualist developments of idealism (more than in Marx where the idea of the superiority of praxis dominates and, in particular, that praxis which has as its aim the *scholé*). The "faith" in technology is so little in contradiction with the "heroic idealism" that it ends up, instead, by proving it true. The idea of science as research and task guides the "always beyond" of the technological enterprise. The vehemence with which the latter wants the permanent transformation of the world is already entirely immanent in the character not at all abstractly contemplative but praxistic of philosophy. *Nos interrogantes*, that's Europe: a plurality of subjects in questioning research. Absolutely different styles of research and yet, even at unfathomable distances, the questioners have ended up by recognizing themselves. Hegel regards Anselm as the greatest of the medieval philosophers. Nietzsche's overman recalls by infinite traits Eckhart's "noble man", while Gentile recalls Bruno's "learned ignorance" when he explains the *nondum* that pesters from inside every scientific discovery. None can tolerate that there is a Boundary (Terminé): neither the mystic who raises himself to "what" no thought can attain, nor the idealist whose Ego is not so much the "point" at the centre of a circle with the infinite radius, but is the very radiating to infinity of the power of thought, which is actualized at every moment. To be sure, faith is the gift that supports the mystic in his "ek-stasis", which cannot stop at any begins, not even the Supreme one, while the questioning of the philosopher is founded on itself and advances the claim of not having presupposed. And yet both present themselves in the form of an inexhaustible search. A search for what is lacking, in the sign of *apousia*, rather than in that

of *parousia*, in the sign of the *semper adveniens*, rather than in that of the event already been, of the *consummatum est*.

Has this European spirit been dethroned? Is this another chapter to be added to the list of “long sellers” on the *Entkrönung Europas*? I don’t believe so. The European political suicide of the twentieth century was the product of the will to hegemonic power of territorially determined and “confining” States. To be sure, they wanted “to explode” imperialistically from their borders only to assert their own “closed” identity. Imperialism is the projection of traditional State sovereignties not their overcoming. They aimed at the subjugation of the other not at the acknowledgement of his freedom. The project of domination was called on to resolve its research understood subjugating discovery, not to renew it. The most deep-rooted reason why twentieth century philosophers could so radically err on the nature of totalitarianism is the fact that they saw in it precisely the “liberation” of man from the closed horizons of liberal individualism and its consignment to the voice of its own responsibility alone. They imagined the relation between man and the totalitarian State to be founded on the positive freedom of man which is *for itself* to the extent to which it is *ad alium*. They imagined the relation between State and people to be based on the dialectic of recognition. They looked for the coming true of their own philosophy – and they searched persistently for its essence that had to be synthesis, supreme reconciliation of theory and praxis –, but they looked for it in a politics that represented its reversed image: *conclusion* of its infinite *scepsis*; act that became revolutionary regime; universalism proclaimed by nationalisms; responsible acknowledgement that spilled in alienation to “presumed” powers. Can we really state that dethroning of Europe corresponds to its philosophy? Or, can the dethroning of the European States, of the twentieth century’s civil war, provide access to a new understanding of Europe? Could its decline as political power, in the old sense of the term, represent the beginning of a new, different direction? Hegel used to say that ripeness begins with decline. This meaning of decline returns in Nietzsche. Philosophy has followed the entire history of Europe, can it mark its rebound?

But the outlook of the *philosophein* must be realistic. Is Europe today no longer “necessary” because of the collapse of its States and many little States, and their imperialistic ambitions, leaving open only the fulfilment of Nietzsche’s prophecy? He wrote in 1885: “The small European States are destined to become in a short time, under the irresistible thrust of the great trade and commerce toward a last frontier, world trade and commerce, economically untenable. Already, currency alone will force Europe to come closer together, when the time comes, under one power”. And he added that: The forms of democracy and parliamentarianism will be the least apt to confront this challenge.

If today we evaluate the “constituent” efforts of the European Community can we assert that this prophecy was proven wrong? Can we say that Europe is uniting under different thrusts than world trade and commerce? That money is not its main reason? That the form of its government is democratic-parliamentary in that sense of the term that was asserted in the history of the national States? Current responses are all more or less apologetic or deluded: ideological in both cases; second-rate realism (*da stenterelli*), or “beautiful soul” melancholy. In actuality, the work for a European Constitution and the events that will follow constitute a formidable test bench for a “search for Europe”. They have placed, once again, an *undecided* Europe against the necessity to decide and they have clearly emphasized the terms of the decision. By appealing precisely to its political weakness, Europe had begun the process of integration. On the geo-political questions it could not have a voice, and its founding fathers, ingeniously, exploited precisely this state of inferiority.

The “removal” of the problem of the cultural-political identity, or its presentation in meaningless traditional terms, anaesthetized and rhetorical, has been a key factor in allowing

the rapidity with which the economico-commercial integration arrived at the monetary-financial one. It is well-known that this chapter cannot be said to be concluded, its logic, however, is completely clear, and it is the logic whereby the economico-social structure, which now rules the entire planet, redefines radically, more than cancelling it, any determined sovereignty, transforming it in a vital point or moment of transmission of its own empire. There is no doubt that the basic principle that informs the so-called European Constitution expresses perfect adherence to the significance of this empire. Only a single end the Constitution declares to be non-negotiable, beyond those principles which constitute its preamble and rhetoric (I don't use the term in a derogatory way): free competition, "freeing" the economico-social space from any protectionist barrier. Naturally, even this purpose is to be pursued gradually and can encounter harsh resistance. And yet it constitutes the undeniable pillar, the *fundamentum inconcussum*, of community construction. The States, the old subjects, will be able to exercise a "right of containment" with respect to it, to slow down or to soften it, but the line is drawn, and the entire building would collapse, as such, if it were put into question. This pillar states that the act of the idea of liberty and source of any of its actual expression is market freedom. Political freedom, citizens rights, etc., are actually thought to be generated from it and without it they are not even conceivable.

Thus, Europe can carry out its own "program", which can be extrapolated from its history to this day, and is founded on its disenchanting acknowledgment of its insurmountable political "misery" and, in fact, on the premise of the irreversible neutralization of any "autonomy" of political action. This does not mean that the "program" can be easily carried out and not even that the result is guaranteed. It only means that it is based on secure data and on an absolutely realistic calculation. The logic of the "program" excludes taking into account factors that by their nature are not reducible to *calculus*. In other words, it would be entirely incapable to account within itself for any deferment to further "tasks" with respect to that "freedom" of which we have spoken. The "program" functions to the extent to which it is *wertfrei*.

It is not important now to criticize the idea of the non-evaluative character (a-valutatività) of the "program". It is important to pose the question whether Europe can be responsible, which entails the ability to respond. One responds to a task that cannot be simply deduced from the present state

of affairs. Responsibility for a task cannot be extrapolated from the calculation of given factors and from predicting the outcome of their dynamics. Responsibility means listening and "obedience" with respect to a task that transcends or that is subsequent with respect to the immanence of the system. Is such a task possible for Europe? A task which is, precisely, a counterblow (*contraccollo*) and not an abstract, unrealistic, fanciful negation of its "program". The European task was always philo-sophically conceived as similar to the task of questioning and research. But it was also moved by an incoercible will of *subsuming* in itself and comprehending the totality of beings by a compulsion to Order. To conceive the European task in this direction would only mean making it the foundation of its own "program". In fact, in it, is affirmed the same imperative of cancelling every distance, of reducing differences to operative-functional divisions of the "work" of the overall system, of assimilating the freedom to a formal legal equality before the immanent "laws" of the latter. From this point of view, the European "program" embodies perfectly the task or the mission that his philosophy seemed to entrust to Europe. Fulfilment of philosophy, then, or its survival as pure hermeneutics, as comprehension-interpretation of *facts*?

For philosophy, however, there is no interpretation without criticism, and criticism is applied first of all precisely to that "image of the world" that claims to "transfigure it" into a system. This "image" is incomparably antinomic. A system of everything is not feasible just as it is impossible to formulate a law of Nature. A system is effective (and the laws that are formulated

in it will have predictive value) only if it is self-limiting, “protecting itself” from external “noise”. What is a disturbing noise for one system is the language of another. The logic of the system, correctly understood, presupposes the existence of insurmountable differences. It does not homologize, equalize but distinguishes and analyses. Therefore, insofar as philosophy is exercise of criticism against any “devastation” of the limits of the intellect and its language, it could entrust, therefore, today, to Europe the task of dissolving the dominant *idola* (whether idolized or apocalyptically repelled), all included in the thinking of the destined affirmation of a form of economic, social, cultural relation capable of reducing the world to a system. No task, however, and no responsibility can be expressed in the pure exercise of criticism. An idea can be glimpsed at when we understand how that purpose, the world-system, contradicts the *final cause* (the “principle cause” for Aquinas!) of that *agòn*, that conflict-dialogue, relation-*polemos*, which constitutes the proper of European history. Its final cause is the acknowledgement that the free person searches for and receives from a subjectivity that he recognizes in his value, whose freedom is not at all “negotiable”. There can only be “satisfaction” in this: to recognize my being-free thought and in the freedom of the other. If I believe to be the maker of the freedom of the other, his freedom *depends* on me and for this reason its ceases to be such. But for this reason my satisfaction is also not as great since to be recognized by someone who “depends” on me will never be able to attest to my worth. I cannot be “certain” of myself if I am not “certain” of the value of the other, or of my freedom if his recognition is due to me. Satisfaction is possible only if the other remains in front of me in all his value and, therefore, if no “equality” concludes our *polemos*. Equally unconceivable is the “final cause” of each of my actions (and that form of doing which is thinking itself) if an abstract separateness breaks the relation or if the relation is established by norms, procedures, authorities transcending the subjectivities at play.

The relation is a *bringing closer* (*avvicinanza*) that is never concluded, a being-together in the distance but in a distance acted, crossed, suffered, never simply measured-contemplated. Where it “satisfies” is precisely when the identity of the other appears to me more definite and insurmountable in its value, since it is on the part of such an identity that I pursued the recognition. Where the relation with the other “satisfies” me more deeply is where the “in-equality” with him appears the greatest. The relation *brings closer* (*avvicina*) to the comprehension of the distance. The distance is not mute separateness but the rhythm of the relation. Only a thinking so organized, metaphoric-analogical, will be capable to salvage in itself that idea of satisfaction-joy (*Befriedigung*) which is the final cause of every *pathos* and every *logos*: the idea of knowing oneself in the value of one’s own being-free through the recognition that an “equal” person donates to us, to us alone for his own being-free. A similar thought will declare the intolerability of any negation of such an idea, that is, of any suffering, not out the goodness of one’s heart, but because it would make *my* joy impossible: the look of who suffers, of who is forced to “depend”, in fact, will never be that free look where I can find my worth. Not even the most banal well-being could stand for me, at this point, on the existence of the damned (Adorno).

This idea supports a *research*, a questioning, which is not the one that dominates in the logic of *discovery*. Always research: a *coming closer* (*avvicinanza*), precisely, which is expressed by conjecture, by metaphor, by analogy – but which will never reveal *the* proper, the *eschaton* of the other, or of the other that I am to myself. A research that demonstrates “realistically” the distinction which does not conclude in any *Pax profunda* (*eirene kai asphaleia* is the ‘slogan’ of the Antichrist!) but which in the same distance sees the *com-patibily*, in the *logos* of the distance what gathers and binds the distincts.

Can Europe *re-col-lect* this thought? Only through the critique of the idea of liberty that has held each discovery and each will to power: freedom as “what” we possess and what we

possess is measure, freedom as “what” we are called on to impose, with which we want to “baptize” the world. In the play of nearness-distance, which makes that relation we have indicated possible, freedom is, precisely, instead, “what” nobody possesses, “what” makes possible that *openness* where the relation happens and the relation *expresses*, which ek-sists in the relation, without ever being able to be exhausted by it. *Irony*, the most European of commodities, as Benjamin called it, is to be utilized ruthlessly against the idol of liberty as the jealous possession of the single, property of the individual, which he claims even to be able to demonstrate and to prove. Freedom is revealed in the “setting” of any claim to possess it, claim which is the foundation of every *philopsichia*. Freedom is expressed in the search for the *Xynon*, the *Communis*, which, as it is such, belongs to none. Not a “thematizable” good (*bene*) (not *mathema* communicable in a definitive form, and yet premise of any communication which leans over the abyss of the *Cum* which, as such, cannot be stated, in its turn. The *Cum* shows itself, we can say, as the possibility of the event of communication). This is the freedom to which we correspond expressing it in being responsible, that is, in corresponding to the radical question of recognition and to the irrepressible necessity of *Befriedigung*. Europe can be represented in the *program* destined by the power of “installation” (*impianto*) (Heidegger’s techno-economic *Gestell*), or in the idea of a *foedus* between who saves one’s own freedom in the recognition of the freedom of the other and, therefore, between he who *ironizes* on the claim of possessing it, between who conceives it analogically as the *im-possible* Good. Europe is called on to decide between “monist barbarism” (Berlin) and the love for this impossible that guards the distance in its most insurmountable of relations (the one, precisely, that connects the *absolutely* distinct). Wanting to construct the unity of the world as world-system on the premise of the absolute truth of their own “identity” appears today, instead, as the best way to demolish any possible *coming closer* (*avvicinanza*). To quote Berlin one again, if we cannot tolerate – but in the sense of *tollere*, to elevate, to show in their stature – values in conflict (*polemos*), if we accept the dogma that they must be reduced to One, that the world has a great Design and it is a question of putting together the pieces, each to its proper place, we will eliminate any expression of freedom. We shall reduce it to the extent of our own power. To be sure, Europe will have, then, forever decided, but because it will have decided its own definitive disappearance.