

WHAT IS EUROPEAN?



On overcoming colonial and
romantic modes of thought

Amsterdam
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Press

Dag Nikolaus Hasse

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Romantic Modes of Thought*

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Introduction

The term “Europe” holds a strong appeal for many people. It represents the hope for free speech, religious freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law, and a freely developing culture. It also embodies the hope that diverse peoples can live together peacefully – a life “united in diversity”, as the motto of the European Union puts it. What an impressively positive image! Many readers will probably say: Yes, I too place my hope in these values, because I believe that Europe, with its ideas, can contribute to making the world a fairer, freer, and more peaceful place. Just a few decades after the catastrophe of the Second World War and the Holocaust, this is indeed a remarkably positive development.

At the same time, however, there are frequent complaints that emotional attachment to Europe – the affective bond, the sense of loyalty – is weak among many people, especially among Europeans themselves. As a result, there have been, and continue to be, numerous attempts to fill the term “Europe” with concrete content: with ideas, values, and cultural traditions that characterise Europe and hold it together. The assumption is that if we can identify such an essence of what it means to be European, it will be easier to inspire enthusiasm for Europe, both in ourselves and in others.

But there is a problem: these efforts to define Europe’s content have taken a disturbing turn. The concepts of Europe that have emerged are laden with historical ballast. Our discourse about Europe is shaped by concepts that exclude people, narrow our view, and create historical and geographical distortions. From the long history of the concept of Europe, we continue to carry colonial and

Romantic undertones – burdens that weigh heavily on the future continent's people and their neighbours.

This book promotes an open concept of Europe. It draws attention to voices about Europe that are not usually heard. And it calls for a twofold shift in how we speak and think about Europe: through its decolonisation and deromanticisation. This approach allows us to overcome modes of thought that stem from two key epochs in the history of the concept of Europe: the Enlightenment and colonial period around 1700, and the Romantic period around 1800.

It would be a misunderstanding to view this disarmament and opening of the concept of Europe as discouraging – quite the contrary. A decolonised and deromanticised concept of Europe holds great promise and can be doubly enriching. It offers a cultural home to more people across the continent and gives neighbouring continents the attention and respect that should be the basis for shaping a common future. Such a concept of Europe has the advantage that it could indeed serve as a model for a Europe “united in diversity”.

Briefly: The Middle Ages

Every generation faces the task of finding its own solutions for shaping society in the present and the future. History plays an explicit role in these considerations, offering both role models and cautionary examples. Yet history is also implicitly involved: its positive and negative imprints continue to live on in our concepts, practices, and institutions.

When it comes to the opportunities and burdens of past eras, the Middle Ages are often judged harshly. References to the medieval period frequently serve as a negative

demarcation. Most contemporary societies, for example, reject theocracies, i.e. religiously legitimised forms of rule, which were typical of medieval central Europe. They also reject the defamatory language of religious pamphlets, in which Jews, Christians, and Muslims attacked one another with polemics that often descended into the vilification of the other. The medieval discrimination against minorities, the pogroms against Jews, and the beginnings of racist statements about religious and ethnic groups are worrying traditions that need to be exposed and overcome.

Yet, remarkably, the concept of Europe itself did not acquire any negative connotations in the Middle Ages that would complicate its usage today. The actual strains on the concept only arose in modern times. One might expect that the medieval concept of Europe carried a positive meaning, at least in crusade literature, and was used in polemical contexts. But this was not the case. Nowhere in the sources does one read: “We in Europe” are fighting against “the infidels in Asia and Africa”. Rather, “Europe” served quite soberly as a geographical term in the Middle Ages, for example to describe that numerous princes of Europe took part in the Crusades, or that the Mongols had crossed the borders of Europe.

“Europe” was neither a polemical expression nor a positive term that would refer to one’s home. Rather, people used expressions such as “we Christians”, “we Latins”, or “Christendom” to describe their own group. The Venetian Marco Polo (1254–1324), who travelled to China, did not refer to Europe but rather to “Latins” or “Latin merchants” (*mercaant latin* in French-Italian or *mercantanti latini* in Italian). In medieval sources, the term “Europe” was seldom given a positive connotation beyond its geographical meaning.

Geography

The geographical concept of Europe remained remarkably stable and largely undisputed in the texts of the Greco-Latin tradition from antiquity through the Middle Ages to the early modern period. The borders of Europe were generally defined as the Strait of Gibraltar, the Mediterranean Sea, the Bosphorus, and the Don River, which flows east of the Crimea into the Sea of Azov, a bulge in the Black Sea. Some ancient authors instead named the Aras or Rioni Rivers in the Caucasus region as Europe's eastern border, but these views did not prevail. The Ural, in turn, only replaced the Don as the border between Europe and Asia from the 18th century onwards. This new demarcation, proposed by the Swedish scientist Philipp von Strahlenberg in 1726, was disseminated mainly through the geographical works of the Russian scientist and Enlightenment philosopher Vasilij Tatishchev, who, in 1744, described the Ural Mountains as the “natural border between Europe and Asia” (натуральное разделение Европы с Азией), citing the watershed function of the range.

But does the geographical concept of the European continent have scientific validity? Modern geography is far more sceptical about the term “continent” than the general public or our schoolbooks suggest. If continents were defined solely by the boundaries between land and sea, then every island would be a continent. Therefore, the criterion of land mass becomes crucial. But how big must a land mass be to constitute a continent? And are waterways like the Bosphorus or the Nile sufficient to separate land masses? Or should only seas serve as valid boundaries?

Geologists, for their part, distinguish between the different tectonic plates of the Earth's outer shell, whose

slow drift causes deformations at plate boundaries, such as mountains and channels. If continents were delimited along the tectonic plates, India and Sri Lanka, for example, would no longer belong to Eurasia, because they lie on the Indian Plate.

Whether “continent” is a meaningful geographical term thus depends largely on the criteria used to define it. Some geographers even go so far as to argue: spaces do not exist; they are made. According to this view, the question of how far Europe extends is not a geographical one, but a political or cultural one.

But this is too radical: we humans (hopefully) cannot change anything about the Strait of Gibraltar. However, how we describe and understand this prominent feature of the earth’s surface depends on us. Most names for regions and places are very old and serve as reliable tools for orienting ourselves on the planet. Whether a flight lands on the correct continent is not a question we would like to see answered politically or culturally; rather, we trust geography and its traditional concepts. Geographical spaces are indeed created by humans, but they are not arbitrary.

The two largest land masses on Earth are America and Europe–Africa–Asia. Assuming that the Bosphorus and the Nile are suitable continental boundaries, the problem remains that Eurasia forms one vast, continuous land mass. The relatively flat Ural Mountains and the Ural River to the south are only one of several ways to divide Eurasia geographically. Thus, when scientific geography uses the term “continent” for Europe, it does so while acknowledging that Europe is geographically a “made space”. Our current concept of the European continent is a convention – a product of more than 2500 years of geographical traditions and debates, first visible in Greek authors such as Anaximander of Miletus

around 550 BC. Nevertheless, the geographical concept of Europe is neither inappropriate nor outdated. The “made space” of Europe has proved to be a surprisingly stable and clear convention: Gibraltar, the Bosphorus, the Don River, and later the Urals. It allows us to quickly and precisely agree on what we mean by “Europe”. Cultural concepts of Europe, as we shall see, are much more volatile and problematic.

1. Decolonisation

Europe is the continent that gave birth to a hope for reason. Every person who thinks and acts in the spirit of the Enlightenment is a European.

This thesis is loosely based on ideas expressed by the writer Robert Menasse in a 2019 interview on the definition of the European writer. Many politically engaged and historically minded individuals speak of Europe in a similar way. By “Enlightenment”, they mean the epoch of the late 17th and 18th centuries, which was characterised by thinkers such as John Locke, Voltaire, and Immanuel Kant, and marked by a deep trust in the power of reason. Such a concept of Europe, which invokes the spirit of the Enlightenment, tends to be progressive, because it emphasises the use of reason by individual citizens rather than common cultural traditions. For this reason, it is mainly associated with the left and liberal political spectrum. However, it also has a conservative flavour, in that it draws on the values of a specific era of European history.

Europe turns from continent to culture

What could be problematic about this appealing concept of Europe? To answer this question, it is worth turning to the Enlightenment itself and understanding how cultural concepts of Europe became popular.

In contemporary public speeches, reference is often made to two forefathers of a cultural concept of Europe, namely,

Charlemagne and Piccolomini, the future Pope Pius II. It is then explained that Charlemagne was called the “father of Europe” (*pater europae*) in a poem from 799, and that the humanist Pope Pius II invented the term “European” (*europaei*) around 1458. Pius II used the term when he called on Christian princes to expel “the Turk” from Europe, and especially from Constantinople, arguing that Europe was the homeland of the Christian community.

It is true: in these quotations, Europe appears more as a cultural space than as a geographical continent, for Charlemagne never ruled over the entire continent, and during Pius II’s lifetime, many inhabitants of the continent were not Christians but Muslims or Jews. However, the famous references to Europe by Charlemagne and Pius II were exceptional for their time. They were rarely imitated and are anything but representative. They are therefore not suitable as foundations for public speeches (quite apart from the fact that Herodotus and Hippocrates in the 5th century BC, writing in Greek, and the Mozarabic Chronicle of 754, written in Latin, had already spoken of “Europeans”). If a cultural concept of Europe did not become popular around 799 or 1458, then when did it?

Historical research has not yet reached the point where it can precisely answer this question through quantitative studies. However, it is becoming apparent that a cultural concept of Europe first came into fashion in the decades around 1700, particularly in French texts. This is evident in the Paris instructions for French ambassadors to Turkey between 1665 and 1768, which the historian Malcolm Yapp has analysed. The early instructions speak of the “affairs of Christendom and the Ottoman Empire” (*des affaires de la chrétienté et de l’empire ottoman*). In 1679, the reference to Christianity was replaced for the first time by “affaires de

l'Europe", and in the following decades, the term "Europe" gradually displaced "Christianity" from the language used by French diplomats in Turkey. The emerging cultural concept of Europe explicitly excluded the Ottoman Empire, even though its capital, Constantinople, lay on the European continent.

Other sources also show that a cultural concept became popular around 1700. The defeat of the Ottoman army before Vienna in 1683 is still described as a victory for Christendom. However, references to Europe increased significantly after that event – in book titles, in treaties, and in writing more generally.

This popularisation did not emerge out of nowhere but was preceded by more than a century of development within the discourse of educated elites. This chapter in the history of the concept of Europe is well researched, and we know that intellectuals began to speak of a cultural Europe in three distinct areas:

Firstly, the concept of "Christendom" was occasionally replaced by "Europe" as early as the 16th century, in connection with the so-called Turkish Wars, i.e., the conflicts between the Ottoman Empire and Christian rulers.

Secondly, the power struggle between France and Habsburg Austria-Spain fuelled fears of world domination by a single power and thus encouraged reflection on a political order for Europe. In the 17th century, individual authors such as Maximilien Duc de Sully, Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, and William Penn outlined first drafts for a European peace order, a European league of nations, a court of justice, and a federal assembly.

Thirdly, the colonial conquests of the European powers influenced the way Europe was described on the continent. In texts and images of the Baroque period, the continents

of the known world were compared with each other, almost always to Europe's advantage.

These three discourses on Europe paved the way for the breakthrough of a cultural concept of Europe around 1700. The second of these three discourses, which concerned the political peace order, has always received much attention and admiration. This is not surprising, since it is part of the prehistory of the European Union. However, the history of the "idea of Europe" during this period was also strongly influenced by colonial notions of superiority. Two representative texts are cited here to illustrate the emerging idea of Europe: the widely read *Pilgrimes* by the Englishman Samuel Purchas from the early 17th century, and Zedler's famous German encyclopaedia from the 18th century.

Pastor Purchas was an enthusiastic observer of the English voyages of discovery and conquest. Without ever leaving England, he wrote popular accounts of these voyages, including a detailed comparison of the continents. Asia, Africa, and America were larger than Europe, Purchas noted in 1625, but they all served Europe, which surpassed the other continents in every respect. Europe, he argued, had the best climate, the best soil, the best air, the bravest, strongest, and cleverest people, as well as the finest fortifications and cities. It might seem, Purchas conceded, that another continent could equal or even surpass Europe in one of these aspects. But this impression was deceptive; in truth, all other continents have been made "tributaries and servants to Europe" – first by Alexander the Great and the ancient Romans, and later by the Spanish, Portuguese, English, and Dutch:

Asia yeerely sends us her Spices, Silkes, Gemmes; Africa her Gold and Ivory; America receiveth severer Customers and Tax-Masters, almost every where admitting Europaeen Colonies.

If I speake of Arts and Inventions (which are Mans properest goods, immortall Inheritance to our mortalitie) what have the rest of the world comparable?

The same superiority, Pastor Purchas argued, applied to the inventions of mechanics and music, culinary taste, military technology, printing technology, and the art of navigation. Europe was rising to the stars and beyond, he claimed, thanks to Christ – because Christ had long made His home in Europe and was now leading it upwards.

These are new tones – tones that the Middle Ages did not know. From a Latin-Christian point of view, Europe was seen only as the second-best part of the world. How could it have been otherwise? Jerusalem, the centre of the world, was located in Asia, as was the earthly paradise, at least for many medieval Christians. And when the world was divided among the three sons of Noah and their descendants after the biblical Flood (as related in Genesis 9f.) medieval interpretations held that Shem received Asia, the most beautiful and richest part of the world; Ham received Africa, which was deemed too hot; and Japheth received Europe, which was considered too cold. In many medieval sources, Europe is depicted as an inferior part of the world. Its north was said to be so cold that “no grass grows and no one lives there” (*at eigi vex gras á ok engi byggvr*), as the 13th-century Christian prologue to the Old Icelandic *Snorra-Edda* puts it (Old Norse geography, incidentally, deserves a place of honour, as it was in many ways the most accurate of its time in Christian Europe). The prologue of the *Edda* goes on to say that the people of Asia possess wisdom, strength, beauty, and “all kinds of arts” (*allz konar kunnostu*) to a greater extent than the people of Europe (*Evrópá*). This is the exact opposite of what Purchas and

many other Europeans of the Baroque and Enlightenment periods wrote and thought. The colonial experience had turned the image of Europe upside down.

In the 18th century, this image had also found its way into the reference works of the educated citizen. For instance, into the *Zedler*, the influential German encyclopaedia edited by Johann Heinrich Zedler and printed in Leipzig and Halle between 1731 and 1754. Under the keyword “Europe” one can read:

Although Europe is the smallest of the four parts of the world, it is nevertheless preferable to all the other parts for various reasons. The air is moderate in it, and the land is very fertile [...] It has an abundance of all the necessary means of life. The inhabitants have very good manners, are polite and ingenious in science and crafts.

Europe, according to Zedler, is superior to all other continents in many respects, just as it was for Purchas: in climate, agriculture, trade, culture, and science. The encyclopaedia continues: “The Europeans, by their skill and bravery, have also brought the most excellent parts of the world under their rule”. Europeans are thus seen as the rightful rulers of other parts of the world, justified by their cultural, political, economic, and military superiority. While Zedler’s concept of Europe is initially geographical at the beginning of the article, it shifts into a cultural one by the end. Europe becomes the place where the most civilised and powerful people live. Zedler himself does not explicitly draw the political conclusions from this, but others do: Turkey, Russia, the Tatars, and generally Orthodox and Muslim countries of Eastern Europe are declared part of Asia, based on cultural arguments rather than geographical ones.

The intellectuals of the Baroque and Enlightenment periods were anything but unanimous on this point. Some counted the Ottoman Empire as part of Europe and excluded Russia; others saw it the other way round. The arguments were always cultural. The excluded countries were “uncivilised” and “superstitious” (Maximilien Duc de Sully); their inhabitants warlike “barbarians” or “un-Christians” (Jakob Heinrich von Lilienfeld); or their forms of government were “despotic”, dominated by “a servile spirit” rather than the European “genius for liberty” (Charles Montesquieu).

Whatever one may think of the arguments, it is clear that the use of cultural instead of geographical concepts of Europe has its price. It inevitably raises the question: “Who is included?” And this question has unpleasant consequences: the exclusion of regions deemed culturally unfitting. For many centuries, Muslim and Orthodox territories belonged to geographical Europe by virtue of a stable convention. With the emergence of the “idea of Europe”, this convention was shaken.

In the spirit of the Enlightenment?

But why should this development, problematic as it is, prevent us from praising Europe as a continent of reason and enlightenment? After all, there can be no doubt that the French Revolution took place in Europe.

Let us return to the sentences quoted at the beginning of this chapter: “Europe is the continent that gave birth to a hope for reason. Every person who thinks and acts in the spirit of the Enlightenment is a European”. The thesis begins with the geographical term “continent”, but then goes on to define Europe culturally: one can be a European anywhere

in the world as long as one thinks European. But what do “hope for reason” and “spirit of Enlightenment” mean? If one differentiates from the general to the specific, three possible answers can be distinguished.

First, it could mean, in general terms, that people are called upon to use their own reason without relying on the guidance of authorities, as Immanuel Kant described the essence of Enlightenment.

Second, and more specifically, the “spirit of the Enlightenment” could refer to the will to modernise and secularise society completely according to rational criteria.

Third, and even more specifically, it could refer to individual theories of Enlightenment thinkers, such as the idea of a constitutional state based on human rights, democracy, and the separation of powers, in which the people give themselves a constitution.

The first answer, then, is that every person who has the courage to use their own reason is a European. This implies that this courage does not and has never existed outside Europe, otherwise the extension of the adjective “European” to all self-thinking people would not make sense. But this insinuation is absurd. Self-thinking people have existed in all times and in all cultures, including those who, in the sense emphasised by Kant, criticise authority. To call such thinking “European” would be rather presumptuous.

The answer must therefore be more concrete, along the lines of the second answer: every person is European who strives for the rational modernisation and secularisation of society. There is no doubt that the Enlightenment thinkers of the 18th century took up ideas and social issues that many of us today consider indispensable: equal rights for all people, freedom from oppression, democratic participation, educational opportunities for all groups, religious

tolerance, criticism of irrational religious practices, and the disempowerment of religious authorities as secular rulers.

Yet we should hesitate to call these achievements, as we see them from today's perspective, "European" and to recommend Europe's development as a model for other continents, for two reasons. Firstly, because the relationship between church and state in Christian Europe has an unusual history that cannot be easily transferred; and secondly, because it is unlikely that these ideas, if we formulate them in such general terms, did not also play a major historical role in other parts of the world.

The situation in 18th-century Christian Europe was so distinctive because the Church had considerable secular power – and not only the Pope as ruler of the Papal States. In most European countries, the clergy formed a privileged class of their own, enjoying benefits such as tax exemptions, separate legal jurisdiction, and considerable economic power through land ownership, levies, and taxes. In the Russian Empire, for example, monasteries were the largest landowners in the country. In the Holy Roman Empire of the German Nation, many bishops were also princes. They ruled, often in an absolutist manner, over their principality, just like their secular counterparts. They were financial chiefs, economic entrepreneurs, army commanders, and bishops all at once. In the history of world religions, such structural power concentrated in a hierarchical priesthood is extraordinarily rare. In other words, Christian Europe had a structural problem with the separation of church and state. Or, to put it more sharply: Christian Europe experienced the Enlightenment because it desperately needed the Enlightenment.

Compare the situation in the Islamic world. Already in the first centuries of Islam, i.e., from the 7th to the 12th century, the power of the caliphs, the "successors" of the

Prophet Mohammed, was much more limited than that of the Christian emperors. Unlike the emperors, the caliphs usually had little power to legislate, except through decrees in the financial sphere. Law-making was claimed by the schools of law. Islamic jurists and religious scholars, for their part, held judicial or state offices in some Islamic communities, but did not control territories. Their secular power was further limited by the fact that, unlike Christian priests, they were not institutionally organised as clergy or as a church. In 18th-century Christian Europe, on the other hand, such a separation between secular rule and religious elite was by no means the norm. It therefore makes little sense to demand that other regions of the world must still “catch up” with the Enlightenment and its idea of the separation of state and religion. If one wants to use this vocabulary at all, it was Christian Europe that had to catch up.

This is the first reason for greater caution in promoting the European Enlightenment. The second reason is ignorance. When Europeans recommend the ideals of the Enlightenment to other countries, have they first made sure that such ideals are not already appreciated and discussed elsewhere, possibly for centuries or even millennia? Are they aware of what the inhabitants of other continents might say in response to these recommendations? Have they at least taken prior note of the work of Americanists, ancient Orientalists, Sinologists, Indologists, Arabists, or Africanists?

The achievements of the Enlightenment, which are understandably so important to many today, can be broken down to questions that people from many different cultures have sought to answer rationally: Does everyone in our group have the same rights? Who among us should receive what kind of education? Should our leaders be legitimised by a popular

assembly? Should power within the group be distributed among several people? Should some members remain unfree and serve the others? Should we accept foreign religious ideas in our community? Do we have reason to criticise our religious authorities?

These questions are fundamental to human coexistence in larger communities. They have been asked, and continue to be asked, in many languages, regions, and eras, eliciting both wise and unwise, workable, and less workable answers, as Europeans have learned from the less Eurocentric historical research of recent times.

The early writings of Confucianism in China, especially by Mengzi and Xunzi in the 4th to 3rd centuries BC, discuss criteria for the authority and legitimacy of rulers, especially their ability to ensure social harmony in the face of conflicting interests. Confucian authors also advocate resistance to unjust rule, address freedom of speech, emphasise the value of education, and criticise superstition. On the Indian subcontinent, strong forms of religious criticism and atheism developed, especially among Buddhist thinkers of the 4th to 8th centuries AD, who formulated detailed arguments against the existence of a creator god and against the idea that obedience, prayers, and rituals could influence the deity. In sub-Saharan Africa, for example among the Bantu societies of Central Africa in the 12th to 15th centuries and among the Ashanti in Ghana in the 17th to 19th, village communities exhibited many democratic features. Although fewer texts have survived from these African cultures compared to those of Asia and Europe, they nonetheless provide ample evidence of political thought, criticism of privilege, and critique of religious practices. One should therefore be wary of appropriating these themes for Europe alone. The hope for reason, in this broad sense, is a crucial driving force of

history, visible from the beginnings of the written tradition. To call it “European” would be presumptuous.

This brings us back to the third possibility for understanding the opening quotation about the “hope of reason” and the “spirit of the Enlightenment”, namely, as a statement about specific ideas developed during the Enlightenment. To explore this properly, we must move beyond buzzwords like “liberty, equality, fraternity”. Let us turn to one such specific idea: the theory of the state. The political thinkers of the Enlightenment were not content with slogans. They argued that in the pure state of nature, without government, people were equal and free, but without the structure of state order, they could not live safely. Rather, they would exist either in a condition of war of all against all (Thomas Hobbes) or, at best, in fierce competition among intrinsically good people (Jean-Jacques Rousseau). The establishment of state rule is therefore a pragmatic imperative of reason to ensure the survival of the individual – or, according to John Locke and Immanuel Kant, a moral imperative of reason. The state is the product of an agreement among a group of people, which can be understood as a contract. The state thus created and legitimised protects citizens internally from one another and externally from enemies. It guarantees the equal rights of all individuals within its community. It is organised in a democratic and parliamentary-representative manner, and its power is limited by the rights of citizens and by the separation of powers. To this end, human communities give themselves a constitution, to which the institutions of power, especially the legislature, are permanently bound.

No political thinker of the Enlightenment (whether Thomas Hobbes, John Locke, Charles Montesquieu, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Immanuel Kant, or Emanuel Sieyès) advocated all of these features simultaneously. Some

favoured a monarchy, others envisioned a state without a constitution. Moreover, several of these ideas were also formulated in other times and cultures. Nevertheless, the overall conception of a constitutional and legal state derived from the state of nature, when described in such detail, can be regarded as a product of Western European thought during the Enlightenment – with the important qualification that the North American colonists and their constitutional documents played an essential role in this history. In this detailed sense, it may be useful to speak of the European “spirit of the Enlightenment” and the European “hope for reason”. Or, to put it another way: only if we take the trouble to be historically concrete can a cultural concept of Europe be used without lapsing into colonial arrogance.

However, this historical concreteness comes at a price. The more precisely we formulate past ideas, the more unfamiliar they become – and the more difficult it is to transfer them to our time. This also applies to the constitutional ideas of the Enlightenment, some of which may seem strange to us today. Few legal scholars of our time would consider the existence of state rule to be a truth of reason that can necessarily be derived from the human state of nature. Moreover, the human state of nature is a mere imagination, a fiction; for empirical data exist only for human beings in a state of culture. But do we want to allow fictions to play a role in justifying constitutional principles? The constitutional ideas of the Enlightenment therefore require critical examination, and for this, they must be concretised to such an extent that their advantages and disadvantages become comprehensible. We must be prepared to accept this sometimes uncomfortable concreteness of historical ideas if we do not want to ascribe exclusively to Europe what rightfully belongs also to other continents.

The disadvantages of the Enlightenment concept of Europe

The cultural concept of a Europe of Enlightenment and reason therefore has two significant disadvantages, one concerning content and one concerning form.

In terms of content, this concept suggests that the spirit of the Enlightenment – understood as the call to use one's own reason without the guidance of authorities, and as the drive for rational modernisation, educational reform, and secularisation – did not exist outside Europe. From a historical perspective, however, this claim is not at all convincing. It is necessary to be much more specific about the particular ideas developed during the European Enlightenment. Yet once specified, these ideas, because of their historical unfamiliarity, are not easily transferable to our time.

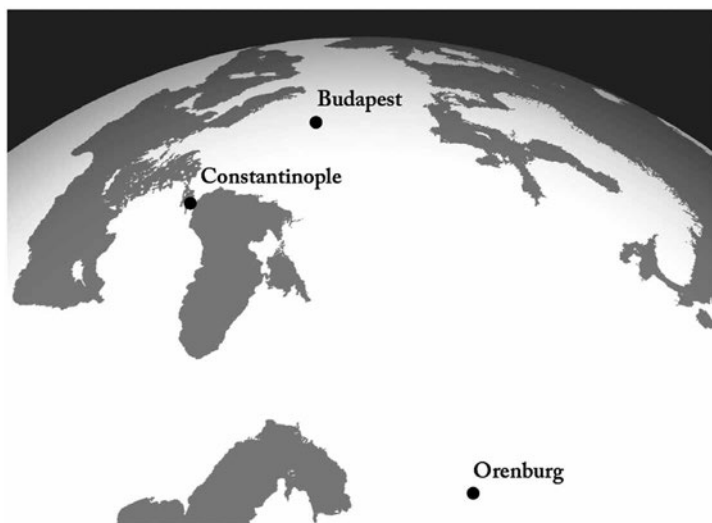
In terms of form, the concept is problematic because it excludes people and traditions. The history of its emergence during the Baroque and Enlightenment periods makes this clear. Europe is "Europeanised"; the continent becomes a culture. This new concept causes double damage, externally and internally. Externally, it distorts the perception of countries outside Europe. When Purchas and Zedler describe Europe as superior to all other continents in every respect, they are blinded by colonial hubris. Yet in the early modern period, flourishing centres of the science and the arts existed outside Europe – for example, in Safavid Iran, in the Indian Mughal Empire, and in neo-Confucian Japan during the Edo period. Some European thinkers of the 18th century, such as Christian Wolff, Voltaire, Johann Gottfried Herder, and Georg Forster, were well aware of this problem. Voltaire, for instance, shifted the cultural achievements of non-European societies into the past so that Europe's present superiority

could continue to be asserted. But the damage remained: the cultural concept of an enlightened Europe reduced all non-European countries to second-class cultures.

The Europeanisation of Europe has a parallel in the Orientalisation of the Orient by Europeans, as analysed by the literary scholar Edward Said and many after him: European texts about colonised countries transformed these regions into an “Orient”, an East distinct from the West. Yet there is an important difference in the ways of speaking about Orientalisation and Europeanisation: the Orient was Orientalised from the outside, shaped by the discourses of the colonial powers, whereas in the case of Europe, the power of description lay with Europeans themselves – with all the potential for abuse that this entailed. The Europeanisation of Europe led to the self-stylisation of mid-western Europeans as the inventors and guardians of cultural values, without non-Europeans having sufficient influence to act as a corrective to this self-image. Descriptions of others have left deep traces in history, especially in the depiction of colonies and their inhabitants. But self-descriptions leave traces too.

Hence, the Enlightenment concept of Europe as a culture of ideas also causes damage within Europe itself. It is much narrower than a geographical concept of Europe and excludes Muslim and Christian Orthodox Europe in particular. The price of such exclusion is high. It limits our perspective to a French–English–German province of Europe and suggests that the essence of Europe is to be found there alone.

Why do we allow ourselves to be impressed by this? One reason is that we do not hear the voices of other Europeans who continued to use the geographical concept of Europe – such as the aforementioned Russian Enlightenment philosopher Vasilij Tatishchev (1686–1750), who held high



Map 1. Europe from the East

government posts in the Urals, Orenburg, and Astrakhan, and argued for the Urals as a natural border between Europe and Asia.

Or the Spanish Muslim al-Ḥaḡarī (c. 1570–c. 1640), who spent a lifetime campaigning for the rights of the Moriscos, that is, the Muslims forcibly converted to Christianity and later expelled from Spain. Al-Ḥaḡarī wrote about Europe (أوروية) in the 17th century: “In this part of the world lies the vast city known throughout the world as the greatest of all cities: [...] Constantinople” (في هذا الربع هي المدينة العظمى الشهيرة في الدنيا أنّها اعظم مدنها ... وهي القسطنطينية). And: “What does not belong to Islam in Europe belongs to Christians.” Seen from Ottoman Constantinople, this was a perfectly understandable point of view.

Or consider the Budapest rabbi Moses Kunitzer (1774–1837), who in 1818 described the European Jews of Turkey and Italy as a model for reform. He proposed that

the Ashkenazi communities of Central and Eastern Europe adopt the supposedly more cultured Sephardic pronunciation for the Hebrew prayers. After all, the Jews living “in Europe in the cities of Turkey and the cities of Italy” (ובאייִ”ראפא בערי תוג”רמא וערי איטא”ליא), already used the Sephardic pronunciation – including, for example, the large Jewish communities of the Ottoman Empire in the European cities of Constantinople, Saloniki, and Edirne.

Tatishchev, al-Ḥaḡarī and Kunitzer speak of cultural centres of Europe that some of their contemporaries in France, England, and Germany, influenced by the experience of colonial superiority, had already excluded from their cultural Europe. We should not allow ourselves to be shaped by this exclusionary thinking. The concept of Europe urgently needs to be decolonised.

2. Deromanticisation

There are three hills from which the Occident (*Abendland*) took its starting point: Golgotha, the Acropolis in Athens, the Capitol in Rome. From all of them the Occident is spiritually wrought, and one may see, one must see all three of them as a unity.

These were the words of Theodor Heuss, President of the Federal Republic of Germany, in 1950. He thus gets to the heart of the humanist-Christian idea of Europe, even though, instead of “Europe”, he uses the German term *Abendland* (literally, “land of evening”), which was particularly popular in the post-war period. Others have formulated similar statements about the essence of Europe, such as: the culture of Europe is determined by three guiding places – Jerusalem, Athens, and Rome. Or, Judeo-Christian and Greco-Roman culture form the main arteries of Europe. In other words, Europe owes to the ancient Greeks, among many other things: science, philosophy, philology, and democracy; to the Roman Empire: law, jurisprudence, and the concept of a republic; to the Judeo-Christian tradition: the appreciation of the individual human being as the image of God; to Christianity: the idea of the equality of all human beings before God, the idea of loving one’s enemies, and the concept of theology as a science; and, some add: to Judaism the idea of a moral law.

The unity of these traditions, it is claimed, was made possible by the spread of Christianity across the European continent. It is true that by around the year 1000, large parts of the continent had been Christianised, at least superficially. Almost all the ruling princes of Europe had

converted to Latin or Orthodox Christianity – with the notable exception of some pagan peoples in the Baltic States, as well as the Jews and Muslims in Europe.

The Renaissance period, from about 1350 to 1550 – the epoch of the “rebirth” of antiquity – further strengthened the link between ancient and Christian traditions, as important Latin Renaissance protagonists such as Francesco Petrarca, Marsilio Ficino, and Desiderius Erasmus were also Christian reform thinkers.

Since then, Greece, Rome, and Christianity have formed central pillars of European education. And not only that: for many people, Christian and humanist ideals continue to hold cross-temporal and cross-cultural significance even today, as reflected in this succinct quotation from 2017: “The connection of Athens and Rome with Jerusalem remains indispensably valid for a secular society, even in times of globalisation”; it must therefore be regarded as equally binding for Christians and non-Christians.

Such a concept of Europe tends to be conservative, as it defines Europe in terms of common cultural traditions and demands a return to the fundamental epochs of the European past. It is therefore mainly associated with the right-wing and conservative political spectrum, although it can also be found outside political contexts, notably in many educational programmes and textbooks across Europe. This concept of Europe became popular only relatively late, around 1800, in connection with the Romantic movement of Western Europe. In order to connect the Greco-Roman tradition with the concept of Europe, it was first necessary to develop the idea of a Christian Europe. Romantics such as Novalis (1772–1801) or François Chateaubriand (1768–1848) lamented the loss of Europe’s unity and longed for a return to the Middle Ages, a time when, in their opinion, Europe

was a single Christian land. The originally Romantic idea of a humanist-Christian culture probably experienced its greatest heyday in the decades after the Second World War, when people were searching for new moral orientation.

Even those who are not supporters of humanist or Christian education must acknowledge that the achievements of these traditions are considerable, and that antiquity and Christianity have profoundly shaped European culture. So what, then, could be problematic about this appealing concept of Europe?

Does it all begin with the Greeks?

The previous chapter showed that it is problematic to characterise Enlightenment thought as “European” if, by “Enlightenment”, we mean, very broadly, Kant’s call to use one’s reason or, less broadly, the great themes of 18th-century thought.

In the Romantic concept of Europe, the “spirit of the Greeks” plays a similar role as the “spirit of the Enlightenment” in the colonial concept of Europe – only the vocabulary has changed. It is agreed that “the Greeks did much for the ‘Enlightenment’, that they went the way ‘from mythos to logos’”, wrote the classical philologist Bruno Snell in 1946 (following his colleague Wilhelm Nestle) in his influential book *The Discovery of the Mind*, considering this discovery the origin of European thought. “From mythos to logos” means a movement from a mythical to a rational and scientific interpretation of the world – from Homer to Socrates. Nestle’s and Snell’s use of this vocabulary is problematic because it suggests that the spirit of reason unfolds purposefully through history. Yet even without the

phrase “from mythos to logos”, the European invocation of the spirit of the Greeks – and its recommendation to the world as “indispensable” – is questionable. As with the appeal to the Enlightenment discussed above, this concept can be analysed and criticised in three stages, moving from the general to the concrete:

Firstly, it could mean, in very general terms, that every person is a European who, like the ancient Greek thinkers, questions what seems to be self-evident and demands of themselves and others that they rationally justify their beliefs and actions. However, anyone who studies the cultures of other continents can easily see that this rational attitude to the world – which can be called “philosophical” – is by no means limited to Greece and Europe. Philosophical thinking developed independently of Greece in several regions of the world, especially in India and China. Philosophical attitudes to the world can also be found in the oral traditions of sub-Saharan Africa, for example, in theories of personhood among the Akan peoples who lived in the coastal regions of West Africa from the 14th century onwards. It has proved historically unsound to distinguish, as scholars used to do, between Western “philosophy” and Eastern “wisdom”, with the aim of reserving meta-thinking and higher-order reflection for the Western world. Anyone interested in sceptical arguments, for instance, will encounter them not only in Cicero in Roman antiquity, but also in the Indian authors Nāgārjuna, Jayarāśi, and Śrīharṣa in the 2nd, 9th, and 12th centuries. Similarly, theories of moral motivation can be found in Aristotle as well as in Mengzi and Xunzi, the two renowned Confucian thinkers of the 4th to 3rd centuries BC. Today, we can only shake our heads at claims such as Snell’s assertion: “In Greece, and only in Greece, did theoretic thought emerge without outside influence.”

Secondly, and less generally, it may mean that the Greeks are recommended as role models to the world not only as rational thinkers, but also as the founders of numerous, diverse sciences whose empirical and theoretical interpretation of the world shapes European culture to this day: as the founders of mathematics, medicine, and many natural sciences such as astronomy or zoology; as the pioneers of philology and its method of textual criticism; as the originators of ethics in its many forms, including Aristotelian virtue ethics; and as the architects of political theory, especially the theory of democracy.

But even this recommendation of Greek traditions would be presumptuous. Scientific thought did not begin with the Greeks. Most Greek natural sciences were further developments of earlier scientific traditions from the Ancient Near East, especially those of Egypt and Mesopotamia. This is particularly obvious in astronomy, astrology, mathematics, medicine, and pharmacology, where the parallels in textual forms and content are evident.

But how did this transfer come about? According to the most likely scenario of current research, Greek scientific development relied heavily on “migrant craftsmen” in the eastern Mediterranean: temple architects, engineers, experts in vase art, sculpture and metalworking, scribes and administrators, physicians and specialists in land surveying, chronometry and astronomy. They spoke several languages, were sometimes organised as professional groups, and moved from one ruler or city to another in search of commissions and payment.

Between the 9th and 7th centuries BC, this culture of wandering experts led to a particularly intense east–west transfer of cultural practices: Greek cities adopted the West Semitic alphabet, along with many Mesopotamian and

Egyptian scientific methods, such as medical symptom descriptions, pharmacological prescription literature, and mathematical solutions to building and land surveying problems. In the centuries that followed, the Greeks adopted more complex knowledge from West Asia, especially the systematic star observations recorded by the Babylonians and their method of predicting planetary phenomena through mathematical algorithms.

Crucially, in the early centuries of Greek culture, it was not only specific content that was passed on from Mesopotamia and Egypt, but also basic forms of scientific rationality: formulating hypotheses, classification, describing regularities, and making predictions. To be sure, these Near Eastern sciences were further developed by the Greeks in the 6th and 5th centuries BC in ways that were themselves highly influential: through renewed theorising, through abstraction, and through systematisation. Hippocratic medicine, for instance, now explained diseases using the doctrine of the humours; Euclidian mathematics developed its own textual forms that represented knowledge in axioms and deductions. However, the tradition of scientific rationality, which many consider the foundation of European culture, did not begin with the Greeks, but with their predecessor cultures in Egypt and Mesopotamia, i.e., in North Africa and West Asia. The claim that “everything began with the Greeks” is the intellectual counterpart to the colonial arrogance of the Enlightenment era.

To call the Greeks the founders of science is also unsound because the assumption that the sciences developed “only in Greece” is simply not true – even if one were to modify it to “only in the Middle East and the Mediterranean region”. Natural sciences developed impressively in many advanced civilisations, such as China, India, and probably also the

Central American Mayan culture, as far as this can be reconstructed from the few surviving testimonies spared by Spanish missionaries. The history of philology, in turn, finds its heroes not only in the Greek Callimachus (3rd century BC), but also in Pāṇini, the Indian Sanskrit grammarian (c. 5th century BC), in Hebrew and Latin Bible experts, and among Arabic grammarians. Virtue ethics, too, is not found only in Aristotle, but also in Confucius in China (6th/5th century BC) and Śāntideva in India (7th/8th century), as historians have shown. So, anyone who recommends the “indispensable validity” of Greek thought for the global society of our time should first carefully check whether they are making a recommendation only because they have not looked to the right and left beforehand.

Even the “invention” of democracy by the ancient Greeks requires closer scrutiny. This brings us to the third stage of analysis, that is, to historical concretisation, the necessity of which could be shown with many examples from ancient culture. Let us take the case of democracy. Here, too, it is not immediately clear what was truly unique about the Greek development. The confirmation of leaders by a group gathered in a popular assembly, as seen in the Germanic Thing or in African or Indian village communities, is found in many cultures.

In Athens at the end of the 6th century BC, under Kleisthenes, a form of democracy was established that gave all male citizens of a large upper class an equal share in power, awarded important offices by lot, and was called “democracy”. Greek political thinkers such as Plato and Aristotle distinguished between different forms of rule and discussed their respective advantages and disadvantages. Democracy, however, was not the system they favoured. Plato argued for the rule of the best – an aristocracy – and

criticised democracy for its tendency to undermine the expert knowledge needed for government. Aristotle's position is more difficult to judge: Was he a pioneer of modern democracy or an opponent of the democracy of his time and a proponent of aristocracy? He viewed democracy with suspicion, seeing in it the danger that a poor and uneducated majority might dominate. His criterion for good rule was that it should serve the good life of all, at least all male citizens, since slaves, immigrants, and women were excluded from political life.

In view of these details – lots, slaves, the ideal of the good life, the advantages of aristocratic rule – Greek political practice and political thought reveal a historical complexity that can seem intellectually challenging and foreign to us today. It is only at this level of historical concreteness that we can compare Greek and other political models and discuss their advantages and disadvantages. Only in such concreteness does it make sense to recommend Greek thinkers to the world and to profess admiration for them.

But are we then still speaking of Europe?

How European are the Greek and Roman cultures?

In the Middle Ages, with few exceptions, the concept of Europe had not yet been extended beyond its geographical meaning, as we have seen – neither in the direction of a homeland nor of a culture. In antiquity, too, we find hardly any trace of a European sense of “we”. Some ancient climatologists do speak positively of the Europeans and ascribe greater fighting courage to them than to the inhabitants of Asia. Otherwise, however, the term remains purely geographical and descriptive, for example, when Alexander

the Great and Augustus are praised as rulers over Europe and Asia, with Africa also included.

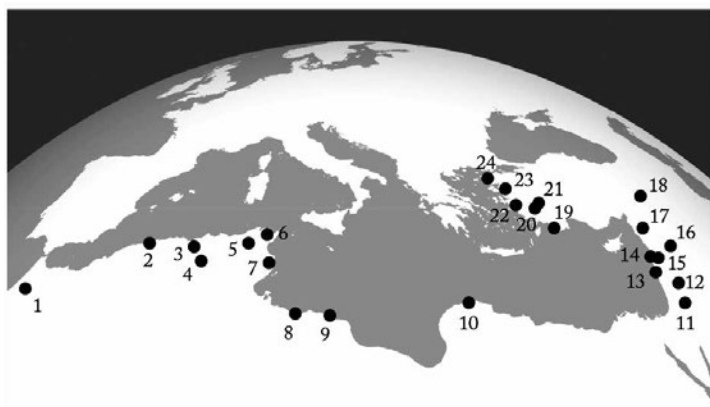
The Greek words “Asia”, “Libyē”, and “Eurōpē” originally denoted mythological figures and were later transferred by Greek geographers in the 6th and 5th centuries BC to designate parts of the earth – divisions that may already have been made by the Egyptians. The exact circumstances of this naming were unknown even to Herodotus, the famous Greek historian of the Persian Wars of the 5th century BC. He distinguishes between Europe and Asia, marking the Bosphorus as the border. Asia also includes Libya, which the Romans later called “Africa”:

But of Europe it is plain that none have obtained knowledge of its eastern or its northern parts so as to say if it is encompassed by seas; its length is known to be enough to stretch along both Asia and Libya. Nor can I guess for what reason the earth, which is one, has three names, all of women.

That sounds sceptical. In fact, Herodotus was more interested in distinguishing between Greeks and barbarians than between continents. By “barbarians” he meant not only the Persians, but all those in Europe and elsewhere who did not speak Greek. Herodotus had little use for the concept of “Europe”. This is not surprising, given that he came from Halicarnassus in Asia Minor, in the southwest of what is now Turkey. From a purely geographical point of view, Herodotus is, so to speak, the Asian father of European historiography.

The example of Herodotus illustrates how problematic it is to describe ancient Greece and Rome as “European”. The Greek and Roman civilisations of antiquity were primarily Mediterranean coastal cultures: they were European, Asian,

and African at the same time. Of course, the remains of numerous ancient buildings on European soil bear witness to how profoundly the Greeks and Romans shaped Europe. But the entire Middle East was already full of Greek columns when they were hardly known as a southern fashion in northern Europe. The very name of the Ionic order of columns points to its origins in Ionia, in Asia Minor. Moreover, the list of Greek and Roman UNESCO World Heritage Sites in North Africa and West Asia is long and impressive: (1) Volubilis (Morocco), (2) Tipasa, (3) Cuicul, (4) Timgad (Algeria), (5) Dougga, (6) Carthage, (7) Thysdrus (Tunisia), (8) Sabratha, (9) Leptis Magna, (10) Cyrene (Libya), (11) Kastron Mefa'a, (12) Bosra, (13) Tyre (14) Byblos, (15) Baalbek, (16) Palmyra, (17) ancient villages of northern Syria (Jordan/Syria/Lebanon), (18) Diyarbakir, (19) Xanthos, (20) Aphrodisias, (21) Hierapolis, (22) Ephesus, (23) Pergamon, and (24) Troy (Turkey).



Map 2. Greek and Roman UNESCO World Heritage Sites in North Africa and West Asia

Anyone who wants to learn about Greco-Roman architecture and art at these outstanding sites – including amphitheatres, temples, aqueducts, baths, triumphal arches, columns, vases, reliefs, and statues – could travel for several years without ever setting foot on European soil. The use of buzzwords like “Athens” and “Rome”, or their famous hills, the “Acropolis” and the “Capitol”, as stand-ins for Greek and Roman culture is therefore misleading. It falsely suggests that we are dealing purely with European powers. In reality, what is special about the Greek and Roman cultural areas is precisely that they connected the three continents, both spatially and culturally.

Take, for example, the famous Greek astronomer, astrologer, and cartographer Claudius Ptolemy, whose “Ptolemaic world view” with the Earth at the centre of the cosmos was central to European intellectual history until Copernicus. Ptolemy lived in Alexandria, in the Roman province of Aegyptus, in the 2nd century AD – just as, 400 years before him, the mathematician Euclid and the poet Callimachus, whom some consider the most important philologist in world history, had done. Ptolemy was a Greek with Roman citizenship, as the name “Claudius” suggests. He lived in a predominantly Greek city alongside Romans, Egyptians, and a few Jews and Jewish Christians who had survived the suppression of the Jewish revolt in Alexandria by the Romans in 115 AD, and very likely many other people of different cultures, languages, and colours, especially merchants and slaves. It would be absurd to call Ptolemy, Euclid, or Callimachus Europeans. Presumably, they would not have called themselves Africans either, although geographically that would have been closer to the truth. Most likely, they would have dispensed with continental labels altogether and said: We are Greeks from Egypt.

Against this background, how can the relationship between ancient culture and Europe be described more precisely? One common approach is to use not a geographical but a cultural concept of Europe, by which all Greeks and Romans are considered Europeans, regardless of where they lived. In this sense, European thought would have its “origin” in Alexandria as well, and European history would “begin” in Asian Troy and in African Hippo, where Augustine had his episcopal see. This cultural Europe would extend to the Greek colonists in the cities along the Indus in present-day Pakistan, founded by Alexander the Great, and would include all the major centres of North Africa.

Such a concept of Europe is highly questionable for several reasons: First, it contradicts the self-description of the Greeks and Romans themselves. Secondly, it puts a dramatic strain on geography: at no time in history was the Indus valley considered part of Europe by any geographer. Third, such a concept is arrogant towards Europe’s neighbouring continents. By the same logic, Asian historians could claim that Asian history begins in Athens or in the Italian city of Thurioi on the Gulf of Taranto, where Herodotus lived in later years, or that African history begins in Milan or Rome, where Augustine worked before returning to North Africa. In other words, Athens and Taranto would “belong” to cultural Asia, Milan and Rome to cultural Africa. In fact, it was merely a matter of power that the European appropriation of the neighbouring continents for its own tradition prevailed – and not, conversely, an African or Asian appropriation of Europe. So, there are good reasons to refrain from adopting such a broad cultural concept of Europe that includes all Greeks and Romans.

One could object that the Alexandrians like Euclid, Callimachus, and Ptolemy belong to Europe because they were

read and received with particular intensity on the European continent in later centuries. Or, as is sometimes said more pathetically: because their legacy was “never forgotten” in Europe. That is true. But the heritage of Indian mathematics was also never forgotten in Europe. Does that mean India belongs to cultural Europe? Intensive reception does not turn authors into natives.

The reception argument is also unconvincing for another reason: Greek and Roman authors were not only received and read in Europe, but also in Africa and Asia, and in some cases much more intensively than in Europe. Before Ptolemy’s mathematical astronomy began its triumph in Europe, it had already found many readers in Syriac, Arabic, Hebrew, and Persian in Asia and Africa. In 1271, Ptolemaic astronomy was even institutionalised at the imperial court in China, through the establishment of an institute of Islamic astronomy, which worked in parallel with the institute of Chinese astronomy and continued until the 17th century. From Chinese, Ptolemaic astronomy entered Korean culture. It is therefore absurd to claim that Ptolemy belongs to Europe because of his later reception.

Yet the reference to reception is important in another respect, because it leads us to a more accurate description of the relationship between antiquity and Europe. Only part of Greek and Roman history took place on European soil; another part occurred in Asia and Africa and was only later incorporated into European culture and history. The European character of antiquity is largely a phenomenon of reception. Herodotus, Euclid, Callimachus, and Ptolemy are sources of European culture – or, figuratively speaking, roots of European culture – but they were not themselves European. At the same time, they are also sources of other cultures in other regions of the world. When we speak in

this way, we take geography seriously and avoid the pitfalls of European arrogance. We are only able to speak in this way because, as previously explained, geographical concepts are much more stable than cultural ones.

There is one last reason why the Athens–Rome concept of Europe is unsound: not only Romans and Greeks lived on the continent. Of course, any history of Europe – and especially any cultural history – must set its priorities. Yet before, during, and after the time of the Greeks and Romans, the continent was inhabited and cultivated by numerous other peoples, many of whom left few discernible traces in later cultures. Celtic culture, however, is a historical heavyweight. Before the Roman Empire began its rise, large parts of Europe were ruled by Celtic peoples. The Romans learned from the Celts: they benefited, among other things, from Celtic military technology and metalworking. They also learned to fear the Celtic chariot, called *quadriga* in Latin, which today embellishes the neoclassical Brandenburg Gate in Berlin and films such as *Ben-Hur* – just as the Greeks had previously learned to fear the chariots of the Persians. The Celtic reverberations in later European history are considerable: one need only think of Celtic art and ornamentation, King Arthur, the Holy Grail, Tristan and Isolde, Merlin, and Ossian. From this point of view, it is a gross distortion to let European cultural history begin with Athens and Rome.

Middle Ages: Was Europe a Christian Land?

Those were beautiful, magnificent times, when Europe was a Christian land, when *one* Christianity dwelled on this civilized continent, and when *one* common interest joined the most distant provinces of this vast spiritual empire.

These are the famous first sentences of the 1799 essay on Europe by the German poet Friedrich von Hardenberg, who published under the pseudonym Novalis. Novalis countered the Enlightenment critique of the Middle Ages with the image of a golden medieval age, whose unity, he claimed, had been destroyed by the Protestant Reformation and the Enlightenment. He called for the reawakening of Europe through the peace-making power of the Christian religion: “The other parts of the world wait for Europe’s reconciliation and resurrection to join with it and become fellow citizens of the kingdom of heaven.”

When Novalis presented his essay to his friends in Jena, another influential Romantic was working on a similar but much longer text while in exile in London: In 1802, François Chateaubriand published his *Génie du christianisme ou Beautés de la religion chrétienne* (*The Genius of Christianity, or the Beauties of the Christian Religion*), a passionate glorification of medieval Christian culture. Chateaubriand compares the Middle Ages with his own time, in which, he claims, Christianity is persecuted across Europe. According to him, “Europe owes her civilisation, part of her best laws, and almost all her arts and sciences” to the Church, the orders, the knights, the cardinals, the bishops, and, above all, the popes. The era of civilised Europe (*l’ère de l’Europe civilisée*), he writes, “rising from among the ruins of Athens and Rome”, borrowed its light from the age of an Alexander the Great in order to reflect it upon the age of Louis the Saint, the thirteenth-century French king.

Novalis and Chateaubriand, along with other Romantics, shaped a new concept of Europe. They saw Christianity as the bond that united the peoples of Europe and linked ancient traditions into a single culture. Many details of what Novalis and Chateaubriand wrote about the Middle

Ages are historically untenable; for example, they greatly overestimated the power and cultural influence of the popes. However, these inaccuracies are irrelevant to the fundamental question of how convincing the core ideas of this Christian concept of Europe are, both historically and geographically. This question is important because the Christian concept of Europe continues to play a significant role in many contemporary debates about European cultural identity.

The European continent differs from Africa and Asia in that Christianity spread much more widely across it. Christianisation was superficial at first in many regions, as it met with resistance from local populations and many older religious traditions lived on within the new religion. Nevertheless, by the year 1000, most European rulers had converted to Christianity, such as Harald Bluetooth of Denmark around 960 AD to Latin Christianity and Vladimir of Kiev in 988 AD to Eastern Roman Christianity. In Iceland, the Althing, an early form of parliament, decided in 1000 under Norwegian pressure to accept Christianity, while allowing the continued private worship of the old deities. These regions clearly belong to the European continent, even according to medieval understanding, which makes the Christian concept of Europe geographically less dubious than the Greco-Roman one.

But the impression of harmlessness is misleading. For the hill of Golgotha is not in Europe. The Christian ideas of loving one's enemies and the equality of all humans before God did not originate in Europe, but in West Asia. Christianity in Europe is largely a phenomenon of reception. This is probably the reason why Theodor Heuss formulated his above-quoted sentence about the three hills in such a way that it was the "unity" of Golgotha, the Acropolis, and the

Capitol that constituted Europe. Or, as Pope Benedict XVI put it more recently: the convergence of Biblical faith and Greek philosophical thought created Europe.

Yet this formulation is also problematic. According to Benedict's definition, all Oriental Christians, who today number over 50 million, would also be considered Europeans: Copts, Christian Ethiopians and Eritreans, Armenians, Nestorians, Jacobites, Melkites, and Saint Thomas Christians in India. Benedict, surely, is not suggesting that these groups created Europe. Yet the influence of Greek education and Greek thought on Christian communities in West Asia and North Africa was much more direct and, above all, more lasting than in Latin Central Europe. Under Charlemagne, an extensive educational programme had to be launched to reintroduce the teaching of ancient disciplines. In the Christian Orient, by contrast, a late ancient canon was preserved and taught in Greek, Syriac, and Arabic. Oriental Christianity could therefore call itself "European" with greater justification than Latin Christianity. The Romantic concept of Europe thus claims for itself an encounter of traditions that is equally characteristic of West Asia and North Africa.

Even more problematic, both historically and geographically, is the cultural idea of the continent itself that underlies this concept: the idea that the continent was a single Christian land. For Europe was far more than just Christian, even in the Middle Ages. This is not only obvious to historical research, but was already an integral part of the self-image of Latin Christians in the Middle Ages. When the cleric Adam of Bremen wrote his Latin *Deeds of the Bishops of the Hamburg Church* around 1070, he spoke full of admiration of the pagan city of Jumne at the mouth of the Oder River on the Baltic Sea. Etymological research has shown that

by the Scandinavian name Jumne, Adam meant the town called Wolin in Slavic languages then as now – an important trading centre for Slavs and Vikings from the 10th to 12th centuries. In later sources, the name appears in modified forms such as Jómsborg, Jumneta, and Vineta. Adam of Bremen praises Jumne's wealth, its size, its hospitality, its good customs, and its many peoples.

It is doubtless the largest of all cities that Europe comprises [*maxima omnium quas Europa claudit civitatum*]. Slavs live in it together with other peoples, Greeks [Orthodox] and barbarians [pagans].

Only, unfortunately, they are still “caught in the error of pagan rites”, i.e., in the Nordic and Slavic mythologies, as we can reconstruct them from the *Edda* and other sources.

Such quotations do not fit into the Romantic cliché of the “Christian Middle Ages”. Many medieval authors were fully aware that pagan peoples lived in the northeast of Europe, Orthodox Christians in the southeast, Muslims on the Iberian Peninsula, and Jews in many areas across Europe – and that these groups not only lived there, but also formed flourishing cultural centres, as Adam of Bremen describes.

This diversity remains. In the late Middle Ages, in the 15th century – at the time of the aforementioned humanist Pope Pius II – the Baltic regions had been Christianised, but the Ottoman Turks ruled in the Balkans and Greece, the Muslim Tatars (as the Latins called the Mongols) controlled large parts of Eastern Europe, and the Muslim dynasty of the Nazarids ruled in Granada, Spain. Even Pius II, who wanted to declare Europe a Christian fatherland, could not help but grudgingly mention these regions.

At this point, an advocate of the “Christian Middle Ages” might object that these non-Christian regions were marginal, i.e., that they did not belong to the core of Europe, but were on the periphery of Europe, geographically, and the result of conquest.

But this objection is unconvincing. Firstly, all cultures on the continent (perhaps with the exception of the Sámi and Basques) arose through migrations and often also through conquest, whether during the so-called Migration Period of antiquity or later, such as in the course of German settlement and Christianisation of Eastern Europe.

Secondly, and this is the crucial point, “marginal” is a matter of perspective and criteria. When we ask ourselves where the largest and most flourishing cities of the Middle Ages were located on the continent, the term “marginal” melts between our fingers. For many centuries, Constantinople and Córdoba were by far the largest medieval metropolises in Europe – until their conquest by Latin Christians in 1204 and 1236. Córdoba’s peak medieval population is estimated at 300,000 inhabitants, while Constantinople may have reached as many as 500,000. By comparison, Rome was a small rural city of about 30,000 inhabitants, where cattle grazed within the ancient city walls. Such small populations were typical of many Latin Christian “big cities” in the early and high Middle Ages. Only in the late Middle Ages, from the 13th to 15th centuries, did some Latin Christian cities such as Paris, Milan, and Venice reach a comparatively modest size of over 100,000 inhabitants, closely followed by Muslim cities such as Granada (in Spain) and Edirne (in Thrace, now Turkey).

Constantinople and Córdoba were cosmopolitan cities of their time. In Constantinople, which was the seat of the Eastern Roman (“Byzantine”) emperor, Greek Christians lived alongside Jews, Armenians, Syrians, and Latin Christians,

but also Muslim Arabs, Persians, and Turks. The imperial bodyguard consisted of Scandinavian Varangians from Kiev. The city was a flourishing world trade metropolis and, at the same time, an important cultural centre. Its best artists and craftsmen in architecture, book illumination, icon painting, frescoes, mosaics, silk fabrics, and other crafts were recruited and admired in many other areas of Europe. Constantinople, officially called Istanbul since 1930 (after the colloquial Turkish name derived from the Greek *eis tēn polin* meaning “into the city”), lies on the European side of the Bosphorus and only expanded to the Asian side in modern times. In its own self-image, it had always been in Europe. In the 10th century, Emperor Constantinos VII Porphyrogennetos described Constantinople as the successor to the ancient imperial city of Rome: “At the summit of Europe [Ἀρχὴν οὖν τῆς Εὐρώπης], I thus place the empress of cities and of the whole world, the new Rome.” Constantinople is the vantage point from which the rest of the world unfolds. The city is Europe’s geographical “beginning” and cultural “summit” or “dominion” (all meanings encompassed by the Greek *archē*). Accordingly, the Latin Christians are occasionally referred to in Byzantine sources as “the Occidentals”, “the Westerners”, and, more often, simply as “the barbarians”.

In the other great cosmopolitan city of the Middle Ages – Muslim-ruled Córdoba in Spain – Muslims of diverse ethnic backgrounds lived alongside Jews, Christians, sub-Saharan Africans, and slaves, mostly from Italy, northern Spain, or Eastern Europe. For many of these people, there were opportunities for advancement in the palace administration. The multiculturalism of Córdoba should not be glorified, nor should that of Constantinople, since both cities experienced social tensions. Yet there is no question about Córdoba’s extraordinary cultural productivity in the fields of literature,

philosophy, sciences, architecture, and crafts. Arabic sources report 70 libraries and 27 public schools. These were golden centuries for Muslim-Arab culture, but also for Christian-Mozarabic liturgy and book illumination, for the education of women, and for Jewish poets and scientists who wrote in Arabic and Hebrew. The rabbis, too, not only devoted themselves to Torah interpretation, but also attached importance to their education in the secular sciences and the philosophy of the Greeks. Córdoba and Constantinople, the only two world cities of the European Middle Ages, do not belong on the periphery but at the centre of European history.

To free oneself from the cliché of the “Christian Middle Ages”, it is worth changing perspective with the help of classical Arabic geography. In Arabic geography, the concept of “Europe” is not used (with very few exceptions). Instead, Arabic maps often show a landmass separated, like a large island, from the surrounding territories by the Strait of Gibraltar and a waterway connecting the Black Sea to the northern (Arctic) Ocean. The 10th-century geographer Ibn Ḥawqal, writing in Baghdad, calls this area, which roughly corresponds to the European continent, “the small country” (الأرض الصغيرة), in contrast to the large landmass to the east and south.

Arabic geographers knew much about Andalusia, of course, but they were also well acquainted with Eastern Rome (Byzantium) through reports from diplomats, merchants, and captives. Eastern Europe, in turn, was also well known to them because of its openness and accessibility. This was facilitated by the long-distance trade that flourished both during the periods of Kiev and Novgorod and later under the Mongols, as well as by the presence of Muslim communities in medieval Eastern Europe, e.g., in Hungary. Cold, northern Europe was only known from reports of

trading partners. Finally, the Latin-Christian Western Europeans were usually referred to as “Franks” in Arabic sources and, with regard to their religion, as “Melkites”, i.e., followers of Constantinople, to distinguish them from the Oriental Christians. From the perspective of Arabic scholars, the Franks encompassed many peoples with different forms of government.

This Arabic view of medieval Europe is instructive. Despite certain geographical inaccuracies, it is much more realistic than the wishful thinking of the Romantics: medieval Europe did not form a unity, and its great cultural centres lay outside mid-western Europe.

Now, a tenacious discussion partner might say: Fine, then I will limit the Middle Ages to Latin-Christian Western Europe and refer only to that as Europe: the Europe of knights, clerics, castles, cathedrals, universities, and the courtly novel.

It is perfectly understandable that one can be full of enthusiasm and admiration for this culture. But such a concept of Europe is not only at odds with the medieval self-image and with geography – it is, above all, a historical fiction, a purism that never existed. Architectural styles, artistic practices, literary motifs, and scientific theories migrated, were exchanged, and intermingled. There were no Latin universities without the Arabic sciences; no novellas by Boccaccio without the migration of Indian, Jewish, and Arabic motifs of narration; no Roman Christianity without its rival Constantinople; no courtly novel without the pre-Christian Celts and Germanic peoples; no Venetian long-distance trade wealth and no Marco Polo without the *pax mongolica* in Eastern Europe, the period of peace under the Muslim Mongols of the 13th to 15th centuries that followed their bloody war campaigns.

Ethnically and religiously, the area of Latin Christianity was by no means homogeneous. Hungary, for example, was the Latin Christian country with the greatest ethnic and religious diversity in the 11th to 13th centuries. Large Jewish communities lived alongside pagan Cumans and Pechenegs, Muslims (the “Böszörmények”, meaning Choresmians), and many immigrants from other Latin or Greek-Christian countries. The Muslims and pagan Cumans were highly valued as archers and fought several successful battles for the Christian Hungarian king.

Such ethnic and religious diversity in the “Christian Middle Ages” may come as a surprise. It is obscured by the Christian Romanticisation of the Middle Ages, which also makes it difficult to adequately appreciate even Jewish life during that period. Many people recognise that Judaism, too, helped shape European history in the Latin-Christian area. But the advocates of the Jerusalem–Athens–Rome concept like to describe this shaping with the term “Judeo-Christian tradition”. This expression is ill-suited to describe European identity, because it is usually understood to mean that Judaism belongs to Christianity: the Hebrew Old Testament is part of the Christian Bible; Jesus, Peter and Paul were Jews. Understood in this way, the expression “Judeo-Christian” obscures the genuinely Jewish part of European culture, not least in the Middle Ages. How many proponents of “our Judeo-Christian tradition” are familiar with the natural science and philosophy of Levi ben Gershon, also called Gersonides (d. 1344), who came from southern France? The famous Talmud interpretation of Rashi (Rabbi Shlomo ben Jizchak), who lived in Troyes in the 11th century? The history of synagogue architecture or the magnificent Jewish book illumination? The Middle Ages were also Jewish, not “Judeo-Christian”.

Medieval Europe was not the “Christian land” imagined by Novalis and Chateaubriand. Even the regions where Latin Christianity dominated were anything but uniform in ethnic and religious terms. The invocation of a Christian Europe or a Christian *Abendland*, as it is often called in German, is therefore doubly problematic: on the one hand, it is based on unhistorical wishful thinking; on the other, it excludes large parts of Europe. Like the Enlightenment concept of Europe, this concept tends to portray Christian mid-western Europeans as the true representatives of European culture.

Love of enemies and equality of all

The appeal to Christian traditions has not gone through the same three-stage analysis as the appeals to the Enlightenment, Greece, and Rome earlier in this book. Nor is such detailed treatment necessary, since it has already become clear that general formulations such as “[...] is a specifically Christian idea” or “the idea [...] only developed in Christianity” often prove to be historically untenable on closer examination. It does not require divine inspiration to conceive that loving one’s neighbour as oneself is a virtue – as already stated in the Hebrew Torah (Lev 19:18), or that all human beings are equal when compared to gods and animals.

Christian concepts are part of the global history of thinking about altruism and equality. How can altruism, i.e., selfless action that benefits another person, or even an enemy, be justified? Calls to overcome retaliatory thinking can already be found in pre-Christian Chinese, Babylonian, Egyptian, and Jewish texts. In the Sermon on the Mount

(Mt 5:44), Jesus Christ impressively calls on people to love their enemies. But why should I do this?

One possible answer is that such love may, firstly, be in my own interest.

Or, secondly, it could be a moral command derived from reason – one that asks me to abstract from my own point of view.

Or, thirdly, it could be rooted in the nature of human beings and our feelings of solidarity and compassion.

In the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew's Gospel, none of these three reasons for altruism seems to be intended: neither self-interest, nor rational motivation, nor feelings of solidarity. Jesus Christ offers only one reason: that one should imitate God, who in his perfection treats all people equally, both the bad and the good. However, in another version of the Sermon on the Mount, namely, that of Luke's Gospel, the love of enemies is justified by reason. This passage concludes with the Golden Rule: "And as you wish that others would do to you, do so to them" (Lk 6:31). One is to act in the reasonable hope of reciprocity, which is the norm of conduct even if the enemy does not act like oneself.

As New Testament research has shown, the justifications for loving one's enemies in Matthew and Luke arise from different textual and social backgrounds. Luke's reciprocity motivation belongs to the context of Greek ideas of reciprocal justice. Matthew's justification, by contrast, transfers a Semitic and Greek ideal of kingship to all people: the simple soul who loves his or her enemy is as sovereign as a king who is lenient with his enemies. Unlike Luke, the context in Matthew is not private but political. Jesus Christ speaks explicitly of "persecutors" and calls for the renunciation of violence even in the face of persecution.

In the New Testament, then, we find not one but at least two concepts of enemy love: in Luke, a rationally justifiable concept that relies on reciprocity in dealing with private adversaries, and in Matthew, a more radical, difficult-to-justify, political concept that counters hostile violence with non-violence and love. This second concept has a similar political appeal as the enemy love advocated by Mahatma Gandhi (1869–1948) who, drawing from Hinduism, called for enemy love and non-violent resistance as an active means of overcoming hostile violence in the world. Here, too, it becomes clear that “love of enemies” is a complex concept and is not suitable as a catchword, at least not for characterising Christian or European culture.

The same applies to the Christian idea of the equality of all people before God, which is derived from the creation of humankind in God’s image in the Hebrew book of Genesis (Gen 1:26 f.). Comparable ideas are found in other cultures, for example, in a saying of the Prophet Muhammad. So, what is special about the Christian idea? It is obvious that people are very different: they are not the same and certainly not identical. Does equality imply a fundamental similarity, or is it a goal – something to strive for, such as equality of rights or equality of opportunities? In some forms of Buddhism, equality is an ideal state of mind in which the individual treats all people equally and refrains from privileging even him- or herself. A similar ideal is found in Gandhi’s interpretation of Hinduism. In contrast, in the Christian tradition, the notion that human beings are made in the image of God is not an ideal to strive for, but rather the thesis of a fundamental similarity: human beings are equal because of their origin, because they are all created in the same image.

It is sometimes claimed that this Christian idea, in its secularised form, is the source of the “All men are created equal” in the American Declaration of Independence and of “égalité” in the French Revolution. Yet this overestimates the influence that the idea of the image of God exerted. The Enlightenment thinkers started from the consideration that all people in the state of nature without government are equal in a certain way; for example, in the – by no means God-like – ability to harm others (Hobbes) or in the capacity for rational self-determination and freedom from coercion (Locke). Moreover, the revolutionary constitutions were not only influenced by Christian and Enlightenment ideas, but also by ancient pagan traditions, above all Stoicism. As early as 300 BC, the first Stoics articulated the ideal of a cosmopolitan world in which all people are wise and equal. In the later Stoic tradition, especially in Cicero (*De legibus* 1.22–23) and Seneca, the emphasis shifted from an ideal to the fact that all human beings, whether ignorant or wise, are naturally endowed with reason, unlike animals. Through this natural endowment with reason, all human beings form a community. The whole world is therefore one state. In Roman law, these Stoic ideas of equality were condensed into the short formula that all men are equal according to natural law – a formulation that became the model for modern constitutions.

As a look at Buddhism, Hinduism, the Enlightenment, and Stoicism shows, influential and thought-provoking alternatives to Christian concepts of equality can be found both within and outside Europe. Today, when we ponder which conceptions of equality are appropriate for our society, we should consider: do we prefer the Christian notion of a Creator, the Stoic emphasis on the rationality of human beings, or Hobbes’ thesis that all human beings

are naturally endowed with deadly aggression? How can a concept of equality be designed that includes other living beings, especially animals, and helps to prevent the cruelty of industrial mass animal farming? The exclusion of animals seems to be a particular disadvantage of traditional concepts of equality.

If we want to understand the specificity of Christian ideas, we need such comparisons and considerations and a minimum of complexity. If we merely assert in broad strokes that advocating equality and love of enemies is typically Christian and typically European, we surrender to a romanticising ideal that overlooks the existence of similar and perhaps more compelling ideas in other cultural contexts.

The dangers of the Romantic concept of Europe

The invocation of the three hills of Golgotha, the Acropolis, and the Capitol, and the emphasis on Europe's Greco-Roman and "Judeo-Christian" traditions result from a tunnel vision of the past. Rooted in Romantic dreaming, this mode of thought conflicts with geography and history, is arrogant towards neighbouring continents, and excludes large parts of European culture. What poverty compared to the wealth of the actual past! It is not only the already mentioned Celts, Vikings, Slavs, Byzantines, Jews, Muslims, and Tatars, but countless other contributors to medieval European culture who experience exclusion. Perhaps the most startling omission concerns modern Europe. If one dares to reduce the foundations of European culture to a few hills, then a fourth hill must surely be mentioned: the rubble of the Bastille of 1789. And an open concept of Europe could list many more hills: the elevation of Stonehenge, the hills of the Mezquita

in Córdoba and the Hagia Sophia in Constantinople, or the hills of croissants piled up in the Café de Flore in Paris, where Simone de Beauvoir wrote *Le Deuxième Sexe* (*The Second Sex*) in the 1940s.

One might object that the omission of the modern era in the Romantic concept of Europe is only a matter of perspective. The Romantic concept is only concerned with the older traditions of Europe, and of course, one could argue, does not intend to exclude the critique of religion, the Enlightenment, or the feminist movement.

Yet the example of Pope Benedict XVI illustrates the risks of such an omission. In his Regensburg speech in 2006, Benedict expressed his idea of Europe as follows:

This convergence [i.e., the convergence of Biblical faith and Greek philosophical inquiry], with the subsequent addition of the Roman heritage, created Europe and remains the foundation of what can rightly be called Europe.

Benedict is clearly formulating a version of the Jerusalem–Athens–Rome concept of Europe. While his speech caused a great deal of controversy due to a statement on Islam in the first part, much of the subsequent content – which is notable for its polemical tone – was largely overlooked. In particular, Benedict speaks of stages or waves of “the programme of dehellenization”, i.e., the deliberate dissolution of the Christian-Greek synthesis that constitutes Europe. He explicitly names three protagonists of this programme: the Protestant reformers in the 16th century, Immanuel Kant in the 18th century, and Adolf von Harnack, the Protestant church historian, who died in 1930. Europe is thus threatened by the Reformation, the Enlightenment, and historical research on the Bible. Benedict immediately adds that he

does not wish to reverse the Enlightenment, but rather to expand the concept of reason by reuniting it with faith. But it is difficult to understand how this new synthesis would differ from the Romantic ideal of a union between Christian and ancient traditions, often projected onto a golden Middle Ages. What is at work here is apparently a Catholic dream of pre-Reformation Europe. In any case, the conclusion is clear: the Jerusalem–Athens–Rome concept with its reduction of Europe’s foundations to three symbolic sites, is by no means innocent. It can explicitly mean a rejection of the modern era. The concept of Europe urgently needs to be deromanticised.

Complexity and criticism

Some readers may wonder why this book does not focus more on the darker side of European culture and, in particular, on the suffering that people inflicted on each other in the name of European ideas. Instead of discussing the Christian concepts of equality and love of enemies, would it not make more sense to discuss the Crusades, the slave trade, or the atrocities committed by Christian colonialists? Instead of talking about ancient democracy, would it not be more appropriate to address Greek and Roman slave labour and the persecution of Jews and Christians in antiquity? Or the bloody reign of terror of the French revolutionaries of 1793 and 1794 in the name of justice, virtue, and democracy?

Such a focus is sensible and absolutely necessary in order to learn from the past. We need to know how ideas have worked out in practice, and we also need to examine their advantages and disadvantages on the basis of historical experience. But pointing to atrocities in the name of an idea

can only provide an indirect critique of that idea, because the idea itself – its consistency, its argumentative grounding, its implications, its alternatives – is not addressed this way.

Moreover, one must be careful not to draw the wrong conclusions. People who claim to act in the name of an idea may be mistaken – they may misunderstand or deliberately misrepresent themselves and their motivation. The path from an idea to the practice of cruelty is complex and by no means straightforward. The scholar of religion Jan Assmann has rightly faced criticism for his thesis that violence in the name of religion is essentially an invention of monotheism, i.e., of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. In fact, horrifying acts of violence have also been committed and justified in the name of Hinduism and Buddhism, despite the fact that both religions are polytheistic or non-theistic and represent high ideals of non-violence.

Similarly problematic is the related thesis that the European slaughter of the last two centuries – in the name of democracy, nationalism, racism, fascism, or communism – is a secularised form of religious violence. The cruelty inflicted by one group upon another has more complex causes. While it often involves an absolutist appropriation of the “true” over the “false”, i.e. some secular or religious ideology, it is also the result of struggles for resources and power, enrichment, group dynamics, and other political, social, economic, and psychological factors.

This book on Europe therefore takes a different approach. It turns directly to ideas, as if we were in the ideal position to freely choose from the ideas and traditions of the past when shaping the future: as if we could cherry-pick from Europe’s intellectual history. To this end, it is worth taking the popular Enlightenment and Romantic concepts of Europe seriously. After all, it is unlikely that so many intelligent minds have

given so much thought to these traditions without reaching noteworthy conclusions. It therefore makes sense to begin by identifying the merits of these concepts in order to then analyse what is problematic about them.

As we have seen, these concepts of Europe are fraught with problems. Much of what is labelled typically European is not accurate, either historically or geographically. The predicate “European” only makes sense if we make the effort to be historically specific and geographically precise. This makes Europe more diverse and perhaps a little more alien, because we are not familiar with its historical concreteness and with the disadvantages of traditional ideas. This makes us more critical. Yet, even as decolonisation and deromanticisation compel us to say goodbye to cherished clichés, the ideas at stake do not have to lose their appeal. Whether typically European or not, the hallmarks of scientific rationality, the idea of a human-made constitution, the justification of democracy, theories of equality or altruism, to name but a few examples, remain powerful and challenging themes. And the ancient world, the Middle Ages, and the Age of Enlightenment remain valuable interlocutors in these conversations, alongside their global alternatives.

But what remains “typically European” when we free ourselves from colonial and Romantic clichés?

3. What is typically European?

Imagine I ask you to sketch a panorama of European culture in about 30 keywords, and you respond with the following:

Michelangelo, Mona Lisa, Rembrandt, Gothic, Classicism, Louvre, City Hall, equestrian monuments, Homer, Dante, Shakespeare, Goethe, Tolstoy, Beethoven, Verdi, Chanson, Rome, Wittenberg, Geneva, Moscow as the third Rome, Istanbul, University, Coffee House, Pizza, Magna Carta, Tolerance, Anne Frank, Marie Curie, Simone de Beauvoir.

I would reply that I am impressed by your answer. Not only is your list charming, learned, and resonant, but it also refrains from appropriating antiquity (with the notable exceptions of Homer and Rome) and aims to be inclusive and progressive. The list acknowledges women, Istanbul, Moscow, and one Russian. But I would turn your attention, very politely, towards one peculiarity: apart from these few outliers, the list consists entirely of mid-western European persons, cities, objects, and styles. To be honest, I did not invent your answer. The keywords are taken from the chapter headings of a three-volume (and otherwise recommended) work of 2012 on European places of remembrance.

Can this be done differently?

Three essays

Let us consider three essays on European culture that have achieved recognition in recent decades: by Milan Kundera, Rémi Brague, and George Steiner. The Czech writer Milan

Kundera (born 1929) published an influential essay in 1983, while exiled in Paris, just one year before his world bestseller *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*. The essay is entitled “Un occident kidnappé ou la tragédie de l’Europe centrale” (“A Kidnapped West: The Tragedy of Central Europe”). With impressive verve, Kundera laments that Soviet Russia has “kidnapped” Czechoslovakia, Poland, and Hungary from Western culture. Previously, the European continent had always been divided into two cultural halves – a Roman Catholic and a Byzantine-Orthodox half. “After 1945, the border between the two Europes shifted several hundred kilometers to the west”, and Central Europe suddenly found itself in the east.

The culture of Central Europe – which, for Kundera, also includes Habsburg Austria before 1918 – was characterised by extraordinary diversity within a compact space, and by strong Jewish influence. It was based on the modern Western concept of a creative, thinking, and doubting individual (Kundera alludes to René Descartes). The exact opposite of this culture is the “uniform, standardising, centralising” Russia, its totalitarianism, and its political suppression of culture. Russia “is seen not just as one more European power, but as a singular civilization, an other civilisation”. As a result of the Soviet Russian kidnapping, Europe has lost its cultural centre in Central Europe.

These extremely strong assertions can only be understood against the background of the Soviet suppression of cultural opposition in Central Europe at the time of the Iron Curtain. Kundera stands in the tradition of the Enlightenment concept of Europe, whose rhetoric of exclusion persists even into the late 20th century, recalling the stereotypes of the Enlightenment thinkers in 18th-century Western Europe. For Kundera, Russia and the whole of Orthodox Eastern Europe

belong to another, alien civilisation, not to cultural Europe. Moreover, the defining distinction is totalitarianism – in the 18th century, the term would have been “despotism.”

Kundera rightly earned much opposition and criticism for excluding Russia and Eastern Europe from European civilisation. Totalitarianism can only be described as a specifically Russian and anti-European evil if German, Italian, and Spanish fascism are completely left out of the picture. And the kind of culture so admired by Kundera as an expression “of the thinking, doubting individual”, whether resistant or conformist or vacillating between the two, also played a prominent role in Soviet Russia, especially in literature and music.

One cannot learn from Kundera how to define Europe as an intellectual concept, because he takes its content for granted: enlightened, creative, individual, and multiform, yet confined within Roman Catholic borders, with no mention of northern Europe. One can learn, however, that reflection on Europe and its culture benefits from inverted perspectives. Kundera does not simply assert that Central Europe belongs to this culture; rather, in his perspective, Central Europe is the *grand foyer* of European culture, its representative centre – and not Western Europe. With impressive language, he describes the cultural productivity of Czechoslovakia, Poland, Hungary, and old Austria, especially their Jewish population (of which he is not a member, but which he admires). For Kundera, it is from this vantage point that the essence of Europe is revealed.

The perspective of Rémi Brague (*1947) is much more conventional in comparison. In his book *Europe, la voie romaine* (Europe, the Roman Way), published in 1992, he aims to show that Europe, at its intellectual core, was essentially Roman; or, more precisely, Latin. Byzantium, Moscow, and

the Ottoman Sultan also called themselves “Roman”. “But no other than Europe has wanted Latinity”. This Latinity was characterised by *secondarité*. For the Romans “have brought nothing new in relation to those two creator peoples, the Greeks and the Hebrews”, but were masters of mediation and appropriation.

According to Brague, the innermost core of Europe is Roman and Latin. What distinguishes this core from all other cultures on the continent, he argues, is the specific Roman-Latin approach to its Jewish and Greek sources. Above all, the Catholic Church deserves to be called “Roman” and thus “European”. In its being Roman, it differs “not only from Islam and from Byzantium, but also from the Reformed world”. Therefore, in spatial terms, Roman Catholic Europe forms the core of Europe; the other countries only have a “graduated membership” (*une appartenance graduée*). To put it less nobly than Brague: they are second-class Europeans.

Brague declares his own Catholic and Romance-speaking home to be the intellectual core of Europe. But why should only he be entitled to make such a claim? Let us invert the formulations and have an Eastern Roman (a “Byzantine”) speak: From an Eastern Roman perspective, unlike Brague’s view, Europe is essentially “Constantinopolitan”, or more precisely, “Greek”. Firstly, because no one but Europe has claimed Greek for itself; secondly, Europe has a specific Greek approach to its sources; and thirdly, it is above all the Greek Orthodox Church that deserves the designation “Constantinopolitan”. Thus, the core of Europe differs from the Catholic, Muslim, and Protestant worlds.

Or let us have a northern European Lutheran speak: Europe is essentially “Wittenbergian”; or, more precisely, “Germanic”, because it has a specific Germanic approach to its sources. Above all, the Lutheran Church deserves to be

called “Wittenbergian”. For this reason, the core of Europe differs from the Catholic, Muslim, and Orthodox worlds.

With this kind of argumentation, any group of people can be classified as culturally alien and thus be excluded. Brague defends his exclusionary Europe by saying that, given his background and education, he is hesitant to comment on the Orthodox and Protestant worlds (and the modern-agnostic, one would add). But then it might have made more sense to write a book about the Vatican instead of Europe. European culture can hardly be understood without a change of one’s own perspective.

In his 2004 speech “The Idea of Europe,” George Steiner (1929–2020) defines the European idea in terms of five parameters, which he also calls “axioms”: first, the coffee house (“so long as there are coffee houses, the ‘idea of Europe’ will have content”); second, the horizon of pedestrians, pilgrims, wanderers, and the landscape thus humanised; third, the streets and squares named after statesmen, military leaders, artists, and scientists of the past; fourth, the twofold descent from Jerusalem (faith) and Athens (reason); and finally, fifth, the tragic awareness of the near end, of transience and catastrophe. Steiner believes that the future of Europe lies in the idea of reason and the Greek spirit of philosophy, in a post-Christian Europe of tolerance, in leisure, individualism, and in the dreamy educational hope, borrowed from Trotsky, that even the “common man” will one day walk in the paths of Aristotle and Goethe.

Steiner’s essay on Europe has two great advantages over Kundera’s and Brague’s: It considers the whole continent and determines what is typically European by comparing it with the cultures of other continents. An American bar, Steiner argues, has a completely different atmosphere than a European café; in the vastness of America, Africa, or Australia,

one does not walk from one village to the next; in the USA, streets are not named after artists, but are called “Pine”, “Oak,” or “Sunset”; classical music from Bach to Schubert cannot be compared to anything outside Europe; only a few non-European countries such as India or, “for a spell”, Islam, have contributed to the history of mathematics; even metaphysics and the tragic sense of an ending are uniquely European. It is precisely these comparisons that provide Steiner’s idea of Europe with justifications.

But are they also convincing? The “Europe of cafés” is the most memorable image in Steiner’s essay. It has even found its way into the speeches of French president Emmanuel Macron. This is strange, because the coffee house is a thoroughly Middle Eastern invention, an import from West Asia. And not just as a place where coffee is served, but as a place to discuss, dream, work, play chess, and pass the time – just as Steiner describes it. Around 1640, the first central European coffee house was opened in Venice. Before that, however, there were coffee houses in Mecca around 1500, then in Cairo, Damascus, then, from circa 1555, in Istanbul and thus for the first time in Europe, and from around 1600 in Qazwin and Isfahan in Iran. The “culture of the café” is still one of those institutions that culturally connect European, North African, and West Asian countries.

The most original of Steiner’s parameters is the horizon of the pedestrian, which a European, who lives in the densely populated centre of Europe, could gain more easily than a North American or Australian. But the vast Scandinavian forests, the Spanish highlands, or the Eastern European steppes are not pedestrian landscapes. And even the centre of Europe was never as densely populated as the Indian subcontinent, eastern China, or Japan at any time in its history. If one were to follow Steiner’s reasoning, the pilgrims on

Japan's famous Buddhist pilgrimage routes would be typical Europeans. This is because the slowly changing horizon of Japanese pilgrims opens up culture, religion, and landscape at the same time. Even the habit of leisurely strolling – the *paseo* in Spain, the *passeggiata* in Italy – has its counterparts in the Ottoman-Turkish *tenezzüh* and the Arabic *tanazzuh*, the traditional forms of relaxing and wandering (Turkish *seyir*, Damascene *sīrān*) in the numerous green parks and promenades, the *mutanazzahāt*, in Damascus, Beirut, and many other cities in the Islamic cultural area. Steiner's definitions of the typically European do not stand up to scrutiny.

In his other parameters, Steiner explicitly formulates stereotypes of the colonial and the Romantic image of Europe, which need not be discussed further. They are expressed in sentences such as: "We are all Greeks", because music, mathematics, and metaphysics (supposedly) began with the Greeks. Or: Western Europe "has the imperative privilege" of realising secular humanism in the world. Those who do not share Steiner's elitist point of view can easily find these formulations arrogant, just like his condescending remarks about non-European culture before.

In his essay, Steiner mentions almost exactly 100 names of famous artists, literary figures, and scientists (including four women) whom he uses to characterise European culture. Eighty-three of these individuals are French, Germans, Austrians, British, and ancient Greeks. No essay can even begin to capture the diversity of European culture, which Steiner praises so highly, and statistics will put any writer to shame. But even the most sympathetic reading cannot deny that Steiner's image of Europe has a significant bias towards modern mid-western Europeans and ancient Greeks. This bias would hurt Kundera, for example, because Kundera's

cultural heartland of Europe – Czechoslovakia, Hungary, and Poland – plays no role at all in Steiner's essay. When Steiner expresses the hope that, one day, the common man will walk in the footsteps of Aristotle and Goethe, he is probably asking himself a very human question: why isn't everyone like me?

All of this shows that George Steiner, too, declares his own intellectual home to be the essence of Europe.

From the bottom up

There are many good reasons to be deeply sceptical about cultural concepts of Europe. In this book, we have not encountered a single cultural concept of Europe that was not biased in some way: in favour of a religion or an agnostic worldview, in favour of a particular region, a local culture, or a language. And we have not encountered a cultural concept of Europe that did not exclude some inhabitants of the continent as barbarians or second-class Europeans, and that did not paint a condescending or distorting picture of the other continents. Partisan, exclusionary, arrogant, distorting – cultural concepts of Europe, we must conclude, are a nuisance. At least those that are detached from the reality of the continent. The “Why isn't everyone like me?” concepts can ignore geography, because Europe is where their preachers are. Such visions of Europe are then imposed on the geographical continent and passed off as its culture. It is time to let go of such concepts.

This realisation is by no means grim. It does not mean that we can no longer speak of European culture altogether. Indeed, we still have the possibility of developing a descriptive concept of European culture. We can describe what

happened on the continent's soil, from the bottom up. In this way, we take geography seriously, avoid a preconceived central perspective, and can compare the continent with other continents.

Cultural spaces undoubtedly exist. Imagine sticking flags on an imaginary map of the world to represent certain cultural practices at a certain time, for example, for the spread of Ionic columns and capitals around 300 AD. In this case, the flags are stuck on a large belt of latitude from Pataliputra in northern India, which is now Patna in the Ganges valley, to Córdoba in Spain and Volubilis in Morocco. If you connect all the flags with threads, a cultural space is marked.

Or let us choose a musical example, the sonata form around 1790. This three-part structure – featuring two harmonically contrasting themes introduced in the exposition, developed in the second part, and reconciled in a reprise – was employed by composers such as Haydn and Mozart. In this case, the flags would be stuck mainly in Austria, Hungary, and Germany, and in a few other centres in Europe where the new sonata style gradually became popular. In Ottoman southeastern Europe, art music around 1790 sounded very different from sonatas in Vienna.

Or consider the medical doctrine of the four humours, which had been developed by Greek physicians such as Hippocrates and Galen, building on Middle Eastern predecessors. This doctrine attributed diseases to an imbalance of the four humours: yellow bile, black bile, blood, and phlegm. Around 1500, this medical theory was taught in Latin at European universities and was widely used in vernacular manuals. But it was also taught throughout the Islamic world in Arabic, Turkish, and Persian. We encounter the doctrine of humours in Armenian, Georgian, and Hebrew, as well as on the Indian subcontinent, where it became an important

part of Unani medicine in the Mogul period (still practised today), but also in Tibet. The most famous authorities on the four humours in all these languages were the Greek Galen and the Persian Avicenna.

Or take, as a fourth example, the Sephardic pronunciation of Hebrew prayers in 1818, when, as mentioned, the Budapest rabbi Moses Kunitzer recommended its adoption by the Ashkenazi Jews of Central and Eastern Europe. From the end of the 15th century, after the violent expulsion of Jews from the Iberian Peninsula, which was called “Sefarad” in Hebrew, many Spanish Jews fled to cities of the Ottoman Empire and later also to Christian cities such as Bordeaux, Livorno, Amsterdam, or Hamburg. They brought many of their traditions with them to their new homeland, including their pronunciation of prayers and their melodies. In doing so, they created a new cultural space. Within this space, Rabbi Kunitzer made particular mention of Fez, Tunis, Tripoli, Italy, and the European part of the Ottoman Empire.

Ionic capitals, sonata form, the four humours, and Sephardic prayers belong to the culture of Europe. They are a small part of those cultural practices and forms encountered on this continent throughout its long history. The attributes “typically European” or “essence of Europe” are inappropriate in this context, because these four cultural forms are also found on other continents or only in certain regions of Europe. So, if we delineate cultural spaces in this way, we will find that the continental borders of Gibraltar, the Bosphorus, and the Urals were rarely also the boundaries of cultural spaces.

This is particularly evident in the history of philosophy and science. From about 300 BC, the time after Alexander the Great, until about 1700 AD, when Aristotelian physics and metaphysics were ousted from the curricula in several

European countries, a common space of science existed, which stretched from the west of India across North Africa and Europe to the Atlantic coast. If we turn to the time around 1500, i.e., the period of the High Renaissance in Italy and the beginnings of Spanish and Portuguese colonialism, this common space encompassed all countries influenced by Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. In medicine, the doctrine of the four humours characterises this space very well, but so do many other medical theories such as dietetics, i.e., the doctrine of a healthy lifestyle, or pharmacology. The astronomy in this area was geocentric and relied on similar geometric models, which were derived from observational data and were used to calculate planetary orbits. Astrology, in turn, the prediction of the future from the stars, drew on the same Greek, Persian, and Arabic authorities.

In the broad field of philosophy and the natural sciences, a common vocabulary was used that is originally Aristotelian, for example, in the discussions of motion and impetus, of the faculties of the soul, or of “being as being” as the subject of metaphysics.

In mathematics, the various branches of elementary algebra were widely shared across regions (although the advanced parts of Arabic mathematics, such as solving third-degree equations, were unknown in Latin Europe). Around 1500, the theology of the various religious groups within Judaism, Christianity, and Islam – despite their doctrinal differences – was united by an explicit scientific approach and a highly developed culture of commenting on sacred scriptures, going back to ancient Jewish and Greek traditions.

The scientific revolution of the 17th century in mid-western Europe is sometimes described today as if it had to overcome all these traditions. In fact, only very specific sub-fields, such as the physics of motion, planetary cosmology,

and theoretical medicine, were revolutionised. All other sciences of the modern centuries rested on the foundation of this Eufasian area of science. (And, of course, virtually no one in the Middle Ages believed the earth was flat. This fairy tale, still found in some schoolbooks, is an invention of Romantic Columbus biographers and anti-clerical intellectuals of the 19th century).

It may seem surprising that such a large area, marked by different religions and customs, has produced such similar sciences. The main reason for this uniformity, apart from the migrant craftsmen mentioned above, is the practice of written translation. Translations from Greek and Arabic were particularly numerous. Today, cities like Baghdad and Toledo are famous for their historical role as centres of translation and cultural mediation in the 8th–10th and 12th–13th centuries.

It may also come as a surprise that religion and science were not mutually exclusive. To be sure, religious authorities hindered free thought by banning teaching or by theological opposition to scientists. In 1277, for example, the bishop of Paris condemned the university teaching of 219 philosophical theses, and around 1197 the famous jurist, physician, and philosopher Averroes had to leave Córdoba under pressure from Islamic theologians. On the other hand, religion also fostered the scientific exploration of the world. For religion can stimulate thought. Many important scientists, such as Maimonides (12th century), Naṣīraddīn aṭ-Ṭūsī (13th century), William of Ockham (14th century), and Nicolaus Copernicus (16th century), were also clerics, theologians, or religious scholars.

Some of today's advocates of a purely Christian or purely agnostic Europe question whether the Islamic world can truly be a breeding ground for science. They claim that the

Greek sciences have always remained a foreign element in cultures influenced by Islam.

But this is a prejudice. It is based on the false cliché that “Islam” (which does not exist as such, there are only many forms of Islam) represents a radically different civilisation from Europe and that “Islam” merely transmitted “our Greek” sciences from antiquity to the Middle Ages.

In fact, the sciences benefited from Islam in several ways. The Abbasid caliphs of the 8th to 10th centuries systematically promoted the translation of scientific texts. In general, the ruler’s court was an important employer of scientists throughout the Islamic world. The development of medicine benefited from the appreciation of personal hygiene in the Islamic religion and from the legal institution of the religious endowment (*waqf*). Numerous hospital, mosque, or school foundations, such as the Vakuf hospital in Sarajevo, can be traced back to the institution of *waqf*. The study of astronomy has a firm place in Islamic culture, because astronomical knowledge is necessary to determine the direction of prayer (*qibla*) and the times of prayer. From the 13th century onwards, it became customary for major mosques to employ a *muwaqqit*, an expert timekeeper, and many astronomical instruments, including magnificent products of craftsmanship, can be attributed to specific mosques or even to an individual *muwaqqit*. Finally, Muslim scientists like Averroes have been encouraged by several Qur’anic verses (7:185, 88:17–20, 3:190) that express a high regard for nature and its study. The religion of Islam, therefore, did not give rise to the natural sciences, but it did provide a framework that contributed to the impressive rise of the sciences under Islamic rulers.

Similar can be said of the Latin-Christian Church in the Middle Ages. The annual calculation of the date of Easter

gave rise to a whole genre of scientific writings, the computus treatises. And the universities of the Middle Ages, although clerical in character and headed by a bishop as chancellor, obliged their students to read numerous Greek and Arabic scientists and thus developed into a constant engine of scientific thought. Finally, in Judaism, the high educational ideal of the rabbis, which encompassed not only Torah and Talmud but also Hebrew linguistics, mysticism, metaphysics, and law, provided a favourable framework for the development of philosophical and scientific literature, especially under Muslim rule in West Asia, North Africa, and in Spain.

This excursion into the common West Asian-North African-European space of science around 1500 shows that while religions were influential, they did not determine everything, especially not in education and science. The sciences, for their part, were not a secular foreign element that was merely transmitted to other cultures. Rather, the framework and context set by religions influenced the development of the sciences in both positive and negative ways.

Our excursion also shows that cultural spaces did indeed exist, but that there were no cultural blocs, no civilisations that could be clearly demarcated from each other, and certainly no “clash of civilisations”.

The identification of cultural spaces depends to a great extent on which questions we ask. If we do not ask about the sciences around 1500, but about the spread of Renaissance humanism in the literature of the same period, we arrive at a completely different cultural map – one that includes northern and central Italy and some centres in Germany, Switzerland, England, France, Spain, Poland, Bohemia, and Hungary. The huge Eufasian space of science that connected

London with Isfahan in 1500 existed simultaneously with the smaller space of Renaissance humanism. Both cultural spaces contributed to the culture of the European continent. If we connect the two spaces in our mind's eye, we have an example of how to think Europe openly.

Three ways to think Europe openly

Let us return to the question: What is European? If one marks out the cultural spaces for individual forms and practices at specific times, a picture of European culture emerges that resembles a cultural space network, a net of countless small and large flag spaces. Some parts of the net extend far beyond the continental borders, others cover only a part of the continent. It is highly unlikely to find a single cultural form whose area of distribution covers the continent exactly and yet does not cross its borders. Because these borders were far too permeable.

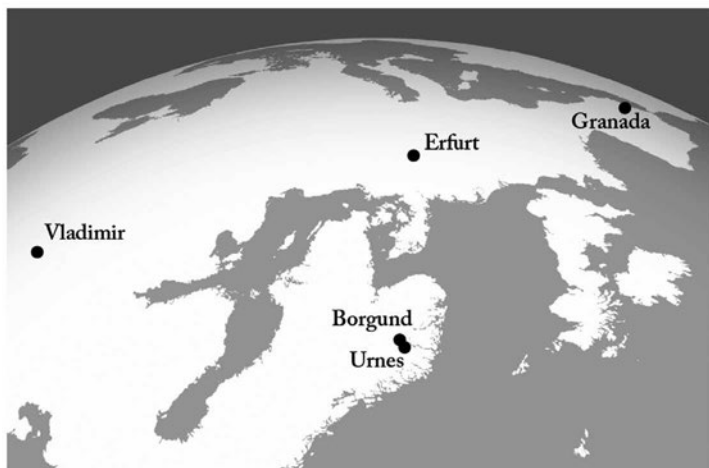
We can talk about Europe in at least three ways without falling back into colonial and Romantic ways of thinking. We can talk, first, about what is typically European; second, about what is European in the sense of encompassing the entire continent; and third, about how one can feel at home in Europe.

We begin with what is “typically European”. The idea of a cultural space network makes it possible to use the concepts “typical” and “specific” in a meaningful way. For what is typical of culture on this continent is not individual characteristics but their combination, i.e., the entire network at a particular time. The 15th century may serve as an example. Of course, other continents have epistolary literature, four humours medicine, palace architecture,

lying sagas, mosques, churches, synagogues, scholasticism, and polyphonic music. But the co-existence of humanistic epistolary literature, university teaching of the four humours, Andalusian palace architecture, Old Norse lying sagas, Ottoman mosque building, Hebrew scholasticism, and polyphonic Latin motet is specifically European. European culture therefore has no essence, but it can still be determined, namely, as a network of cultural forms and practices of a particular time.

Secondly, we can talk about the European culture of a given time by focusing our attention only on the continental section of the cultural space network and fading out the other continents. In doing so, we mentally cut off the parts of the network that overlap at the continental borders. However, if we take this approach, we should refrain from using the attributes “typical” and “specific”, because what is specific to Europe can only be determined in comparison with other continents. At least we now have the whole of the continent in view, and this enables us to speak meaningfully of the European culture of a time.

The crucial challenge is to have the whole continent in view. Imagine you are in a bookshop or library and are looking for a work on European architecture of the 12th century, with a focus on sacred architecture. Do you find anything about the wooden stave churches in Urnes and Borgund in Norway? About the mosque building in Granada, the second construction phase of the Erfurt synagogue, the fortified churches in Romania, the Orthodox church building in Eastern Europe, the white cathedral in Vladimir in Russia? Probably not. Rather, you will only read about a very specific regional phenomenon that is particularly dear to the hearts of mid-western Europeans: the emergence of the Gothic cathedral.



Map 3. Europe from the North

Or ask in a library for literature on European architects of the 16th century. You will be offered books on Michelangelo and St Peter's Basilica, on Juan de Herrera and the palace El Escorial in Spain, and on the style of Andrea Palladio. But will people also think of Postnik Yakovlev, the architect of St Basil's Cathedral with its nine domes on Moscow's Red Square? Or of Sinan bin Abdülmennan, the famous architect of the Ottoman Empire? Sinan's admired buildings – mosques, schools, mausoleums, bridges, aqueducts, palaces, and caravanserais – found many imitators and shaped the architecture of southeastern Europe for centuries. Sinan and his team designed such important architectural landmarks of Europe as the Drina Bridge in Bosnian Višegrad, the Selimiye Mosque in Edirne, and the Süleymaniye Mosque in Istanbul, but also many lesser-known buildings in Greece, Albania, Bulgaria, or the Crimea.

Or attend a lecture on liberal theology and religious reform in Europe in the 19th century. You will certainly learn

something about Reform Catholicism and the liberal Protestant theology of Adolf von Harnack and others. But will you also hear about liberal Judaism and its leading figures such as Abraham Geiger (1810–1874), the co-founder of the Berlin Hochschule für die Wissenschaft des Judentums? Geiger was an impressive thinker who advocated scientific-philological training for rabbis, the use of the German language in Jewish liturgy, and a historical understanding of the Talmud.

And there is a fourth theological reform current on the continent in the 19th century: the Jadidism of the Muslim Tatars in Eastern Europe. The current of Jadidism (derived from Arabic *jadīd* “new”) is part of the worldwide modernist movement in Islam, whose texts Charles Kurzman has made accessible in his book *Modernist Islam 1840–1940*. A particularly influential Jadidist worth reading was Ismail Gasprinski (1851–1914), the Tatar writer and publisher from Bakhchysarai on Crimea, who promoted the modernisation of Muslim schools and the education of Muslim women in the Russian Empire. Gasprinski called for a much better instruction in the Tatar Turkic languages, Arabic and Russian, and successfully campaigned for expanding the religious reading canon to include Muslim and Western European scientists such as al-Fārābī, Avicenna, Ibn Khaldūn, Johannes Kepler, and Isaac Newton. According to Gasprinski, this was the only way to fulfil the two main tasks of Islam, prayer and education.

There would be many more examples of how European culture can be understood in a continental way. What would you expect when visiting an exhibition of 17th-century European painting? Rembrandt, Rubens, Velázquez, and Caravaggio? Why not painting from the continent's largest metropolis, Constantinople, a centre of attraction for painters from all directions? Why not icon painting from Eastern

Europe? Why not painting that originated at the court of the Vasa in Sweden? Because the mid-western European canon has entrenched our view.

Let us move on to the third way of thinking openly about Europe, and thus to the concepts of “homeland” and “home.” French president Emmanuel Macron has summed up a feeling that many Europeans are familiar with: “We know that we are European when we are outside of Europe.” The danger with this feeling is that it can be deceptive. It does not describe what defines Europe, but where Europeans feel at home. Macron’s 2017 speech on Europe reveals that he evidently feels at home with the ancient Greeks and in modern mid-western Europe:

This Europe, where every European [*chaque Européen*] recognizes their destiny in the figures adorning a Greek temple or in Mona Lisa’s smile, where they can feel European emotions in the writings of Musil or Proust, this Europe of cafés that Steiner described, this Europe that Suares called ‘a law, a spirit, a custom’, this Europe of landscapes and folklores, this Europe of Erasmus, [...] what holds it together is its culture.

Every European? No. What Macron describes here is primarily his own cultural home. Could it be that many Europeans do not find Musil and Proust emotionally moving, but rather long-winded? Perhaps they are at home in a more feminine or feminist Europe? For example, in the Europe of Mary Wollstonecraft, Jane Austen, and Virginia Woolf or of Anna Politkovskaya and Greta Thunberg? Or in a more Christian or Muslim Europe? Or they find their preferred cultural home in the Nordic heroic sagas, in Richard Wagner, in J. R. R. Tolkien? Or in Hungarian and Czech literature? Or in the Russian film of the 1920s, in British pop, Turkish folk

music, or Scandinavian heavy metal? (The list is endless.) These people have a different cultural home than Macron, but they are still culturally at home in Europe. European culture is so diverse, so rich, that it can offer a home to many different people.

It is very precious to be able to speak of a cultural home, whether in Europe or elsewhere, in one or more cultures. It encourages, it stabilises one's life, and it creates a bond with other people. Macron is right when he says that we sense cultural belonging most when we are somewhere else. But feelings of home, even cultural ones, are too individual to allow general conclusions about the culture of a continent. We can describe and explore the European culture of different times, from the bottom up, as in this book. But we cannot feel at home in this wild ocean of the most diverse cultural forms. To do that, we need individual islands. This is why this third way of talking about Europe differs from the first two, i.e., from talking about what is "typically European" and "continental European". Cultural homes are subjective. We can agree on the cultural space network of the continent, but not on where we feel at home, also not in Europe.

When people speak of a cultural home in Europe, there is always the danger that this talk turns into an exclusionary concept of European culture, when this home is regarded as a privilege. But having one's cultural home in Europe is not a privilege of people who live in Europe, let alone a merit. You can live in Seoul and have your cultural home with Thomas Mann, the red brick churches of the Baltic and the music of Johann Sebastian Bach. And you can live in London and feel culturally at home with Gabriel García Márquez and the culture of the Colombian Andes. Being a resident of the continent of Europe does not grant privileged access to European culture. Someone born in Bonn does not, from

the outset, have a deeper understanding of Beethoven than the Beethoven lover at the antipodean point of the globe in the South Pacific. Culture can provide an intellectual home for all people. It is the object of common human experience. In this sense, culture is, to speak with Edward Said, “humanistic” and “universal”.

If, then, European culture as an intellectual home is so universal and at the same time subjective: why do I bother to emphasise this third way of speaking about Europe? Because speaking about a cultural home is a social matter; it creates connections with other people. While we can never fully agree on our cultural homes in Europe, we can still exchange ideas about them, identify similarities and differences, give and receive suggestions. In doing so, we form approximate commonalities of cultural interests and build a sense of shared belonging. If this exchange about Europe is an open one, if it is based on a descriptive, continental concept of European culture, it may well open up a great opportunity: that very different people feel culturally at home in Europe.

4. Multiethnic cities: The Europe of the future

To think Europe openly does not imply that we can no longer talk about what defines Europe and its culture. We can certainly do that, but only descriptively from the bottom up. But is that sufficient for living together in solidarity on this continent? Is there not a lack of affective attachment, of passion, of the radiance of the great catchwords “discovery of reason”, “Golgotha, the Acropolis, the Capitol”, “Dante, Shakespeare, Voltaire, Goethe”?

The sentence “What holds Europe together is its culture” is wishful thinking, but lacks reality. Nor is this idea desirable at all, because a Proust-Musil-Erasmus Europe would amount to cultural impoverishment. The idea that a community is held together by a particular culture is a left-over of nationalism, i.e., the opinion that a state should be based on a nation that is in some way uniform. Since there were ethnic and linguistic minorities in most states of the modern era, the nation had to be defined by common cultural characteristics, usually by declaring the cultural ideals of the majority or of a dominant group to be the culture of the nation. Whether this was a sensible political idea is doubtful.

In the meantime, nationalism has been overtaken by reality. All large cities in Europe are multiethnic. For some, this is burdensome, for others enriching, in any case it is a reality. It is no longer possible to formulate a convincing concept of nation that has any cultural substance for the populations of our time. Of course, politics can always be done with the slogan “Make this nation great again”, but this slogan stands isolated because the substance behind

it is hollow. “Nation” means nothing more than the group of those who hold a particular citizenship.

But that is not terrible. Why not? One reason why we need not fear the multiethnic cities of the present and the future lies in the history of multiethnic cities on the European continent. Because multiethnic cities are nothing new to Europe. They have existed for a long time, and there is much to be learned from their history. But we can only learn if we do not glorify the metropolises of the past as paradises of cosmopolitan coexistence.

European cities became multiethnic for very different reasons. London and Paris, as centres of colonial empires, were the largest cities in Europe in the 19th century. In London, the biggest immigrant groups at that time were the Irish, who fled hunger, and Jews from the Russian Empire, who fled violence and pogroms. In Paris, on the other hand, the lack of workers was the most important reason for immigration, most of which came from other European countries: Belgium, Italy, Spain, and Germany.

Occasionally it is claimed, with a somewhat xenophobic undertone, that only empires were and can be multicultural. This is not historically correct. London and Paris were centres of colonial empires in the 19th century, and, of course, people of many languages, dresses, and colours were part of the cityscape, London sailors and soldiers a case in point. But the main causes of the multiethnicity of these cities had nothing to do with the empire, because the migration to London and Paris was triggered by hunger, violence, and the recruitment of labour. These three factors are part of world history and not just of empires. They caused many of our ancestors to migrate.

Let us look further back in European history. As shown, medieval Europe was not a homogeneous “Christian land”.

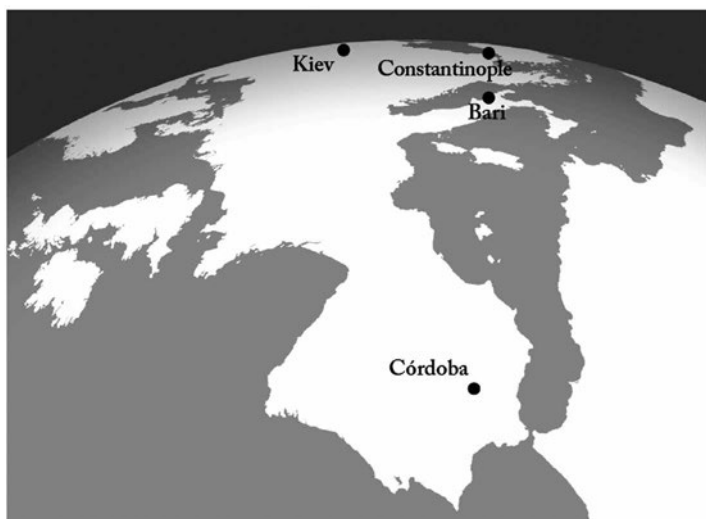
Jumne (Wolin) at the mouth of the Oder, the largest city in Europe, as Adam of Bremen called it, was a city of pagan Vikings and Slavs. Prague is described in Arabic travel reports from the 10th century as a great trading centre where members of many trading peoples lived, including Scandinavians, Slavs, Jews, and Muslims. Kiev, the seat of the Grand Duke and ruler of the Kievan Rus, was for a long time a centre of long-distance trade, leading from Sweden and Finland across the East European rivers to Constantinople, Baghdad, Bukhara, and Samarkand. The intensity of this long-distance trade is evidenced by the approximately 17,000 Arab silver coins that have been found in Kiev and the surrounding area at excavations. During Kiev's long period of prosperity in the 10th and 11th centuries, people of many languages and religions roamed the city's streets: non-monotheistic, Christian, Jewish, and Muslim. From the 12th century onwards, Kiev lost importance and power – not because of its multiethnicity, but because of military conflicts and competing princes. Multiethnic cities in Eastern Europe, one can see, have a centuries-old tradition.

The same is true for other parts of Europe, such as Italy. The Italian city of Bari on the Adriatic coast was a centre of Byzantine, Arab, and Norman culture in the Middle Ages and a multiethnic city where Greeks, Lombards, Franks, Slavs, Armenians, Arabs, and Jews lived. Many merchants from the eastern Mediterranean and North Africa frequented Bari. A particularly good insight into multiculturalism in medieval Europe is provided by the lists of bridal gifts preserved for Bari, which cover a period of 400 years (10th to 14th centuries). The terms for dresses, accessories, and jewellery, for materials, shapes, and colours create a fascinating Latin–Greek–Germanic–Arabic–Slavic–Venetian–French picture, from Circelli earrings to Zendai silk.

The most famous examples of multiethnic cities in medieval Europe are the aforementioned metropolises of Constantinople and Córdoba, cities to which many people migrated because they offered work, protection, and trade opportunities.

In 12th-century Constantinople, the population consisted of Greeks, Armenians, who also held high state offices, Syrians, Jews, Latin Christians, and Muslims. Many of these groups lived in their own neighbourhoods. The Muslims had their own mosque. The Venetian, Pisan, and Genoese quarters were located near the harbours on the Golden Horn. The Venetians had great privileges, since they had made a contractual commitment to Constantinople to provide military protection against attacks by the Sicilian Normans (who were backed by the Pope). Social tensions within the city developed, especially between Latin and Greek Christians, who were not permitted to marry each other. In 1171, the Eastern Roman Emperor ordered the temporary arrest of all Venetians living in his empire, over 10,000 people, and the wealth of the Venetian quarter flowed into the treasuries of the state elite. About 100 years later, however, after the devastating sacking and destruction of the city by the Latin Crusaders and the Venetians in 1204, multiethnic life began to flourish again with energetic support from the Genoese.

From 1453, the beginning of Muslim Ottoman rule in Constantinople, the coexistence of peoples became the basis for lasting economic and cultural prosperity. Non-Muslims were disadvantaged, because they paid a poll tax (the *cizye*) graduated according to wealth, had to observe certain dress and building regulations, could not testify against Muslims in court, and had no access to state offices, with the exception of the diplomatic service. Yet, this well-ordered coexistence was characterised by astonishing stability and considerable peacefulness for more than 400 years, until the first pogroms



Map 4. Europe from the West

against the Armenians at the end of the 19th century. The low level of state pressure on non-Muslims to convert to Islam against their will proved to be an important stability factor. With the genocide of the Armenians in 1915/16, the forced expulsion of the Orthodox Christians in 1923 (with the simultaneous forced expulsion of the Muslims from Greece) and the emigration of many Jews, Istanbul lost its old internationality (a new one has since developed). The fatal idea of the “nation” played a very unpleasant part in this.

In Muslim Córdoba of the years 711 to 1236, non-Muslims faced certain disadvantages – most notably the poll tax – much like they did later in Istanbul. However, the opportunities for social advancement were greater. The caliphs of the 10th century awarded no official offices, but central tasks in administration and diplomacy to Jews, Christians, and freed slaves. In this way, they limited the power of old Arab-Muslim elites. As in many other multiethnic cities

of the Eufasian region, the life of the various ethnic and religious groups centred without coercion in their own city quarters, each with their own religious buildings. The many marketplaces were popular places for overcoming ethnic and religious boundaries. And there were social areas where these boundaries played only a minor role: in the upper classes, in youth culture, and in the underworld – not unlike today's European cities. Coexistence in the multiethnic city of Córdoba was not without conflict, as the (presumably not fully reliable) tales of Christian “martyrs” in the 9th century show. Social tensions also existed between the ethnic groups of Arabs and Berbers, and between the cosmopolitan liberal upper classes and religious conservative sections of the Muslim and Christian population.

In 1009, a civil war broke out between different Arab and Berber elites, putting an end to Córdoba's golden age. Córdoba remained a multiethnic city, like many smaller cities in Andalusia, even after the repressions against the Jewish population in the 12th century. Córdoba is an example of a European multiethnic metropolis that flourished for centuries.

From today's perspective, Córdoba may appear to be a haven of tolerance and multiculturalism, but that would not be entirely accurate. Certainly, the different groups tolerated each other, and some sectors of society were multicultural. But the secret of its success was not tolerance, but legal security, the possibility to claim one's rights before a judge; not multicultural mixing but respectful coexistence. People in Córdoba could do many things together, but when it came to birth, marriage, death, and taxes, there were religious and ethnic barriers that were only overcome in a few areas of society.

Finally, let us briefly look at ancient Rome, which, unlike Córdoba and Constantinople, was the capital of an empire.

The Roman Empire differs from many other empires in history in that it turned millions of people into Roman citizens – people of different origins, languages, colours, and ways of life. Full Roman citizenship was granted to all inhabitants of cities with the status of colonies. Citizenship was also usually offered to the landowning upper classes of newly subjugated cities and countries. Those who served in the Roman army or were freed slaves of a Roman also had access to limited citizenship. As a Roman citizen, one paid less taxes, could settle in the Roman Empire, marry Romans, inherit from Romans, go to court, and trade under the protection of Roman law. Rome thus offered significantly better privileges than its rivals, the Carthaginian and Greek founders of colonies. It is true that, even before the Roman Empire, multiethnic metropolises existed in the Eufasian region, such as Assur on the Tigris. But Assur's population growth was largely based on deportations and forced resettlement. Rome, in contrast, was an example of highly successful civic inclusion.

When we return to the multiethnic cities of the present, we find that the historical situation and our standards for a functioning community have changed significantly. Many social movements – Stoicism, Christianity, the Enlightenment, and, not least, feminism – have changed our ideas of equality and led us to demand equal rights for all citizens and not to accept privileges based on ethnic or religious origin. We also demand that offices and political participation must be equally accessible to everybody. And we want not only legal security granted by a sovereign, but a constitutional state that protects citizens from abusive interventions by the state itself.

Despite all the differences, however, there is something to learn from the European multiethnic cities of the past.

A first lesson is that, for many centuries, stable and largely peaceful multiethnic cities existed on the continent. That is encouraging. Europeans can do that: they can live peacefully in multiethnic societies, benefiting from a long experience. One could argue that Europeans were also very good at the opposite, at murdering entire ethnic groups. That is true. But the concern of this book is to point to paradigms and opportunities in the past, and the tradition of multiethnic cities is one such positive experience.

A second lesson is even more important. We can learn from the multiethnic cities of Eastern Europe and the Mediterranean that a functioning community does not need a *Leitkultur*, an assimilation to a leading culture. True, in all these cities there was a dominant group: in Kiev the Norman Varangians and later other elites; in Constantinople the Orthodox Christians, later the Muslim Ottomans; in Córdoba the Muslim Arabs. The other non-dominant groups, however, were not assimilated, but remained independent culturally and in everyday urban life, with clearly defined rights. One was used to encountering many languages, many clothing styles, many colours, on the streets. The festivals of the individual groups were also celebrated by others, though presumably with less religious seriousness. But it remained largely a side-by-side existence that only rarely developed into a togetherness and even more rarely into a mixing of cultures in the full sense.

This is worth noting because, in today's discussions, we all too readily see only two alternatives: We argue either, from a conservative standpoint, in favour of integration and assimilation to a *Leitkultur* or, from a left-wing standpoint, in favour of multiculturalism in the sense of a mixing, a blending of cultures. Neither is typical of the multiethnic cities of the European past. These cities gave legal security to

the different ethnic groups, while accepting the side-by-side existence of ethnic and religious traditions and practices.

The lesson is that such side-by-side existence can be sufficient for a functioning community. This does not mean that we should go back to living in separate neighbourhoods. Overcoming ghettoisation and segregation is a central task of urban architecture and urban planning. What is meant is that we are asking too much if we argue for integration according to a *Leitkultur* or if we argue for multicultural mixing. It is very human and natural that people with different ethnic or religious customs feel foreign to each other. Feelings of alienation towards fellow citizens are never a good thing, but they are perfectly normal and part of the human psychology. Most of us seek the company of people who are similar to us. We all live in cultural neighbourhoods, so to speak, but that does not yet endanger our community. The task is not to eliminate side-by-side existence, but to make it work. For those of us who are able to do so, the task is to overcome the distance. For others who prefer to live at a respectful distance, the task is tolerance: letting others live as they wish, no matter how and when they celebrate their festivals. "Side-by-side existence" means recognising that others in Europe have the same rights as oneself. It also means refraining from missionary and conversion attempts, be they religious or secular.

The continent of Europe enjoys an undeserved advantage over other continents on the path into a global future: It was not colonised by people from other continents. In many countries outside Europe, colonisation led to a separation of the population into "natives" and "colonisers". In Europe, on the other hand, there are no "natives". Every European has ancestors who once migrated. The Sami and Basques are sometimes referred to as the only indigenous peoples on the

continent, but most likely they only migrated earlier than anyone else – so early that no records of their migration have survived. Apart from these possible exceptions, there are no indigenous peoples on the continent. The cultural development on the continent is characterised by many different peoples, languages, religions, and cultures, also because the continental borders were easy to cross. This history and the fact that all Europeans have migrants as ancestors makes it easier to accept diversity, to live a respectful side-by-side existence, and to develop it towards togetherness.

But doesn't such a community risk lacking sufficient loyalty from its citizens?

Political obligation

At this point, it is helpful to consider a distinction proposed by Judith Shklar in her 1992 lecture "Obligation, Loyalty, Exile." The Harvard political scientist, who grew up in Latvia and fled to Canada as a German Jew in 1939, suggests to distinguish between obligation and loyalty. Shklar understands "loyalty" as the emotional attachment to a social group, while "obligation" refers to the political commitment that we accept towards a state or other legal institution for purely rational reasons.

States should not demand loyalty, but a sense of political obligation, because loyalty to groups is often not a matter of choice. Most ties that generate loyalty are decided by birth, not by choice. If group loyalty, especially ethnic loyalty, is made the basis of a state, this would inevitably lead to suffering for those excluded. States therefore do not need more loyalty, but more civic sense of obligation, that is, more individuals who, motivated by rational deliberation and a

deeply rooted sense of security, feel committed to the state that protects them from violence.

Shklar's distinction helps us to understand both Europe's past and present. In the flourishing multiethnic cities of earlier European history, inhabitants often accepted precisely this political obligation to their rulers. They felt little loyalty to the rulers of Kiev, Bari, Constantinople, or Córdoba, because their loyalty was to their own group and origin, but they had a rational sense of their political obligation to the ruling dynasty because it offered legal security and protection.

In today's political debate, as noted at the beginning, there is frequent concern that many citizens lack a strong bond with Europe and the European Union – that their sense of attachment and loyalty is too weak. To address this, some call for a return to a common European identity, a common culture, and a community of values, in the hope of rekindling enthusiasm for the European idea.

This concern is wrong on both the analysis of the problem and the response to it. Firstly, the analysis is wrong because, although there may be a lack of loyalty, this lack is neither a defect nor a problem. Europe is far too large and too diverse to be able to generate an affective group feeling or a cultural sense of home as a whole, at least for most people. Loyalties are generally much more regional, much more specific. And because of their personal or family history, many people feel multiple loyalties, such as to two regions, languages, accents, landscapes, or social groups. The political states in Europe, which are all multiethnic, and the European Union itself do not need emotional loyalty, but rational political obligation. Presumably, empirical studies could easily show that the sense of political obligation towards the European Union is considerable and that there is no reason to complain.

Secondly, as a response to the problem, the idea of creating loyalty by invoking a European identity is particularly worrying. Many of the authors criticised in this book appeal to a common European culture, but in fact declare their own intellectual home to be the core of Europe. This is damaging. The result is exclusion and arrogance, and it obscures what is most important: a rational understanding of what a state and a community has to offer.

Thus, developing an open concept of Europe means recognising that “nation” is a problematic concept, especially when one tries to fill it with content. It means understanding that the side-by-side existence of group loyalties does not necessarily jeopardise a state. And it means working to increase the sense of political obligation towards the community and ensuring that this sense motivates people to actively engage in their community.

Future

Why does an open concept of Europe make Europe better equipped for the future? For at least three reasons.

Firstly, if the most important task of a state is to provide legal certainty and protection against injustice and violence, then the continent is on a very good path. This is not an emotional statement, but rather a rational conclusion based on global statistics and reports from organisations such as the UN, Amnesty International, the Global Peace Index, or Reporters Without Borders on violations of the rule of law, torture, the death penalty, crimes against humanity, war crimes, violations of press freedom, political murders, oppression of minorities, racism, and economic exploitation. In many of these statistics, most countries on

the continent rank remarkably well. This is by no means a given.

Clearly, the European states, and the European Union in particular, are doing certain things exceptionally well. It is arguments like these that strengthen the sense of political obligation. The European community is not great because of its traditions, but because of its ability to do something well in our time – something that requires serious thought and sustained effort. This is precisely what may motivate people of all ages, backgrounds, and beliefs to become politically or socially involved in the community. Because there is such a thing as a passion for reason: for good ideas, for rational arguments, for intelligent politics. This motivation is even more important because statistics show that European states also do the wrong thing when they fail to find solutions: namely, solutions against human rights violations at their borders, or against xenophobic and antisemitic offences, or against attacks on the legal system and the free press. The antidote to such threats is not a greater affective attachment to Europe, but a greater passion for rational solutions and the commitment that arises from this.

Secondly, an open concept of Europe reveals a Europe full of intellectual potential. If we abandon the tunnel vision we have inherited from the Enlightenment and Romantic periods, we will also be able to learn from liberal Muslims, Russian Enlightenment thinkers, Ottoman architects, Hungarian multiethnic culture, Icelandic geographers, Eastern Roman emperors, Czech writers, Andalusian youth culture, and Latvian Jewish exiles. There was and is a rich culture of thought and reflection on the continent. Europe shares many parts of this cultural network with other continents, and there is no reason for European arrogance or complacency. Rather, it is worth studying these common traditions

together. This, too, is meant by passion for reason: passion for the history of thought on topics such as scientific rationality, the rule of law, democracy, obligation, equality, altruism, or a cultural home in art, music, or literature. It would not be wise to focus only on European thinking, because to find solutions for the communities of the future, it is sensible to take the best ideas from all parts of the world and learn from Asian, African, Australian, or American models. At the same time, it would not be wise for Europeans to overlook ideas from their own continent.

Among these topics, altruism, i.e., altruism in the sense of global solidarity, is likely to play a decisive role in the challenges of the future. The climate crisis and the impact of artificial intelligence on the global labour market are two long-term challenges that affect all of humanity. They can best – and perhaps only – be mastered if the populations of all regions are prepared to give up some of their own prosperity in favour of economic and geostrategic opponents or in favour of future generations. This is why it is so important to reflect on altruism and to fully utilise the intellectual potential of thinking about this topic. Sharing one's wealth with one's opponent could be described as a form of loving one's enemy. It is an open question whether the concept of loving one's enemy is, in fact, helpful, whether it runs the risk of strengthening regimes of injustice, and whether it is asking too much of many people. Perhaps what we need instead is a rational idea of altruism that convincingly renounces prosperity in favour of global goals.

Thirdly, an open concept of Europe makes Europe better equipped for the future because it describes a much broader horizon of cultural homes than traditional concepts of Europe, and can thus enable a more peaceful coexistence on the continent. But after the loss of their colonial empires,

do mid-western Europeans also have to be prepared to lose their “European” traditions as fictions? Yes, this is necessary. For many reasons – and two particularly important ones. On the one hand, with respect to other continents, Europe’s colonial and Romantic self-aggrandisement is not only morally and intellectually troubling, but also denies recognition and respect to many other parts of the world, implicitly or explicitly.

On the other hand, with respect to the European continent itself: few things are more wonderful and reassuring than experiencing recognition of one’s own cultural home and confirmation that one is in the right place. Every European is a foreigner to some other groups in Europe. Accepting the equality of all cultures and individuals in the European cultural network and abandoning the idea of a *Leitkultur* – but not the idea of a law that binds everyone – is the decisive step towards cohesion and overcoming foreignness; the decisive step towards the awareness of being in the right place together, despite all differences. This step begins with a change of perspective: the willingness to view Europe and its neighbouring continents from all intellectual points of the compass.

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About the author

Dag Nikolaus Hasse, born in 1969, is Professor of the History of Philosophy at the University of Würzburg. His research centres on Arabic sciences and philosophy and their influence in Latin Europe.

In *Success and Suppression: Arabic Sciences and Philosophy in the Renaissance* (2016), he analyses the high point and gradual decline of this influence on philosophy, medicine, and astrology in the 15th and 16th centuries. Hasse has focused in particular on two Arabic-speaking thinkers: the Persian Avicenna (*Avicenna's 'De anima' in the Latin West*, 2000) and the Andalusian Averroes. Together with his Würzburg research team, he is exploring the vocabulary of classical Arabic scholars and their Latin translators in a digital lexicon, the *Arabic and Latin Glossary* (2009 ff.). The edition project *Ptolemaeus Arabus et Latinus*, which he directs, is dedicated to the history of astronomy and astrology in the 2nd to 16th centuries.

Hasse is ordinary member of the Bavarian Academy of Sciences and Humanities and was honoured with the Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz Prize in 2016.

It is common to define Europe by its democratic, scientific, religious, and cultural traditions. But in *What is European?* Dag Nikolaus Hasse argues that the search for Europe's essence has taken a troubling turn. He shows that many traditional ideas about Europe are culturally one-sided and historically and geographically distorted, and calls for a decolonisation and deromanticisation of the discourse on Europe.

The book promotes an inclusive vision of Europe that reflects its long history of multiethnic cities, offers a cultural home to a wider range of people across the continent, and extends attention and respect to other continents, thus laying a more respectful foundation for shaping the future together.

At the same time, Hasse demonstrates that overcoming colonial ways of thinking does not and should not result in anti-Europeanism. Criticising European arrogance may well go hand in hand with feeling culturally at home in other traditions of Europe. For this, it does not matter whether one is a resident of the European continent or not. There is no privileged access to European culture or to the culture of any other continent.

Dag Nikolaus Hasse is professor of the history of philosophy at the University of Würzburg. Among his numerous publications, two monographs stand out: *Avicenna's De Anima in the Latin West* (2000), and *Success and Suppression: Arabic Sciences and Philosophy in the Renaissance* (2016).

