

Idea and Tradition of Europe in the Light of Its Own History

István FEHÉR M.

Department of Modern and Contemporary Philosophy,
"Eötvös Loránd" University, Budapest

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Abstract

The paper gives a short panorama of the tradition and philosophical history of the idea of Europe. It presents different phases of the discussion about Europe – discussion that usually emerged in the periods of radical social-political re-arrangements, crisis or insecurity of the European values – from Greek culture, through Bayle's *République des Lettres* or Kant's and Hegel's writings, to Postmodern philosophers such as Gadamer, Heidegger and Rorty who had to face the problems that occurred after the geographical, political unification of Europe in the 1990s.

The study raises the questions: *What does the concept of Europe mean? Where was it born, and what are the perspectives for it? What are the characteristics of European culture? On what principles has the European Union been built?* It argues that Europe and philosophy organically belong together, for Europe itself can be regarded as a philosophical idea.

E-mail: h914feh@helka.iif.hu

I.

Theoretical discussions on Europe or on some specifically European tradition – as any kind of theoretic discussion independent of its subject matter in general – are mostly characterized by being influenced by their given historical context. The motivational background and the general tone of the disputes vary throughout the ages. The very fact that we are talking today about Europe, about specific European values or traditions is surely the result of specific historical conditions. The disappearance of Europe's Yalta-division occurring at the end of the

eighties brought as a historical event within reach the perspective of Eastern and Western Europe joining together, and gave new impulse, in the following decade, to the unification-process that had already been active in Western Europe for decades. Consequently, the approaching perspective of Europe unifying and united, raised, in the middle of the unification process, a number of issues with renewed topicality; not in the last place the question related to the idea of the unifying Europe—an idea not necessarily geographically intended. After Europe seemed to become geographically united the question arose whether there was anything else beside the geographical element common to this area now being unified?

Until this very day, the discussion about Europe has undergone different phases. Thereby it generally emerged in periods of radical social-political re-arrangements, crisis or insecurity regarding values claimed to be specifically European. In the following I shall briefly refer to some phases of this dispute.

II.

The idea of the unity of Europe's is not new: we can encounter it in different ways and different contexts throughout the history of Europe. This idea comes predominantly to the fore in the age of Enlightenment. One of its characteristic representations is the notion of the republic of learned men, scholars and erudite persons, namely the *République des Lettres* conceived by Bayle, which was meant to connect scholars from different countries and really maintained the contact between the majority of European intellectuals of the age. Herder spoke about a "European Republic" ("europäische Republik") in this context. He thought that "in Europe the totality of learned men constitutes a state of their own"¹. These scholars, he argued, "form a chain of interconnected links throughout the progress of time", "some kind of an invisible church, even in those places where they have not heard about each other at all. The common spirit of the enlightened and enlightening Europe is inextinguishable", sounded his optimistic prophecy.²

Enlightenment, however, was more than a concern of learned men. It did not remain a mere intellectual movement. "Apart from all these, Enlightenment aimed at achieving a complete reform of social conditions and

¹ Johann Gottfried Herder, *Ideen zur Philosophie der Geschichte der Menschheit*, hrsg. von Heinz Stolpe, Berlin und Weimar, Aufbau, 1965, Bd. 2, pp. 260, 40.

² Johann Gottfried Herder, *Briefe zur Beförderung der Humanität*, hrsg. von Heinz Stolpe in Zusammenarbeit mit Hans-Joachim Kruse und Dietrich Simon, Berlin und Weimar, Aufbau, 1971, Bd. 1, p. 81.

human life.” It “emerged with the claim to lay anew the foundations of social-communal existence by surpassing the theological-religious backgrounds, in the effect of promoting public welfare through commerce and agriculture, through the improvement of judicial affairs and the consolidation of infrastructure. [...] Enlightenment was a comprehensive, all-European phenomenon, [...] and ultimately it can only be interpreted and analyzed in a *cross-European* context”.¹

Against this background it is no surprise that a scholar, a “learned man” such as Immanuel Kant – in fact one of the greatest minds of the Enlightenment – attempted to conceive of “the whole of Europe” as a “single federal state”, not merely on a cultural, but on a political level as well.² Kant called “such a union of different countries a permanent state-congress”.³ At the same time he confined its jurisdiction within well-defined limits by restricting it in this way: “Nevertheless here a congress represents an arbitrary and at all times dissolvable meeting of different states and not a constitution-based connection (such as in the case of the American states) [...]”.⁴

As can be seen, Kant manifestly supported the idea of Europe as “a single federal state”, but disagreed to a large extent about its constitutional establishment. His disagreement follows from reasons of principle. According to him, a constitution had only sense in association

¹ Richard von Dülmen, “Ende der ‘selbstverschuldeten Unmündigkeit’: Das Zeitalter der Aufklärung”, Idem, *Kultur und Alltag in der Frühen Neuzeit.*, Bd. 3: *Religion, Magie, Aufklärung*, München, 1994, 212. See *Europa. Ein historisches Lesebuch*, hrsg. Wolfgang Behringer, München, 1999, p. 169. (Italics are mine: F.M.I.)

² I. Kant, *Die Metaphysik der Sitten*. Erster Teil. Metaphysische Anfangsgründe der Rechtslehre. Des öffentlichen Rechts zweiter Abschnitt. Das Völkerrecht, § 61. Kant, *Werke in zwölf Bänden, Werkausgabe*, (hereafter: WA), hrsg. von Wilhelm Weischedel, Frankfurt am Main, Suhrkamp, 1977, Bd. 8, p. 475. In Hungarian see: *Az erkölcsök metafizikája* (The Metaphysic of Morals), in: Kant, *Az erkölcsök metafizikájának alapvetése. A gyakorlati ész kritikája. Az erkölcsök metafizikája*, (Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals. The Critique of Practical Reason. The Metaphysics of Morals), transl. Berényi Gábor, Budapest, Gondolat, 1991, p. 459. (Italics are mine F.M.I.) This perspective defined in Kant’s view the “majority of ministers in the European courts” “in the first half of the 16th century at the meeting of the general orders of society held in Hague” (ibid.).

³ Cited from the German Edition, p. 474, see in the cited Hungarian edition p. 458.

⁴ Cited from the German Edition, p. 475, see in the cited Hungarian edition p. 458.

with one single state, understood in terms of one “moral person”. Whereas an “alliance of nations” was not far from Kant’s federalist perspective, a “state of nations” most certainly was.¹

¹ See Kant: *Zum ewigen Frieden. Ein philosophischer Entwurf*, A 7; WA, Bd. 11, p. 197. In Hungarian: Kant, *Az örök békéről* (Perpetual Peace), transl. Mesterházi Miklós, in: Kant, *Történefilozófiai írások* (Writings on Philosophy of History), Budapest. Ictus, 1996, p. 258. “It is a society of men whom no one else has any right to command or to dispose except the state itself. It is a trunk with its own roots. But to incorporate it into another state, like a graft, is to destroy its existence as a *moral person*, reducing it to a thing; such incorporation thus contradicts the idea of the original contract without which no right over people can be conceived.” (Italics are mine F.M.I.) Cf. A 28 (*ibid.*, 208. hg. resp. quoted Hungarian transl., 269.): “Second definitive article for a perpetual peace “The Law of Nations Shall be Founded on a Federation of Free States”; – *Peoples, as states, like individuals, may be judged to injure one another merely by their coexistence in the state of nature* (i.e., while independent of external laws). Each of them, may and should for the sake of its own security demand that the others enter with it into a constitution similar to the *civil constitution*, for under such a constitution each can be secure in his right. This would be a league of nations, but it would not have to be a state consisting of nations. That would be contradictory, since a state implies the relation of a superior (legislating) to an inferior (obeying), i.e., the people, and many nations in one state would then constitute only one nation. This contradicts the presupposition, for here we have to weigh the rights of nations against each other so far as they are distinct states and not amalgamated into one.” (Italics are mine: F.M.I.). Above all, we should act on Kant’s doctrinal consideration: “The idea of international law presupposes the separate existence of many independent but neighbouring states. Although this condition is itself a state of war (unless a federative union prevents the outbreak of hostilities), this is rationally preferable to the amalgamation of states under one superior power, as this would end in one *universal monarchy*, and laws always lose in vigour what government gains in extent; hence a soulless *despotism* falls into anarchy after stifling the seeds of the law. Nevertheless, every state, or its ruler, desires to establish lasting peace in this way, aspiring if possible to rule the whole world. But nature wills otherwise. She employs two means to separate peoples and to prevent them from mixing: differences of language and of religion. These differences involve a tendency to mutual hatred and pretexts for war, but the progress of civilization and men’s gradual approach to greater harmony in their principles finally leads to peaceful agreement. This is not like that peace which *despotism* (in the burial ground of freedom) produces through a weakening of all powers; it is, on the contrary, produced and maintained by their equilibrium in liveliest competition.” (62; *ibid.*, 225 hg., resp. 285. hg.; Italics are mine: F.M.I.) [The English translation of the excerpts from Kant’s text is taken from the following site:

III.

Europe's unification process was initiated after the Second World War under the influence of recent atrocious historical experience and inheritance and, in order to prevent wars and ensure peace in the future, unification was set in motion in terms of an international economic process. Indeed, economic and political instances remained its promoters and carriers up to this day. In opposition to the Enlightenment, there can be no question here of the simultaneous unfolding and development of some ideological movement with the re-founding of communitarian existence. "The starting point was inherent in the economic sphere, where the marketing processes develop their dynamics."¹ Could it be possible – we may ask here – that, in spite of the collapse of communism that had meanwhile taken place, the thesis (claimed to be outdated and regarded as having been settled for good) according to which existence precedes and determines consciousness, or, in our case, the economic basis precedes and determines legal and political super-structure, has not fully lost its validity? This question may legitimately be asked especially if we direct our attention upon the process running parallel with the unification of Europe, namely, the process of globalization assimilating the entire planet; globalization that "establishes beyond the traditional national control of markets, an international control as well", while it "is becoming more and more emancipated [...] from under political regulation and is globally expanding."²

Richard Rorty, one of the leading philosophers of our days, wrote that if the "formation of hereditary castes," begun in the eighties, "continues unimpeded, and if the pressures of globalization create such castes not only in the United States but in all the old democracies, we shall end up in some kind of an Orwellian world" – in a world in which „there may be no supranational analogue of Big Brother, or any official creed [...]. But there will be an analogue of the Inner Party – namely, the international, cosmopolitan super-rich"–, while the job of intellectuals like Rorty himself „will be to make sure that the decisions made by the Inner Party are carried out smoothly and efficiently", to keep „the proles

<http://www.mtholyoke.edu/acad/intrel/kant/kant1.htm> (The translator.)]

¹ Rüdiger Bubner, "Was wird aus der Verfassung Europas?" (in *Eine Verfassung für Europa*, 2. aktualisierte und erw. Auflage, hrsg. K. Beckmann, J. Dieringer, U. Hufeld, Tübingen, Mohr Siebeck, 2005, p. 97).

² Rüdiger Bubner, *Polis und Staat. Grundlinien der Politischen Philosophie*, Frankfurt/Main, Suhrkamp, 2002, p. 171.

quiet", and „to keep up the pretense that national politics might someday make a difference."¹ Rorty goes on to make the point somewhat further: „It is no comfort to those in danger of being immiserated by globalization to be told that, since national governments are now irrelevant, we must think up a replacement for such governments." Although the nation-state has ceased to be „the elemental unit of capitalism," it nevertheless „remains the entity which makes decisions about social benefits, and thus about social justice."² In his latest book that appeared at the millenary turn, Rorty has brought up the question again. He says here that „the central fact of globalization is that the economic situation of the citizens of a nation state has passed beyond the control of the laws of that state. [...] We now have a global overclass which makes all the major economic decisions, and makes them in entire independence of the legislatures, and *a fortiori* of the will of the voters, of any given country. The money accumulated by this overclass is as easily used for illegal purposes [...] as it is for legal ones. The absence of a global polity means that the super-rich can operate without any thought of any interests save their own."³

In his study discussing features common to the New Testament and the Communist Manifesto, Rorty claims that both texts teach us the susceptibility to inequality, and nourish our trust in the future. Both want to encourage us. They are „expressions of hope" and do not aim at putting forward claims to knowledge. Christianity and Socialism – both denote the same subject matter, therefore an idea such as “Christian socialism" sounds almost as a pleonasm: “nowadays you cannot hope for the fraternity which the Gospels preach without hoping that democratic governments will redistribute money and opportunity in a way that the market never will."⁴

IV.

Even if we put aside its relation to globalization, the fact cannot be doubted: the realistic emerging perspective of Europe's geographical-political unification as a historical development has brought on the question: is there beyond the geographical element something else that

¹ Richard Rorty, *Achieving Our Country*. The William E. Massey Sr. Lectures in the History of American Civilization, Cambridge, Mass., Harvard University Press, 1998, pp. 86f.

² *Ibid.*, p. 98.

³ Richard Rorty, *Philosophy and Social Hope*, London – New York: Penguin Books, 2000, p. 233.

⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 201ff. quote p. 205.

keeps this land together? In what way should we view the idea of Europe? The idea that – due to political changes – seems to have taken the place of the word “West”, which had similar connotations at the beginning of the century. And which, as soon as it appeared, was surrounded by perplexity.

In his article entitled “Vom Wort zum Begriff” from 1995, Hans-Georg Gadamer – reflecting on the history of our century – states the following: “Today the word *West* does not sound as modern as it used to in my youth when Oswald Spengler was actually declaring its decline. Nowadays people speak rather about *Europe* instead, however in this respect no one actually knows how and what it will be; we only know at best how we would like it to be.”¹ The extent to which the changes initiated by the political processes influenced people’s minds is well displayed in Gadamer’s opening address at the 1989 Heidegger-symposium in Budapest: “The first significant step we are taking today,” he said, “consists in the fact that an awakening Europe becomes absorbed in conversation with herself.” These words mirror the hermeneutical conception of Europe as an unfinished and unfinishable conversation with itself, a conversation which is continuously striving towards infinity.² A conversation is obviously something polyphonic, with many interlocutors; and the different voices – criticizing, complementing each other, and arguing with one another – do not merge into a monolithic element.

The perplexity in Gadamer’s voice is far from being a coincidence. This can be explained to a considerable extent by the above-mentioned claim that this process has economical-political origins, its ideological background and motivation is rather obscure or opaque. Therefore investigation is all the more important.

The last phase of the debates regarding Europe, as has previously been claimed, started to develop around the early nineties.

¹ H.-G. Gadamer, “Vom Wort zum Begriff. Die Aufgabe der Hermeneutik als Philosophie” (1995), in: *Gadamer Lesebuch*, hrsg. J. Grondin, Tübingen, Mohr, 1997, p. 100.

² H.-G. Gadamer, “Grußwort an das Symposium“, in: *Wege und Irrwege des neueren Umganges mit Heideggers Werk. Ein deutsch-ungarisches Symposium*, ed. I. M. Fehér, Berlin, Duncker & Humblot, 1991, p. 16.; in Hungarian: “A szümpózium köszöntése” (Welcoming the Symposium), in: *Utak és tévutak. A budapesti Heidegger-konferencia előadásai* (Right and Erroneous Ways. The Lectures of the Budapest Heidegger Conference), ed. Fehér M. István, Budapest, Atlantisz, 1991, p. 20.

Around that time, from among the numerous publications and editions on the theme of the European unification, the works presenting the issue from an intellectual-cultural point of view were fairly frequent. However, in the second half of the nineties the number of these writings – as well as the enthusiastic-optimistic tone characteristic of their approach – started to drop significantly.

One of these works was the volume *The History of the Idea of Europe* edited by Kevin Wilson and Jan van der Dussen. In its preface the editors drew up the following questions: *What kind of Europe are we building and why? What is the relation between this new Europe and the European history and experience? Are there specifically European values? Is there some kind of a coherent recognizable European identity? What does Europe mean, and what does it mean to be European?* In order to answer all these questions it may be useful for us to turn towards the European history, in order to find in it a sort of European-ness.¹ In the following I am going to present some essential propositions of this book.

First of all it is essential to remind of the fact that the idea of Europe has actually emerged after the French Revolution – this confirms what I mentioned under point II. In the preceding period we could only talk about Europe in geographical terms. It was associated with the idea of freedom in the Greek culture, with Christianity in the 15th century, with the politics of the balance of power in the 16th; and it was interconnected with the notion of civilization in the 18th century. This idea of Europe, articulated along the notions of freedom, Christianity, civilization, sometimes vanished for centuries. We can speak about its more permanent presence only in the past two centuries. The notion of the European cultural *history* as an idea arises in the early 19th century. All the different political and religious currents of the early 19th century (reactionaries and conservatives, Catholics and Protestants, liberals and democrats) created their view concerning Europe's historical development, with which different requirements and ideals were associated. Thus the ideals of freedom and Christianity were projected back into the distant past and were subjected to elaborate examination, while civilization became more or less a synonym for progress.² Let us remind here, only in relation to Christianity, of Novalis's famous work entitled *Die Christenheit oder Europa*, which begins with the following

¹ *The History of the Idea of Europe*, eds. K. Wilson, Jan van der Dussen, London & New York, Routledge, 2nd, revised edition, 1995, (first ed.: 1993), p. 9.

² Pim den Boer, "Europe to 1914: The Making of an Idea", in: *The History of the Idea of Europe*, p. 14.

lines: "Those were beautiful, lofty times when Europe was a Christian land, when *one* Christendom inhabited this humanly fashioned part of the world; *one* grand common interest bound the most distant provinces of the wide spiritual realm".¹ Reading these lines we can recognize the typical Christianizing, past-oriented romanticist world of the early 19th century. The expression "Europe", as indicated in *The History of the Idea of Europe*, is not to be found in the Bible.²

It is worthy to add some complementary thoughts to the argumentation of *The History of the Idea of Europe*. Firstly, it is notable that not only Romanticism, but also contemporary German idealism connected European spiritual life to the Christian idea, putting the accent in Christianity upon the thought of the freedom of the individual identified with her intellectual, spiritual essence. For Hegel, philosophy is the result of the intellect, of free thinking,³ and "the particular aspect" of philosophy "is coeval with the particular aspect of those people, in the circle of whom it appears, with their constitution, government, ethos, social life, [...] and religion."⁴ Philosophy is the conceptually manifested self-consciousness, or the gaining self-awareness, of world history; this latter culminating in the German Christian world that emphasizes the independence and internal freedom of the individual. As such, it presupposes the basic nature of culture: freedom of thought does not exist without political, religious-conscientious freedom, and without being aware of the infinite value of the individual.

In his lectures on the philosophy of history, Hegel emphasizes this distinctive feature: "European humanity [...] appears by nature as the freer" he writes: "the principle of the freedom of the individual [...] became the principle of the European state life".⁵ Although the "European spirit has spent its youth in Greece", the "phase of intimacy

¹ Novalis, *Fragmente und Studien. Die Christenheit oder Europa*, hrsg. C. Paschek, Stuttgart, Reclam, 1984, p. 67.

² Pim den Boer, "Europe to 1914: The Making of an Idea", in: *The History of the Idea of Europe*, p. 19.

³ Hegel, *Előadások a filozófia történetéről* (Lectures on the History of Philosophy), transl. Szemere Samu, I. vol., Budapest, Academic Publishing House, 1977, vol. I. p. 21.; cf. pp. 37. ff.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 59.

⁵ G.W.F. Hegel: *Előadások a világtörténet filozófiájáról* (Lectures on the Philosophy of World History), transl. Szemere Samu, Budapest: Academic Publishing House, 1979, p. 191.

[...] is missing at the Greeks”.¹ “The principle of Christian religion is the subjective insight”.² “Man will only become real as a spiritual being, if he overcomes his naturalness.”³

Freedom of religion and conscience, citizen autonomy, the independence of thinking, its *being-by-itself*, as well as individuality as a value in itself: these conceptual elements complexly intersect one another according to Hegel. The freedom that Hegel has in mind does not overlook the general; that is, it is not seen to coincide with what is arbitrary, uncontrolled or unmotivated. In this respect Hegel – in spite of all the otherwise existing and not at all irrelevant differences – fundamentally is connected to Kant. For Kant freedom made sense and significance only in regard to morality; freedom torn away from morality did not receive any special attention from Kant.⁴ Moreover: Kant – being the philosopher of the community of citizens respecting each other and who are obedient to the commonly adopted laws – only took a scornful notice (if he noticed it at all) of freedom uncommitted to ethics and reason, as well as of freedom that is above the laws of man: this is

¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 412., 573.

² *Ibid.*, p. 609.; cf. also *ibid.*, p. 640.

³ *Ibid.*, p.650.

⁴ I shall only mention two characteristic examples. When in his main work, in the *Critique of Pure Reason* Kant introduces the concept of freedom, he writes the following: “If we grant that morality necessarily presupposes freedom [...] as a property of our will: [...] and if at the same time we grant that speculative reason has proved that such freedom does not allow being thought, then [...] freedom, and with it morality, would have to yield to the mechanism of nature.” (*Kritik der reinen Vernunft*, B XXII; see *A tiszta ész kritikája*, transl. Alexander Bernát and Bánóczy József, Budapest, Academic Publishing House, 1981, p. 19.; new publ. transl. Kis János, Budapest: Ictus, 1995, p. 41. English translation by Norman Kemp-Smith <http://hermes.arts.cuhk.edu.hk/Philosophy/Kant/cpr/02pref-b.htm>) It appears that Kant is exclusively interested in freedom as the condition of morality. In other words, Kant is in fact interested in morality; and in freedom only because morality is impossible without freedom. See also in the *Critique of Practical Reason*: “Freedom, however, is the only one of all the ideas of the speculative reason of which we know the possibility *a priori* [...], because it is the condition of the moral law” “[...] had not the moral law been previously distinctly thought in our reason, we should never consider ourselves justified in assuming such a thing as freedom.” (see Kant, *Az erkölcsök metafizikájának alapvetése. A gyakorlati ész kritikája. Az erkölcsök metafizikája*, transl. Berényi Gábor, Budapest, Gondolat, 1991, p. 106. English translations by Thomas Kingsmill Abbott http://www.4literature.net/Immanuel_Kant/Critique_of_Practical_Reason/)

nothing but “lawless freedom”, “the freedom of combat”, “rudeness”, “degradation of humanity”.¹

If for Kant morality means that we subject ourselves to the moral law and thus it involves subjection, fulfilment of obligations, duties, then this was accepted also by Hegel in his own way. He went so far as to state: “freedom is only possible through obedience”.² This kind of obedience was at the same time very much distinguished from blind submission. “In such obedience man is free,” he wrote articulately coming back to the issue of freedom, “because particularity is obedient to generality. Man himself has a conscience and therefore he must be free to be obedient”.³

It has become of use to speak about European culture as a culture crucially (positively or negatively, but in any case) determined by the Jewish-Christian tradition. And it might also be relevant to refer here to the fact that atheism is and remains to be a specifically European phenomenon; it could only emerge on the base of Christianity. Man’s domination over nature and the subjection of nature is also a project with biblical origin. Max Weber has shown essential parallels between Protestantism and the spirit of capitalism. In European culture despite all kinds of secularization the Jewish-Christian tradition remained to be of fundamental importance. People could turn into atheists or become religiously disinterested: the habit, the mentality, the morality, outlook upon life and the philosophy of life (with or without the transcendent grounding) show common features. In opposition to the static-cyclic time perception of Greek and Oriental cultures and religions, the linear-eschatological time perception, as well as ideas such as: the uniqueness and non-repetitive character of history, the importance of individuality, the infinite value of the individual/individual soul (immortality of the individual soul), human equality (the equality of man in front of God and later on in front of the law) and man’s freedom (his having been created

¹ Kant, *Az örök békéről* (Perpetual Peace), transl. Mesterházi Miklós. In Kant: *Történefilozófiai írások* (Works on Philosophy of History), Budapest, Ictus, 1996, p. 270.: “When we see the attachment of savages to their *lawless freedom*, preferring ceaseless *combat* to subjection to a lawful constraint which they might establish, and thus preferring *senseless freedom* to rational freedom, we regard it with deep contempt as *barbarity*, *rudeness*, and a *brutish degradation of humanity*.” (Italics are mine: F.M.I.); also cf. *ibid.*, p. 273. English translation from <http://socsci.colorado.edu/~parisr/PS4173/Kant.htm>.

² Hegel, *Előadások a világtörténet filozófiájáról*, p. 573.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 705.

to be free to choose between right and wrong) are by all means distinctive features of the Christian tradition. This tradition defined European culture at the core and permeated it even where history in secularized forms aimed at some worldly target, or where – like, e.g., in the case of the French Revolution – the ideas of equality and freedom (ideas otherwise also rooted in the Christian idea of fraternity) came to be expressed in a sharply reinterpreted judicial-political form. The industrial revolution, the natural sciences, the technical development, the prosperity of free commerce, individualism, liberalism, positivism, the thought of progression, have often been indicated – and sometimes without any praise or enthusiasm – as phenomena inherent in and intrinsic to the Jewish-Christian tradition or of secularized forms of this tradition. The numerous historical manifestations of utopian socialism, Marxism and social democracy – as the offspring of the early Christian idea of equality – do not represent an exception either; on the contrary, they thoroughly fit into this tradition. Inasmuch as these were combined with atheism, anti-religiousness, the reason lay less in objections as to the subject matter than in the way of comportment. This as was the case for example with Marxism which opposed religion mainly on grounds of ideology-criticism, namely the role which religion played in the political-ideological justification of the actual social order. Marxism can be regarded as the manifestation of the early Christian social-communistic idea, and it cannot be fully understood without tracing it back to the Christian context¹ – first of all to eschatology. The motivation of the component of religion-criticism is unequivocally the apologetic-ideological function of religion. Marx did not want to terminate the (Hegelian) philosophy identified with religion; he rather wanted to carry it out. Marxism is a secularized eschatology and as such is part and parcel of European-Christian thought. Marx inquired after the realization of the civilian-Christian ideas; his dispute was carried out against the background of the same ideas. He did not argue with the ideas, he was rather concerned with they way they have come (or have not come) to fruition; in any case, he was also animated by these same ideas. The Marxist (earthly) realm of freedom is the radicalization of Enlightenment thought of human freedom and equality; and both notions date back to Christianity. Man was created free by God, as the outstanding figure of renaissance Platonism Pico della Mirandola has vividly explained in his

¹ Bertrand Russel discovers quite detailed correspondences between the two (see *A History of Western Philosophy*, London, Allen and Unwin, 1947, p. 383.).

work entitled *De hominis dignitate*; man's dignity lies in the fact that man – in opposition to other creations which have a predetermined place in the order of creation – is endowed with free will regarding his place and fate. Belonging to, and commitment to, the cultural heritage of the Jewish-Christian tradition and its secularized version has been – and still is – a tacit ingredient of the idea of Europe.

V.

The name of Europe as a continent falls into the obscurity of the past. In the 5th century B.C. Herodotus wrote that he did not know why the world was thought to be made up of three parts and that these three continents – Asia, Africa and Europe – bore women names. Such division of the world goes back to ancient times. In Greek mythology, Europe is the daughter of a Phoenician king. Zeus falls in love with her, changes into a bull, takes her to Crete, takes up human shape and begets three sons from her. The rape of Europe became one of the favourite recurrent themes of literary creations and visual art works, starting from the Greeks through the Renaissance and Baroque up to the modern times.

At the end of the 19th century the enhancing crisis of liberal culture created some kind of a European consciousness, European identity in the sense that scholars realized this culture was endangered and was approaching a crisis. The debate on the issue of Europe broke out at the turn of the century with the participation of thinkers such as F. Nietzsche, G. Simmel, Ortega y Gasset, Paul Valéry, E. Husserl, M. Heidegger.¹ The crisis of liberal culture and the trauma of World War I gave rise to new approaches, projects and searches for solutions. Among these we must emphasize Friedrich Naumann's Central-Europe plan that maximally revived the conceptions of idealism and people's rights to autonomy. In Naumann's view, the constrained Germanization of the Central-European nations was definitely damaging, harmful, and useless. He was exemplarily tolerant towards the various nations and ethnicities. He even praised Jews for transmitting and teaching the correct approach to good cooperation in business and work. The Jews and the smaller nations, noticed Naumann, have fought loyally in war and therefore deserve respect. He went as far as suggesting or presuming a kind of a Central-European identity.²

¹ Pim den Boer, "Europe to 1914: The Making of an Idea", in: *The History of the Idea of Europe*, p. 19.

² Peter Bugge, "The Nation Supreme: The Idea of Europe 1914–1945", in: *The History of the Idea of Europe*, p. 92.

The History of the Idea of Europe does not reach ultimately a definite, unitary conclusion. Europe – if it can be defined at all – may be described as something that is "unity in diversity". Europe always appears as the continent that never submitted to any one ruler, as the continent that has never been content with final truths and steadily continued to question, make researches and to debate: Europe remained self-critical, obtaining thus a unique dynamism. Europe's basic paradox is that it does not contain some exclusively European essence.¹

At this point it is worth returning to Gadamer's views. The above presented idea that Europe has never been reunited under the rule of a single ruler or dominated by a single religion or ideology was emphasized in Gadamer's writings in the last two decades. In a lecture held in 1985 – before the political changes –, which was characteristically entitled *Die Vielfalt Europas*, Gadamer reminded: "Only in Europe are such intellectual activities as science, art, religion and philosophy differentiated. Who can tell whether Tsuang-Tse or any other Chinese sage, was a religious man, a savant, a thinker or a poet?"² Gadamer returned to the same thought in a lecture held in the early nineties saying that in fact it is purely arbitrary whether we denominate the conversation between a Chinese sage and his disciple philosophy, religion or poetry.³ He has also equally accentuated Europe's multilinguism in both these lectures. In the former he emphasized the natural languages and the natural language communities according to his hermeneutical perspective, considering the emergence of a universal language undesirable. In the latter he commented critically upon the answer which a responsible director in the East-German provinces gave to the question, "What language should be thought in schools?" The answer sounded: "Nothing's easier – computer language!"⁴

Even if Gadamer has emphatically referred to the characteristically European difference of the intellectual activities, to the autonomy of science, art, religion and philosophy from one another, he nevertheless reminded us in his former lecture that philosophy is closely

¹ *Ibid.*, p. 11.

² H.-G. Gadamer, *Die Vielfalt Europas. Erbe und Zukunft*, Stuttgart, Robert Bosch Stiftung, 1985, p. 14.

³ H.-G. Gadamer, "Europa und die Oikoumene", in: *Europa und die Philosophie*, pp. 67–86., here p. 68. See the reprint in Gadamer, *Hermeneutik im Rückblick. Gesammelte Werke* (hereafter: GW) Bd. 10, Tübingen, Mohr, 1995, pp. 267–284.

⁴ *Die Vielfalt Europas*, p. 30; "Europa und die Oikoumene", in: *Europa und die Philosophie*, pp. 78f.

interconnected with our European civilization. For philosophy, in the widest sense of *theoria*, is a collective term for science as such. Even Newton's famous work, which made him the father of modern physics, even this work had the title *Philosophiae naturalis principia mathematica*, i.e. the mathematical principles of natural philosophy – reminded Gadamer. In our Western culture philosophy was connected to science from the beginning. "This is the novelty that resulted in the unity of Europe", and which, proceeding from the scientific culture that had come into being in Europe, determined in several important respects in its irradiance the situation of world civilization up to this day, said Gadamer in the middle of the eighties.¹

Gadamer's claim that despite any subsequent separation and differentiation, philosophy and culture organically belong together in the process of European culture has a long and honourable tradition. Gadamer's own mentors – Husserl and Heidegger – had also variously formulated this claim. The idea that Europe and philosophy organically belong together, that Europe's exclusive differentiating characteristic is philosophy,² and that therefore Europe's essence is constituted by philosophy, is strongly articulated within the life-work of both thinkers, even if their method of defining philosophy shows characteristic differences from time to time. Both Husserl and Heidegger were inspired by the historical moment. In accordance with the intellectual climate of the interwar period, similarly to the numerous diagnoses of this period, they both expanded on Europe's deepening crisis, and searched for a way out. In a certain way, it is Europe's salvation that is at stake for both of them.

The attempt to return to the origins is generally the sign of a crisis; and it is motivated by the wish to pursue, re-discover the endangered, basically threatened, and disrupted identity. In the *Letter on Humanism* written directly after the World War II, Heidegger states the following: "But the western world is not thought of here just regionally as the Occident, as distinguished from the Orient, not merely as *Europe*, but rather world-historically in terms of its intimacy with the source (of the Western world)."³

¹ *Die Vielfalt Europas*, p. 13.

² See for example "Europa und die Oikoumene", in: *Europa und die Philosophie*, p. 67: "Philosophy was absolutely created in Europe".

³ "Brief über den »Humanismus«", in: M. Heidegger: *Wegmarken, Gesamtausgabe*, Bd. 9, hrsg. F.-W. von Herrmann, Frankfurt/Main: Klostermann, 1976, p. 338.: "Allein auch das Abendland ist nicht regional als Occident im Unterschied zum

That Europe's exclusive distinctive characteristic is philosophy, may be expressed in the fact that *Europe itself can be regarded as a directly philosophical idea*. The typical example here is Husserl, who in his 1935 lecture entitled "Philosophy and the Crisis of European Man" was urged by the experience of progressing crisis to explore the "philosophical-historical idea of European man".¹

It will be useful to quote somewhat longer from Husserl's investigations: "We may ask," Husserl wrote " 'How is the spiritual image [geistige Gestalt] of Europe to be characterized?' This does not mean Europe geographically, [...] as though European man were to be in this way confined to the circle of those who live together in this territory. [...] Clearly the title Europe designates the unity of a spiritual life and a creative activity – with all its aims, interests, cares and troubles, with its plans, its establishments, its institutions. [...] 'The spiritual image of Europe' – what is it? It is exhibiting the philosophical idea immanent in the history of Europe (of spiritual Europe). To put it another way, it is its immanent teleology, which, if we consider mankind in general, manifests itself as a new human epoch emerging and beginning to grow".² "Spiritually Europe has a birthplace. By this I do not mean a geographical place, in some one land [...]. I refer, rather, to a spiritual birthplace in a nation or in certain men or groups of men belonging to this nation. It is the ancient Greek nation in the seventh and sixth centuries B.C. In it there grows up a *new kind of attitude* of individuals toward their environing world. As a consequence, there emerges a completely new type of spiritual structure, rapidly growing into a systematically rounded cultural form that the Greeks called *philosophy*. Correctly translated, in its original sense, this means nothing but universal science, science of the world as a whole, of the universal unity of all beings. [...] In the

Orient gedacht, nicht bloß als *Europa*, sondern weltgeschichtlich aus der Nähe zum Ursprung" (Italics are mine: F.M.I.). (English translation by Miles Groth. http://www.wagner.edu/departments/psychology/filestore2/download/101/MartinHeideggerLETTER_ON_HUMANISM.pdf)

¹ E. Husserl, "Az európai emberiség válsága és a filozófia" (Philosophy and the Crisis of European Mankind), in: Husserl, *Válogatott tanulmányai* (Collected Works), Budapest, Gondolat Publishing House, 1972, p. 323. (All the quotations from this work are taken from Quentin Lauer's English translation. http://www.users.cloud9.net/~bradmcc/husserl_philcris.html)

² E. Husserl, "Az európai emberiség válsága és a filozófia", p. 329.

emergence of philosophy in this sense, a sense, that is, which includes all sciences, I see [...] the original phenomenon of spiritual Europe."¹

Europe's philosophical-historical idea, the idea of the spiritual Europe urged Husserl to probe into the origins of this idea. This he localizes within the new orientation created by the Greeks: philosophy. Philosophy means a theoretical comportment, living for the truth, through which "a new kind of supranational condition could arise".² Two years before Husserl's lecture, Heidegger in his rectorial address had similarly claimed that "[...] the *beginning* of our spiritual-historical existence [...] is the departure, the setting out [Aufbruch], of Greek philosophy. Here, for the first time, Western man [der abendländische Mensch] rises up, from a base in a popular culture [Volkstum] and by means of his language, against the *totality of what is* and questions and comprehends it as the being that it is. All science is philosophy, whether it knows and wills it – or not. All science remains bound to that beginning of philosophy. From it science draws the strength of its essence, assuming that it still remains at all equal to this beginning."³ As we can see, Heidegger, similarly to Husserl, connects philosophy to sciences, tracing philosophy back to the Greeks. (In the latter respect it is plausible to assume the retroaction of Heidegger's thoughts to the old Husserl.)

Beside these basic parallels, some rather significant differences also emerge between Husserl and Heidegger, to which it will not be useless to refer. According to Husserl "the European crisis has its roots in a mistaken rationalism"; he thought that "the form of development given to ratio in the rationalism of the Enlightenment was an aberration", which resulted in "what has become for man an unbearable unclarity regarding

¹ *Ibid.*, p. 332.

² *Ibid.*, p. 351. I attempted to investigate the questions regarding Europe's "spiritual image" against a more detailed historical background in my study entitled "»Die geistige Gestalt Europas« – was ist das?"; see *Von der Idee zum Konvent. Eine interdisziplinäre Betrachtung des europäischen Integrationsprozesses*, hrsg. J. Dieringer, S. Okruch (Andrássy-Schriftenreihe, Bd. 3), Budapest: s. a. [2005], pp. 17–33.

³ "A német egyetem önmegnyilatkozása" (The Self-Assertion of the German University), in: M. Heidegger, *Az idő fogalma. A német egyetem önmegnyilatkozása. A rektorátus* (The Concept of Time. The Self-Assertion of the German University. The Rectorate) 1933/34, Budapest, Kossuth Publishing House, 1992, p. 63. (English translation from the following edition: Gunther Neske and Emil Kettering (eds.), *Martin Heidegger and National Socialism*, New York, Paragon House, 1990. <http://www.eco.utexas.edu/~hmcleave/350kPEEHeideggerSelf-Assertion.pdf>)

his own existence and his infinite tasks". According to Heidegger the aberration, or deviation, had been committed much earlier, by the Greeks. Heidegger grasped this also as a kind of forgetting, but differently from Husserl. It was for him not a self-oblivious rationalism, or the self-oblivion of rationalism, but the forgetting of being: man had forgotten the Being. Husserl had placed his trust in some kind of renewed, some new kind of rationalism, rationalism which underwent a (transcendental phenomenological) self-awareness. However, this could not become a way out for Heidegger. On the contrary: the concepts of ratio and rationalism required a critical re-examination ensuing from their fundamentals. But in spite of this not at all irrelevant difference, there is another common trait relating the two thinkers to each other. Husserl tended to think that his philosophy could only operate against the crisis and in the service of a spiritual rebirth. He envisaged his philosophy "in the form of a science whose scope is universal, wherein an entirely new scientific thinking is established in which every conceivable question, whether of being, of norm, or of so-called 'existence', finds its place."¹ Similarly, Heidegger's own intellectual efforts – despite all his reserve towards the Husserlian rhetoric regarding scientism, intellectual teleology, or rationalism and spirit –, the renewed questioning concerning the meaning of being carried, in his self-understanding, the hope of a solution. According to the old Husserl a philosopher is a clerk responsible for mankind.² Similarly, in the thirties Heidegger talked about the "preservation of the beginning of Western knowledge in the Greek World" and "in keeping with this, the responsibility for the Western world."³ At the same time, contrary to Husserl – and his emphatic, but mainly powerless rhetoric –, Heidegger had few illusions regarding the power of philosophy to influence history, to save or at least to shape Europe.⁴

¹ E. Husserl, "Az európai emberiség válsága és a filozófia", p. 365.

² Cf. *Die Krisis der europäischen Wissenschaften und die transzendentale Phänomenologie*, § 7, *Husserliana*, Bd. VI, hrsg. W. Biemel, Den Haag, Nijhoff, 1954, p. 15.

³ *A rektorátus 1933/34. Tények és gondolatok* (The Rectorate 1933/34. Facts and Thoughts), in: M. Heidegger, *Az idő fogalma. A német egyetem önmegnyilatkozása. The rectorate 1933/34*, p. 83.

⁴ See "Europa und die deutsche Philosophie", p. 33.; *Einführung in die Metaphysik*, Tübingen, Niemeyer, p. 6. On the other hand, Husserl scoured as a genuine missionary "the incredulity in the human mission of the West" ("Az európai emberiség válsága és a filozófia", p. 367.)

VI.

After World War II the debate on Europe settled. The heated discussions of the beginning of the century and of the interwar period had been dominated by the convulsions of European history and by awareness of the crisis. Oswald Spengler dramatically prophesied the decline of the West. For Husserl the alternative was: "The crisis of European existence can end in only one of two ways: in the ruin of a Europe [...], fallen into a barbarian hatred of spirit; *or* in the rebirth of Europe from the spirit of philosophy [...]."¹ Heidegger at the beginning of his lecture held in 1936 in Rome spoke in a similar tone about a "naked either-or": "Europe's salvation or Europe's destruction [Zerstörung]."²

The debate on Europe was re-opened at the beginning of the 1990s. Contrary to the general and dramatic character of the former debate, the renewed discussion was characterized by an encouraging tone and the hope that Europe would soon be unified. This change was due to the favourable historical developments that preceded and made possible the new debate: European division was terminated, the antagonistic political blocks ceased to exist. This time the conditions encouraged optimistic tone and trust in the future

They might have done so, though, in the long run. By contrast, the hopes regarding a unified Europe were soon to be surrounded by an atmosphere of insecurity and perplexity which began to spread. The repeatedly mentioned fact that the unification process was governed by economic-political-judicial factors and that it lacked ideological content had played a significant role in this failure. In his mentioned lecture held in the early eighties Gadamer expressed the hope that "Europe's unity is more than a merely power-political [machtpolitisch] issue". From a contemporary perspective one cannot simply dismiss the concern, according to which the European economic-political processes, within this the developments around the European constitution, might lead to "the despotism of a future world domination disguised in a theory of

¹ "Az európai emberiség válsága és a filozófia", p. 366.

² M. Heidegger: "Europa und die deutsche Philosophie", in: *Europa und die Philosophie*, p. 31. See also "Wege zur Aussprache", in: *Denkerfahrten*, hrsg. H. Heidegger, Frankfurt/Main: Klostermann, 1983, p. 16. ("Rettung des Abendlandes"), pp. 20f. ("drohende Entwurzelung des Abendlandes", "Erneuerung des Grundgefüges abendländischen Seins").

human rights”.¹ Such concern is supported by Kant’s federalist views that reject universal monarchy.²

The unification that has been taking place is in any case far from the characteristics of Christian-German spirituality, which were so important for Hegel. Hegel had acknowledged the claim to “satisfy the finite needs”,³ and as is known, he was among the first thinkers who focussed their attention upon the latest developments of Anglo-Saxon political economy, and made a basic account of them. He even reserved a place apart for it under the name “civil society” in his *Philosophy of Right*. “But this branch,” emphasized Hegel, “concerns the particular; but exactly in the particular there are no immanent boundaries. Here the accumulation of wealth and refinement can become excessive”⁴. The civil society “does not eradicate the inequality between men [...] evolved by nature”, on the contrary, it deepens it more, and “develops it into the inequality of wealth, and moreover to the inequality of intellectual and moral education.”⁵ “If the civil society operates unhindered, then its industry and population is continuously increasing [...]: on the one hand the more and more wealth is accumulated. On the other hand peculiar work becomes more and more isolated and limited, and this results in the increasing dependence and misery of the class attached to this working method”.⁶ In Hegel’s view, all these wrongs should be amended by the state. This state, however, the nation state, becomes nowadays more and more overshadowed by the process of expanding globalization, so that finally, as it seems, it practically “decays.” The eminent role attributed to the state evokes, of course, the totalitarian distortions of the 20th century. This role, together with the importance of the universal perspective of the world spirit – the state being presented as the earthly incarnation of the world spirit –, is apt to question Hegel’s topicality in this respect. Nevertheless, this observation would not do justice to Hegel in the last

¹ Rüdiger Bubner, *Polis und Staat. Grundlinien der Politischen Philosophie*, Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp, 2002, p. 184.

² See above, in the places referred in note 1. p. 208. I have discussed the topic somewhat more in detail in my observations related to R. Bubner’s study quoted in note 1. p. 209.: “Die Verfassung und das Volk Überlegungen im Anschluß an den Aufsatz Rüdiger Bubners” (see *Eine Verfassung für Europa*, hrsg. K. Beckmann, J. Dieringer, U. Hufeld, Tübingen, Mohr Siebeck, 2005, pp. 107–117).

³ Hegel, *Előadások a világtörténet filozófiájáról*, cited edition, 101.

⁴ *Ibid.* See also *Jogfilozófia* (Philosophy of Right), §191.

⁵ *Jogfilozófia*, § 200.

⁶ *Jogfilozófia*, § 242.

resort, since what he did was to call attention to a question which had not been resolved to this very day. Hegel's importance lies rather in the enforcement of the communitarian view (this is carried on in the present-day debates by the so-called communitarian standpoint), in emphasizing the importance of historicism and traditions.

VII.

After this short review, I would like to consider the issue more closely: what does the concept of Europe mean for us; is there something that we might define as a European tradition – for instance, the universalism of natural law, constraint of rational argumentation, human dignity, religious tolerance, participatory or representative democracy –, or were these made to be an European heritage only by euro-centric history of ideas that had begun with the Enlightenment?

Instead of some "substantive" answer, I would rather sketch a consideration that could be called methodologist. European tradition is a reflexive, reflected tradition, it is conscious of itself as a tradition, and thematizes this issue. Considered more closely: the very moment we are asking "is there any tradition that sets a standard for us?" – is there, or is there not? and if there is, which one, and in what sense? –, the simple fact of asking this question testifies to the fact that our relation to the tradition has ceased to be a naïve, matter-of-fact relation; it is no longer unproblematic, unreflected.¹ By simply asking the question, the naïve, thoughtless identification is done away with (or it has always already been done away with).² The discipline mainly concerned with tradition – the essence, vivacity, transmittal of tradition, the connection to or the detachment from it³ –, is called hermeneutics. It is antidogmatic and pluralistic because it asserts that tradition and above all the interpretation

¹ Concerning this question see further details in my study "A megtört tradíció. A hagyomány létmódja idegenség és ismerősség között" (The Broken Tradition. The Condition of Tradition between Familiarity and Unfamiliarity) (*Protestáns Szemle*, LXIII, 2001/2-3, 61–75.).

² "A historical consciousness is inherent in our understanding of Christian tradition, just as in the understanding of the classical Greeks. What binds us to the great Christian-Greek tradition, though this might be a living tradition: is the awareness of otherness – being aware of the fact that we no longer belong to it – that defines us all." (Gadamer: *GW*, Bd. 2, p. 122.).

³ "It may belong to the essence of tradition that it exists only when acquired by someone, however, it is an essential feature of man that he can break and criticize tradition [...]" [*Igazság és módszer* (Truth and Method), transl. Bonyhai Gábor, Budapest, Gondolat, 1984, p. 17.]

of tradition is endless (and at the same time that the interpretation of tradition is of great importance). It is the doctrine or rather the habit of mutual understanding and endless, continuous dialogue. According to hermeneutics there are no interpretational monopolies, hegemonies, and that similar to the way there is no first word, in like manner there is no last one in the infinite series of interpretations as well as discussions.¹ It is an approach, having as a point of departure the self-critical position, according to which the other party may be right.² Suppose we identify the European tradition with any item of the enumeration – universalism of natural law, constraint of rational argumentation, human dignity, etc. – or with any further concepts: we should realize that we do in any case do *interpreting* (or even more: *have always already done interpreting*). We have in one way or another fixed in what sense we understand the notions of the universalism of natural law, the coercion of rational argumentation, and the others. We have to do so by claiming: European tradition is constituted for me by such and such values, and the latter have such and such meaning (here and now, for me).

¹ See Gadamer GW, Bd. 2, p. 478. (= *Igazság és módszer*, p. 388.); GW, Bd. 8, p. 408.

² See Gadamer: GW, Bd. 10, p. 274.: “The art of understanding is above all things the art of paying attention. In addition to this we must be open to the possibility, that the other may be right.” [Die Kunst des Verstehens ist sicher vor allen Dingen die Kunst des Zuhörens. Dazu gehört aber auch noch, daß man offenläßt, ob nicht der Andere recht haben könnte.] Cf. Jean Grondin: *Von Heidegger zu Gadamer. Unterwegs zur Hermeneutik*. Darmstadt: WB, 2001, p. 106.: “The core of his hermeneutics is that the other may be right – emphasized Gadamer in the last few years. According to this, hermeneutics is the art of being able to accept that we are wrong.” [“Die Seele seiner Hermeneutik, hat Hans-Georg Gadamer in den letzten Jahren immer wieder betont, bestehe darin, dass der andere Recht haben könnte. Die Hermeneutik sei gewissermaßen die Kunst, Unrecht haben zu können”]. See Grondin: *Hans-Georg Gadamer. Eine Biographie*, Mohr Siebeck, Tübingen, 1999, 354, 371.; idem, *Einführung in die philosophische Hermeneutik*, Darmstadt: WB, 1991, 160. [in Hungarian: *Bevezetés a filozófiai hermeneutikába* (Introduction to Philosophical Hermeneutics), transl. Nyíró Miklós, Budapest, Osiris, 2002, p. 174.): “The possibility that the other may be right is the soul of Hermeneutics.” – For the particularly hermeneutical disposition “there is no higher principle than being and remaining open for discussion. But this always implies that we acknowledge beforehand that our discussion partner may be right or even superior to us.” (GW, Bd. 2, p. 505.) No dialogue, discussion “is possible if either partner considers himself to be in a superior position”. (GW, Bd. 2, p. 116.) In this feature appears what may be called the democratic comportment of hermeneutics *par excellence*.

“The *humanist tradition* is the tradition that we must turn back to”,¹ writes Gadamer, and humanism and its different forms – Antique, Renaissance, Modern and Postmodern –, and in addition to this, the ideals of education, civilization, and edification (*Bildung*) and their configurations may be claimed to form the basis of the hermeneutical *tradition*. (This statement can also be assumed to be a “weak substantive” answer.) For what is at issue for interpretation, or for the *tradition* of interpretation, is that in addition to extending our knowledge, we also perform an act of self-interpretation, whereby we ourselves undergo a change and become different. Without this character European tradition, and along with it art and its role in human life, would sink into a not necessarily barbarian, uncouth tradition, but anyway into a tradition lacking culture. Without this the community of scholars spanning over nations and ages, Bayle’s *République des Lettres* and its interpreting successors and late descendants would similarly not obtain their rights. And this would be, as Richard Rorty expressed it in his influential work, “the termination of discussion”, “resulting from this, the freezing of culture” and finally “man’s dehumanization”²

We had better not have illusions, anyway. And it is no need for us to use great words either. If we look at the above enumerated values of European tradition – the universalism of natural law, coercion of rational argumentation, human dignity, etc. –, and amplifying this list we add to it the tradition of interpretation, and then, wanting to cast an eye upon reality, we open up the newspaper in order to find out from it what is the essence of Europe, of the European Union, we find the headline of the leading article in the foreign policy column saying: “*EU: Fight for the Money*”. This may have a sobering effect on us.³ – From this article we can find out for instance, that an “important internal fight is going on between and around the members of the German-French-British ‘leading trio’ [...]: when these three agree, the other member states have nothing to do.” – Well, yes, we may recall: in the ancient Roman Empire also there were wealthier and poorer provinces. And of course, in the centre of the empire the rich had a greater influence.

Viewed from this perspective of live reality, all the differences among universalists of natural law, rational argumentators, the adepts of human dignity or the members of the community of interpreters are being

¹ *Igazság és módszer*, p. 36.

² R. Rorty, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*. Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1979, p. 377.

³ *Népszabadság*, 2003, July 30, p. 3.

put in their true light and thereby simultaneously pushed into the background—they fade simply away in the perspective of what there is.