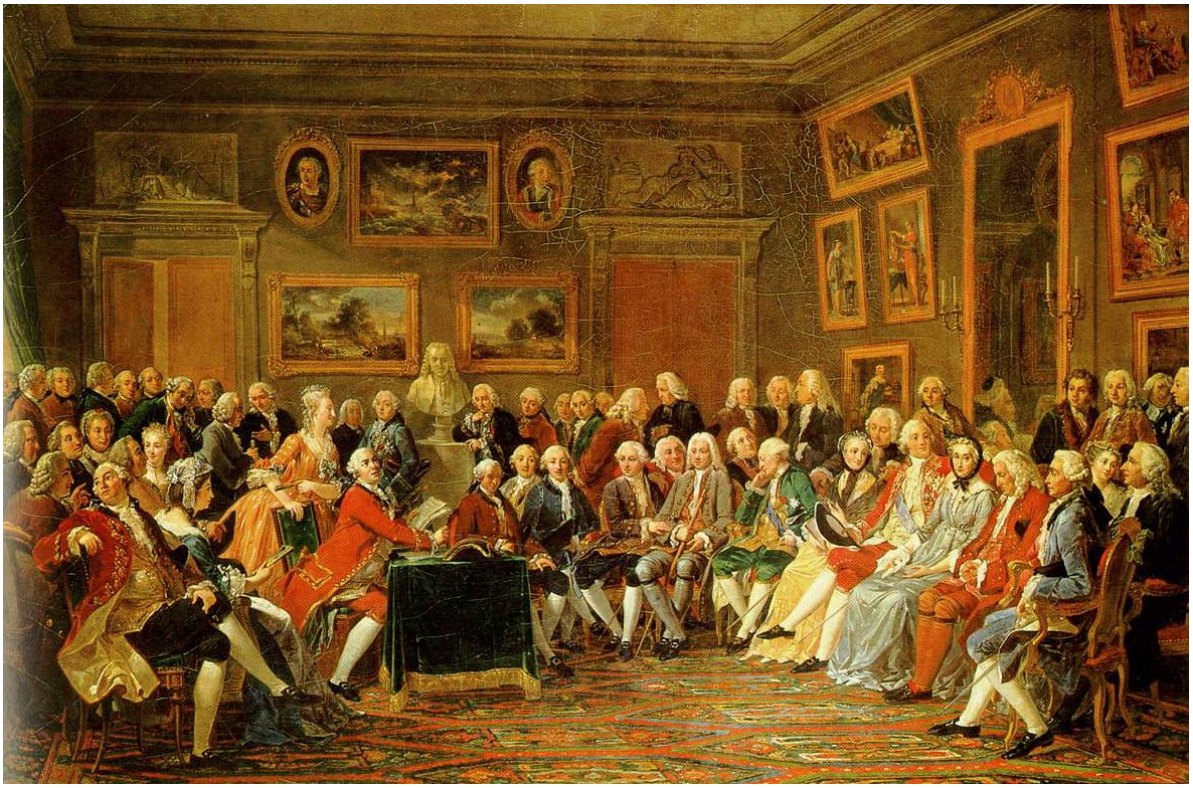
HISTORY AND VALUES

The transformation of European values

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Quadre del saló de madame Geoffrin, a França, l'any 1812. Font: imatge de domini públic pintada per Charles Gabriel Lemonnier

What is ‘Europe’? Europe is a continent like any other, but it does not know it. Nevertheless, it is a continent different from the others. But, again, it doesn’t know it. Because sometimes it thinks it is the center of the world, right at the very heart of the mapa mundi. And, at other times, Europe does not know or want to know where it is on the map, whether due to ignorance or self-disdain.

The challenge now is for the European Union to progress towards unity whilst, at the same time, guaranteeing the diversity of its nations and cultures. And its citizens should also see it that way, without having to think that the much-trumpeted ‘diversity’ is just for the elites, who enjoy it at work and at play.

The formation of European values

We use the word ‘values’ to describe those beliefs or ideal mental images used to maintain social customs or habits of interest to us or to introduce new ones. If some habits or customs have become obsolete, the values that surrounded and sustained them will also fade away. This could happen in Europe’s future.

Values tend to be studied on the small or medium scale, no more. Analyzing them on a continental or planetary scale is not free from imprecision or even error. To do so, we need to be reminded, first of all, of a few key features of the history of the concept of Europe and to see whether we have any basis (more than merely speculative, at least) for talking about inherently ‘European’ values.

Paradoxically, the idea of Europe grows as divisions within the continent increase, and as there is a degree of awareness of the latter. First came the practical division, in 314, of the Roman Empire into East and West. This division, which would give rise to Constantinople, the ‘New Rome’, arose for internal reasons within the Empire, something that would not be the case with the second split in 768, with Charlemagne’s Germanic Holy Roman Empire and its increasing confrontation with Islam, which was approaching from the Mediterranean and which led to a separation between the Carolingian North and the Muslim South.

The third division arose out of the schism between East and West in the Christian Church in 1054. A cause —internal this time— that would create a dividing line between the West, with its Latin rite, and the East, with its Greek one. But the fourth division, internal once again, turned out to be the greatest, taking place within the Western Church itself in 1517, between the Protestant North, followers of Luther, and the Catholic South. For many Christians, this was a blow comparable only to that suffered by the same religion back in 314, when the Roman Empire was divided, and they felt that the end of the world was upon them. In the sixteenth century, the Lutherans were regarded, despite the obvious differences, much as the jihadists are viewed (and condemned) today. A real shock to the system that just happened to coincide with the Turks’ expansion across the Mediterranean. Finally, the very last internal division in Europe, one that will surely have contributed to its self-awareness, took place in 1945 after the defeat of the Nazis, between the capitalist West and the communist East.

Each division of Europe bolstered the idea that the different parts had of themselves and, indirectly, due to this very division, the idea of Europe itself. An idea that would begin forming after the collapse of the Western Roman Empire in 476 and at the end of the Eastern Empire in 1453, with the fall of Constantinople to the Ottomans. The former crisis led emperor Justinian to restore the old empire from Byzantium, the *renovatio imperii romanorum*, and to codify all existing Roman law into the *Corpus Iuris Civilis*. The latter crisis of the Empire, in the fifteenth century, led to the Humanist movement and the imitation of the Classical Greco-Roman world, something that still reverberates in the modern idea of Europe. However, we should not forget, in the formation of this idea, the

leading role-played by the wish for imperial recovery and, associated with this, by the strength of Christianity as a political tool. Let us take a closer look at the issue.

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Constantine the Great's restoration of imperial unity in 324, from the former Byzantium, was accompanied by a historical milestone: the recognition of Christianity, which would later become the official religion, in 380, under Theodosius. The *Vulgata*, or Latin Bible, would begin to be translated two years later in Rome by Saint Jerome, who deserves to be regarded as another 'Father of Europe' because of the fusing, in this key work for Europeans, the wisdom of the ancient Jews, the logic and concepts of the Greeks and the literary art of Cicero. The next combination of imperial recovery and Christianity was to be found in 527 in Justinian, the last Latin-speaking emperor and the first to proclaim that the Empire's unity was conditional on unity of faith and orthodoxy.

A renovation of empire and religion would come in 768 at the hands of Charlemagne, called 'the Father of Europe'. His resistance against the Muslim world and rivalry with Byzantium would bolster internal unity, focusing on Christian faith and Latin culture, with this language being decreed the continent's leading *lingua franca*. A similar set of circumstances would not again be witnessed until 1516 under Charles V, discoverer of the 'New World', whose *Monarchia universalis* was based, like that of Charlemagne, on neo-imperial ambitions and Catholic unity, triggered this time both from outside, due to the Turkish expansion, and from within, due to the Protestant threat. And Europe would see one more amalgam of Empire and Church with the defeat of Napoleon and the meeting of the victorious powers in 1815, in Vienna, to draw up the new map of the continent and return to the Ancien Régime: the Europe of the 'Restoration'.

How many restorations has Europe not had since that of Constantine the Great? European values are closely linked to its culture, and the latter to its ecclesiastical and imperial history, which transmits and transforms the values of the Jewish and Greco-Roman worlds. There is a pre-Europe up until Charlemagne: that of the idea of *Imperium* as its cornerstone. Then, there is a proto-Europe, first under the notion of *Christianitas*, from the First Crusade until the fifteenth century, that of Humanism.

At the Council of Constance, in that same century, the parties discussed the tacit premise that 'Europe and Christianity are the same thing', as noted in its Acts (III). Much earlier, in the eleventh century, Pope Gregory VII said of the Crusades: 'In the whole of Earth, where once Augustus ruled, now rules Christ'. We are speaking of a proto-Europe that would later continue under the banner of Occidens, from the voyages of Columbus until the Treaty of Westphalia in 1648, which would provide the basis for the current map of Europe. Until the

discovery of America, ‘the West’ was a part of Europe but, from that day on, Europe has been a part of the West, beginning to acquire, with the new mapa mundi, a certain notion of itself.

However, Europe would not consider itself ‘Europe’, a cultural unit, until the eighteenth century, with the crises of *Latinitas* and *Religio* —which had survived as paradigms of the Western European Empire— and due to the appearance of the Enlightenment, which would identify Europe with cosmopolitan values such as peace, freedom and the progress of the sciences. Starting with the ‘Century of Light’, *Europeitas* would be based on secular and democratic rather than religious and imperial values. Rousseau would even postulate a ‘République Européenne’.

The so-called ‘Europeanism’ would nail this down in 1957, with the Treaties of Rome, which established commercial interests and good neighborliness between liberal democracies as the reasons underpinning the new European Union.

European values

In 2004, European Union leaders approved a draft Constitution that would be rejected by the citizens of some of its Member States.

Did Europeans not feel identified with this Constitution’s values? Article I-2 states that ‘the Union is founded on the values of respect for human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law and respect for human rights, including the rights of persons belonging to minorities’. A rallying cry that is difficult to belittle.

It is true that, throughout European history, the Empire became both united and divided. Just as it is true that the Church both helped unify and represented a source of division. In the World Wars of the twentieth century, Christian fought to the death against fellow-Christian. Nevertheless, Europe does have a legacy, a repository of common values built and rebuilt over the course of nearly two thousand years of history. Europe is a «master symbol» like no other. What greater experience or test of the validity of European and Europeans’ values could there be than that of approving a single Magna Carta for the entire continent? Let us not forget that Rome was Greek and that Christianity appropriated the Jewish world. The Church was Roman. Humanism was Greek. And the Enlightenment and modernity sought to be cosmopolitan. Why fear European unity? Was it not open enough to the world, in itself a sign of the world?

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There is a degree of correlation between Europe's large regions and its languages, culture, religion, and politics. There is an individualist and a communitarian Europe, a richer one, and a poorer one. One could talk of four great European geo-cultural spaces: the Franco-German, the Central European, the Mediterranean and the Slavic. Nevertheless, we make the division, be it North/South or East/West, it is undeniable that the parts making up Europe in the twenty-first century have a lot in common. What is most common is the mutual relationship between the continent's cultures and people. And also with those beyond its borders: the Judeo-Christian world, Islam and the influence of North America. So, what we regard as most 'ours', or original, in each European tradition is due, in part, to the appropriation of foreign traditions and the renewal of our own with new catalysts: from the Greek world to the Slavic one, including Rome and the Germanic world. So it is that in every sphere of European language and life, we can find the imprint of other spheres and the experience of something old as something new, of every start as a restart.

Europe has subjected other peoples, persecuted those who think different and caused terrible wars. However, oppression, intolerance, and war are not values; indeed, with values, these calamities of human origin could have been prevented. The history of Europe itself provides examples of some behavioral principles that have contributed to this prevention: the distinction between faith and reason, the separation between civil and religious powers, the difference between citizenship and ethnicity, and the clash between science and superstition. Europe has also been the wellspring of universal ideals such as democracy, civility, rationality, freedom, equality, tolerance, humanism, development, human dignity, human rights, and material well-being.

Other originally European ideas are, perhaps, less universal: technological progress, the secular State, nationality, personal independence, social equality, the unconditional right to life, freedom of expression and secular humanism. However, there are also values that, whilst Europe has made them its own, are not exclusively European in origin, being either 'co-originating' or acquired, such as truth, knowledge, wisdom, spirituality, civilization, justice, happiness, beauty, health, peace, community and compassion.

Specifically European values

If European values, whether originating from the continent or not, are shareable and non-exclusive, can there be anything specific or unique about them? And isn't the label 'European' arbitrary? Shouldn't we simply call them 'universal'?

One should perhaps admit, from the very beginning, the logic of these two questions, or even definitely admit it, if we admit that, despite everything, Europe is a continent unlike others and if we reject the alternative of labeling its values 'Western', which would be even more controversial.

Nevertheless, there are some values that are 'specifically' European. Values that cannot be shared by other peoples or that, for whatever reason, have not been. One of these is the value of *Europe* itself. The other, the *European way of possessing values*.

I) Europe as a value. Europe as a value consists of at least three things, none of which are (by the way) incompatible with a non-European vision. Firstly, it represents the possibility of a supra-national project that is beginning to turn into a reality. Something truly historic is being done; the preliminary testing of cosmopolitan governance and coexistence. At the same time, Europe, as a value, is the representation of a democratic ideal based on the principles of liberty, equality, the rule of law, the division of powers and political pluralism. And, thirdly, Europe as a value is making those values that best characterize Europe's moral and political inheritance and that make it most stand out from other regions of the world present and binding.

In summary form, these values would be: 1) the Rational Truth, a contribution from the Hellenic world; 2) Civility, or the sum of Civil Law and Citizenship, the legacy of the Roman world; 3) Human Dignity, springing from the Judeo-Christian tradition; and 4) Critical Thought, whose origins lie in secular Humanism and in the Enlightenment. It is not difficult to see that there is one value that runs through all four of these, and that is nothing less than their condition of possibility: the value of freedom.

Europe as value would be inconceivable without the ideal and imperative of freedom. It is a desideratum, whose source can be found in the very history of Europe, and its best moral and political legacy. It is not a desideratum existing outside of time or space, or an arbitrary one. It can, therefore, be said that the duties of Europeans stem from the compulsory remembrance of this European legacy. It is perhaps our most important duty as Europeans.

II) The European way of holding or having values. A way of conceiving of them, and of trying to make them fit, which also makes European values different. We are very slowly evolving from state-based nationalisms to supra-nationality. But there is also a risk of descending, down the stairs, from acceptable Europeanism to revulsive Eurocentrism. Since each of the values of Europeans entails the risk of its opposite. This we know, and because some fear it and others prefer to ignore it, the formula this European way of holding values gives way to is that of a necessary commitment to the values. It must be acknowledged that our relationship with these values is neither passive nor routine. We cannot even allow it to be trusting. It is an alert and committed relationship, which must remain active.

What is most specific, then, about European values does not stem from the specificity of their content (which is by now, in fact, universal), but rather in the way in which Europeans conceive of and commit to our values. We are keenly aware and have been warned of their fragility and the risk of them turning into their opposite. Each value encapsulates its opposite as origin, risk and possible fate. So, we have the right to ideal values, but also the duty not to be naïve or feel we possess an innocent or refined soul. We acknowledge that European values can be altered, with the risk of them becoming exchangeable, if we do not hold the present and take good care of them: they can turn into their antithesis. They are neither misleading nor even less ambivalent values, but are always teetering on the edge of falling into ambiguity if enough is not done to prevent the risk of them becoming their alternate. The European singularity is a paradox.

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Europe's history and present teach us that European ideals come from clashing and debating with their opponents; that they arise from amongst these opponents and could turn into them. So, if we say 'freedom', we cannot ignore the fact that its genesis is linked with tyranny, or with colonialism, and with their subsequent rejection. If we say 'tolerance', we also have to think of the shadow of intolerance. Or if we say Europeanism, we cannot ignore Eurocentrism.

Europe as a community of cultures

The building of the European Union is a process. The pursuit or otherwise of values have an impact on the cycles of expansion or contraction of this process. And it is inevitable that this is the case. To believe that European integration is political and has no need for cultural ties is not just a cliché: it is a mistake for integration itself.

However, needing to have a European awareness and to progress in European values, which are at the same time universal, does not mean that we must believe in a single and homogenous 'European cultural identity'. If we did, we would reproduce on a global scale that which drives us apart and pits the national and local scales against one another: identifying political identity with cultural identity and identifying the latter with an identity that is primordial in nature. This is, then, the peril of ethnicity predominating over civility; of ethno-territorial politics winning out over civil-democratic politics. And this is something we are currently seeing in the nationalistic turning in on oneself and the xenophobic movements of some European countries. In the image of cultural inhospitality sometimes conveyed by the continent.

Nevertheless, European values will help us wipe the slate clean of all of that because we haven't given up on Europe. It would be sad, as Europeans, to think that being European was just, as Kundera put it in *L'art du roman* 'feeling nostalgia for Europe'. However, we must, at the same time, be on the alert against Eurocentrism. The community of cultures that undeniably exists in Europe does not justify or surely make desirable any form of unequivocal or homogenous identity. That would mean we have understood nothing of the polyphony of voices issuing from the great choir of Europe.



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