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Europe in the face of the Other

ABSTRACT

The following considerations ask for an ideal Europe, they raise the question of how a continent positions itself to the challenge of the foreigner. The range of possible answers is conceivably wide; and this forces a detour via social-theoretical reflection. There is an ethical foundation of the political, which is abstract and imprecise, but at the same time remains indispensable. The political is the category conceived by Hannah Arendt and other political thinkers to enable resistance to concrete politics permeated by power (1). Another social concept should be clarified: cosmopolitanism. In an ideal world, cosmopolitan values are a prerequisite for the interaction of people of different origins. Could we imagine a cosmopolitan Europe that overcomes all scepticism and will not turn out to be an illusion? (2) On the basis of this guiding distinction, one can question the current political ethics and concretely examine the resource of solidarity: is it a substance that always appears limited, inadequate, deficient - or is it obvious to regard solidarity as a construction immanent in law? (3) Finally, it must be a question of "regaining" a perspective in which solidarity would be understood as self-evidence of the social (4-5).

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Introductory remarks

What does Europe stand for? It is a question that cannot be answered lightly. We should take a closer look and become explicit: what kind of Europe are you talking about? The old Europe that lit the lights of the Enlightenment? About the "ancien regime" in the broadest sense, which had risen above the peoples and subjects with all its force? About the present Europe, which has formed itself as a unity, with factual ties and insecure alliances? Which Europe? The question is not only about the relationship between past and present, but also about the problem of identity. In order to obtain an image of oneself, one must make distinctions; a figure must step against a background. Unfortunately, this figure is currently not only blurred, but polarizing. It threatens to be crushed between the opposites. On the one hand, Europe resembles a wishful thinking, a promised land. It is considered a haven of peace and prosperity, a place where people like to stay. On the other hand, there would be a Europe that would fit into a seemingly unstoppable development: An image of Europe that is needed as a vehicle for the hegemonic policies that are currently keeping the world on its toes. If we ask about Europe, then we would be forced to take a stand and take sides at a time when the uncertainties have allegedly become as great as is often claimed.

On the other hand, there is probably another way to address the issue. Europe learns something about its identity when it becomes aware of the existence of strangers and others. It is not the retrospective of the history, but the face of the other that invites us to form a picture of ourselves. For this image theory is needed, but it does not hurt to listen to some voices that approach the theme of Europe from a foreign point of view.

A survey of writers helps a continent to learn something about itself. When asked what the "ingredients" would be for Europe, the answers were pleasingly affirmative. Europe is first and foremost a geographical space, a rich, dazzling, impressive space. A space whose vastness can be excellently appreciated by using the vast railway network that unites the continent. Jaroslav Rudis writes about the most beautiful way to get to know Europe: "My Europe? These are the railway tracks, switches, tunnels, bridges, locomotives, trains, stations, platforms, station restaurants. Even as a child I was fascinated and overwhelmed by the huge European railway network. We can get off anywhere, it is beautiful everywhere, said an older man to me in the train between Munich and Vienna. He was right. Everything is so picturesquely beautiful. But also everything so sadly beautiful. Because even if you love trains so much, you must not forget the terrible role of the railway in times of war and annihilation"¹.

Jaroslav Rudis, born in Turnov, Czechoslovakia, speaks of Europe at close quarters. Not Europe from the height of the eagle, which can perhaps only see the highlights and summits, the cultural greatness. It is the writer who recognizes Europe as a great contradiction which can be recognized when one approaches it: beauty and horror, diversity in space and abysses in historical depth. The answers that writers give to the question about Europe are therefore both a warning and a hymn, a declaration of love. Something strange remains about the idea of Europe. Culture and history, the beauty and depth of space, the peace of the present and the wars of the past, great works and past outbreaks of violence do not create a harmonious picture. Something eludes understanding, something remains alien.

This brings the reflection to a critical point. Europe can learn more about itself when it approaches the foreign. In the concrete encounter with strangers who are exposed to a situation of extreme defencelessness, existential questions are raised - questions about what is socially, politically and morally necessary.

This topic will be dealt with in the following reflection, "Europe in the face of Others". However, the title raises expectations that cannot be fulfilled in the following. It does not search for the economic area of Europe, nor does it clarify the complex political interplay of parts and the whole. The question whether Europe is or can be a power that can guarantee market and trade, participation and order, will remain unanswered. The big issues: Health, education, technology, social market economy and state regulation – these are genuine topics of European policy that appear in other contexts. Likewise, one cannot expect a finished concept on how to deal with the worldwide waves of migration, i.e. which models of political ethics would be appropriate for these challenges². A "finished" model that recognizes, for example, a preference for utilitarian or individual legal preferences or that reduces itself to communitarian ideals would be inappropriate to the following reading³.

The following considerations are based on different assumptions. They are in the context of a responsive philosophy and in the tradition of phenomenology. The conditions of this perspective include insights into the responsiveness between the own and the foreign. Put simply, there is more than one answer to the questions asked by others. The demands made on Europe from outside lead to linguistic disputes that are conducted in the anteroom of concrete politics. They include detours where there is the possibility of hearing claims as well as ignoring them and looking the other way⁴.

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What this is about could be expressed in the following. Europe is not a pure wishful thinking, but a figure of fulfilment. The following considerations should not be based on a political Europe, but on an ideal Europe, and should once again raise the question of how a continent positions itself to the challenge of the foreigner. The range of possible answers is conceivably wide; and this forces a detour via social-theoretical reflection. The following terms are clarified in the introduction, which often remain vaguely in the background: there is an ethical foundation of the political, which is abstract and imprecise, but at the same time remains indispensable. The political is the category conceived by Hannah Arendt and other political thinkers to enable resistance to concrete politics permeated by power (1). Another social concept should be clarified: cosmopolitanism. In an ideal world, cosmopolitan values are a prerequisite for the interaction of people of different origins. Could we imagine a cosmopolitan Europe that overcomes all scepticism and will not turn out to be an illusion? (2) On the basis of this guiding distinction, one can question the current political ethics and concretely examine the resource of solidarity: is it a substance that always appears limited, inadequate, deficient – or is it obvious to regard solidarity as a construction immanent in law? (3) Finally, it must be a question of "regaining" a perspective in which solidarity would be understood as self-evidence of the social (4-6).

The political-ethical relationship between power and society

When we speak of strangers or others approaching Europe, there is already a misunderstanding in this way of speaking. The same applies to the attempt to take linguistic control of this encounter. The *idealistic political* enters into a tension with the *real political*. What this distinction means becomes clear when we take a closer look at the tradition of political philosophy.

To act politically means to act according to a polis. The idea of common affairs is deeply ingrained in the basic beliefs of Europe. It has meant politicisation between free and equal citizens since ancient times. In common action ideals are produced, but sooner or later the powerful, concrete policy is carried out. Ambivalence is evident when we look at the indissolubility of the two areas. The political describes an ideal that is without a place and anomic, it describes the moment in which people meet and "become" political, a moment that can be found in the work of Aristotle and was described in modern times above all by Hannah Arendt⁵. But this moment of the political is fragile. At the moment of its appearance, coercion and violence emerge. The common practice turns into political provisions. The political, which describes something like an ideal and a norm, is broken by the legitimation of rule.

It is an older distinction that has retained its validity. It helps to recognize what remains politically virulent and imperfect. And it is necessary to remind the concrete politics of power of its forgotten yardstick. We cannot, of course, reduce the political to the ethical. But there are normative-ethical standards by which the political is reflected. The persuasiveness of the normative standard remains vital: Hannah Arendt spoke of the activities of self-preservation that remained separate from the realm of freedom. On the one hand there was the realm of necessity, the Greek *oikos*. Here politic is shaped by the constraints of economy and rule. On the other hand, we (still) recognize the idea of the polis, a figure from the realm of freedom. When citizens gather in spaces and seek a common answer to the most pressing questions of their community, this ideal comes close. This common practice is fragile, as Hannah Arendt knew. The free practice of the many always disintegrates – historically speaking – as soon as politic begins its activity of control. The emphasis on acting together vanishes as soon as political provisions come into force.



Hannah Arendt (1933). Source: Wikimedia Common

The moment of ethically qualified cooperation has always been a fleeting event, an exception. As soon as the effective realization of the purposes begins, the public space is limited. The potential of joint action is subordinated to the constraints of political control.

It is obvious to transfer this sceptic experience to the present. The theme of *Europe and the Other* falls apart into different areas of normative and factual politics. From an ethical point of view, it is actually about "caring" for people who are driven by the conditions of violence. The political situation, on the other hand, seems to be permeated by discourses about migration panic, fears, resentments. The ethical motif of encountering the other is suffocated by a political mechanic. And in this respect one could once again concretely name the goal of the following considerations: how is it possible to look at the relationship "Europe and the Other" with different eyes? How could we achieve a renaissance of the political in which the economy does not rule, but in which the ethical quality of joint action is rediscovered?

The answers must first remain vague, because recent experiences have brought to light the darker sides of the political, if not its abysses. Initially, there is no reason for greater optimism. Europe's actual overarching theme seems to be fear of others. Zygmunt Baumann spoke of "strangers at our door" on behalf of many. In German the chosen title was *Die Angst vor den Anderen*.⁶ As one suspects, it's about the use and abuse of migration panic. Politically and publicly the fact of the migration movement is perceived as a crisis. The images that are talked about give the moment of crisis its drama: a Europe that is overwhelmed, that is doomed to destruction. A Europe that resembles a battlefield of moods and opinion-making. It occupies people's hearts and minds, whether you like it or not. It is about the struggle: against the sovereignty of interpretation, against moral panic, but also against the simple feeling of being overwhelmed. Seen in this light, rational politics has long since asserted itself against its forgotten part of politically qualified cooperation.

Rational policy is the dominant policy, power-conscious, guided by interests, assertive. It is not a new phenomenon, but a part of the history of violence. If you widen the historical objective, you can see gaps and distances between societies; you can see migratory movements that are perceived as flows. But this way of "flowing" is an ordinary aspect of human history. Since the beginning of human culture, certain groups have been "moved" to flee violence, to ensure their own survival, to improve their own situation. In modern times, these quasi "natural" movements have dramatized themselves because the political world of states is known to always exist in an imbalance. Figures rise when inequality increases, when a gap develops, or when, cynically speaking, people on the opposite side are confronted with their supposed superfluosity. One can statistically prove the extent of this inequality⁷. But the question remains: which "reality" characterizes political modernity: a scenario of denationalisation in which spaces of violence can grow, or an optimistic scenario in which the global level of prosperity is raised in the long run?⁸

The decisive question to be pursued here, however, is the perception of the Other, which is always a question of the self-perception of European culture. The challenge lies in the concrete statement on the factuality of the foreign. It is about something other than overcoming problems, but about deeper sentiments that refer to something seemingly unmanageable and disturbing. How to deal with it is also a question of culture in the broadest sense. And the first question to be asked here is: which "culture" can

be found in Europe, a culture of serenity, of generosity, a cosmopolitan culture or rather a culture driven by fear?

Cultural ups and downs

European identity can be recognized by how it defines itself in relation to the Other. On the one hand, this idea is comprehensible and politically virulent. However, it touches various levels that go beyond what we generally think we know about the Other. If it is true that Europe's self-image can be determined in relation to the Other, who approaches us as a stranger, then this is only part of a much larger phenomenon. Europe has multi-layered and changeable references to something "different". The more precisely we can define this impersonal "Difference", the more clearly Europe's relationship to itself becomes apparent.

Europe and the world – this division seems anachronistic. It is subject to apparently older labels and terms that have become obsolete. It obviously gives priority to one's own by putting it first and anything else secondary. It is probably a contradiction that is more than just an annoying evil that will be eliminated by universalistic flights of fancy. *Europe and the other parts*, *Europe and the rest of the world*, *Europe and the whole* – in these formulas we see the coordinates of a European world view. Its elements and basic ideas are to be seen, the criticism of Eurocentrism has lost nothing of its value. Of course, the world does not remain the same. Today it is as far away as conceivable from that world of the late 18th century, in which idealistic poets could worry about the morally progressive world events. In his universal historical writings Friedrich Schiller spoke of wars that had to be waged in order to finally bring Europe to the principle of peace "which was granted only to states and citizens"⁹. With Goethe, he saw himself exposed to a stream of history in which the uneven periods were heading towards an overall culture, and thus naturally presupposed a Columbus who discovered America and a Vasco de Gama who circumnavigated the tip of Africa. In this picture, Europe owed its gratitude to those tireless pioneers, thought leaders, and even the enthusiastic pilgrims who were "in conflict with Eastern penetration"¹⁰. But these are insinuations of a different time, world views that we will not win back, nor should wish back. The gestures of superiority were deeply rooted in the older ideal of Europe; there was no room for alterity, the foreign and the non-identical. This criticism of the Eurocentric self-image has been articulated so often that it does not need to be repeated here.

It is another basic idea that deserves attention. It is the emphasis of the idea of a humanity that spreads and unfolds from a certain space. This concept of humanity is associated with a concept of history that had a speculative and universalist character. How much of this emphasis can be transferred to the present? Nobody wants to revive the older convictions that spoke the word to a unified historical subject, nobody wants to revive man as the autocratic creator of the world. But one should not say goodbye completely to the normative basic idea: that the intentions of the many could unite to an overall will. Could the contingent actions result in a planned, conscious shaping of history - with all the reservations and doubts that are appropriate in view of the mortgages of the philosophy of history?

Europe and the other – in this constellation there is a philosophical task of history. The older critique of history wanted to break up historical continuity; it wanted to emphasize the other by breaking up with the past. These motives stand in a time of critical philosophy, which today would have to be evaluated under different circumstances. But their basic impulse has lost none of its force. It turns against the

natural totality and shows the scope of human action. This is a European issue, perhaps because the original idealistic dreams and critical thoughts began here.

To take up once again the concept of culture, one could ask: in which "cultural" constitution is Europe at present? How far is one from an ideal that could be described as cosmopolitan, generous, appreciative? And beyond that: how close is this culture to the state of cultural decline claimed by parts of the intelligentsia?

In the following, let us base our analysis on a Nietzschean diagnosis (which consciously employs its playful tone): Nietzsche claimed, as is well known, that one could recognize the decline of a culture by the fact that a complete standstill in the world would have occurred without God¹¹. In a culture that no longer represents anything and stands for nothing, the well-being of everyone increases - as does that state of spiritual enslavement. The world of the last men is decadent; in other words, history in the empathic sense is lacking. It is a highly ambivalent diagnosis if one wants to translate it into the present. The counter-movements seem highly plausible: one longs for simplicity and comfort, one conjures up a rhetoric of the approaching catastrophe or one invents religions that cover the lack of salvation and wholeness. One could call it "spiritual self-service"¹².

But the reproach to the "West" is even more far-reaching. Decadence is spreading: the welfare state is stifling all autonomy and maturity. The idolatry of the social leads to the equality of unfree people. In the older societies the concern for the salvation of souls dominated the heads of people, but in the world of the last human being a housing of bondage is created, a technical state in which pets live instead of people.

This criticism is Nietzschean and therefore always indecent. As a serious criticism, however, it must be deepened if one is not to be satisfied with the diagnosis of a definitive posthistoire. The keyword is: decline. Perhaps this does not concern culture as a whole, but above all and first of all the modern state.

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The state is an older, obsolete category, says modern sociology. It had ups and downs and has been overtaken in the present by far larger forces: by supranational institutions, global markets, by the privatization of education and the military. Because the older state, "invented" in Europe, loses its original meaning, it no longer seems sovereign. There are many signs that the loss of sovereignty of the state is leading to extreme counter-movements: for some time there has been talk of fortress Europe; on the island of Britain the drawbridges are being pulled up in tortuous processes; time and again governments are struggling with the phenomenon of immigration, which they perceive as a threat. All this is connected in a complex, and then again very simple way with the strengthening of national conservative parties and diffuse right-wing forces.

Political theory is, of course, concerned with the connection between nationalistic containment and theatrical staging. The matter is due to a paradox: the modern states "recognize" that they are losing their decision-making sovereignty – and they try to conceal this loss through every conceivable effort¹³. This policy, writes Wendy Brown, for example, is based on efficiency and violence. Nation states wall themselves in by erecting physical fences, borders and walls. They do this apparently knowing that physical borders are the weakest response to global migration in the 21st century. Violence is therefore being forced: Police and surveillance techniques have long since acquired the reputation of being indispensable¹⁴.

Two levels of politics can be distinguished with a critical eye: on the one hand, the subtle means to bring others and strangers under control or to gather them in certain areas of society have been refined in the modern state. But at the level of official politics, it is a spectacle to serve the interests of the public. This politics includes the drama of danger and redemption, power and possibility, manipulations of space

and time¹⁵. In this play the state has all the strings in the hand and it rules with the omnipotence that the creator of Leviathan had intended for it. This state acts like a ruler of bygone times: it determines the framework for political action and at the same time determines the incentives via political affects. As a ruler he does not let this power be torn from his hands, therefore he has walls erected whose function and legitimacy are not comprehensible. As a director, he stages the drama of the politics of identity in order to prove his political sovereignty.

At this point the necessity of theoretical distinctions becomes plausible. The objects that should be criticized are multi-layered. It is a question of dealing with political developments that are more than alarming. It is also about the conditions of modern statehood, which, as shown, are characterized by subtle strategies of power. And at the same time it is about the scope of morality in a political world. But these margins of manoeuvre are only opened up when criticism remains open to contradictions and if it can connect the critique of power with the perception of the other in a productive way.

The Recovering of the Social – The Recovering of Solidarity

In view of the many crises that are currently being proclaimed, the question arises of how to regain the social. More specifically, it is the difficult question of solidarity with others, with strangers and with those in need of protection. From a legal theory point of view, the matter seems clear: people who are fleeing, who have been exposed to violence, need subsidiary protection. This form of involving the other is, in fact, part of the legal concept of the modern state. Fundamental rights have an internal cosmopolitan content. In other words, civil rights push for human rights inclusion for the sake of their own legal existence¹⁶.

But the relationship between Europe and the other is not thus fully understood. For one thing it must be about the political question of how a perspective of social justice can be regained. On the other hand it is also about the philosophical question of how the social conditions under which we meet and interact with one another can be adequately described. The thesis that the social must be regained sums up the contradictory situation. Without the perspective of the social world, nothing could be said that would be appropriate for the human form of life. At the same time, everyone can see that social life forms are occupied with conflicts that seem to override all certainties about social cohesion.

For this reason, the reflections should begin with the vague concept of the alien and of all forms of alienation. From a phenomenological point of view, the stranger is not simply a "figure" who is unknown, homeless, uprooted and thus eerie. It is beyond that: projection surface, "object", crystallization point. That he should not only be regarded as an object of a political maxim, but that he "is" the subject of his own situation, should not be questioned. But in a critical perspective it is about the surplus of the foreign, about what "we" mean to recognize in the face of the foreign. If we remain in a negative image, the stranger embodies the uncertainty and fragility of all orders. His existence is reminiscent of things that should not have happened, of the collapse of order, of violence that is far from us. The irritation has to do with the habituation to states that are not self-evident; some speak here of a thin skin that the inhabitants of the first modern age have appropriated¹⁷. But the irritation also stems from a much deeper insight: order in itself is only an illusion, security can only be thought of in the horizon of vulnerability. The encounter with the foreign is therefore not about the encounter of two worlds: a secured and walled-in world into which messages from a distant world penetrate (or are ignored). Rather, the stranger forces us to reflect on the very foundations of the human condition.

The nomad is thus not only a symbol of a power relationship, but also an irritating expression of undeniable vulnerability. It transports, so to speak, ordinary messages with disturbing content. All the more urgent in view of this matter of course is the question of how we can regain the social. The answers lead from the concrete socio-political situation in the centre of Europe to the fundamental question of the social conditions under which we encounter one another.

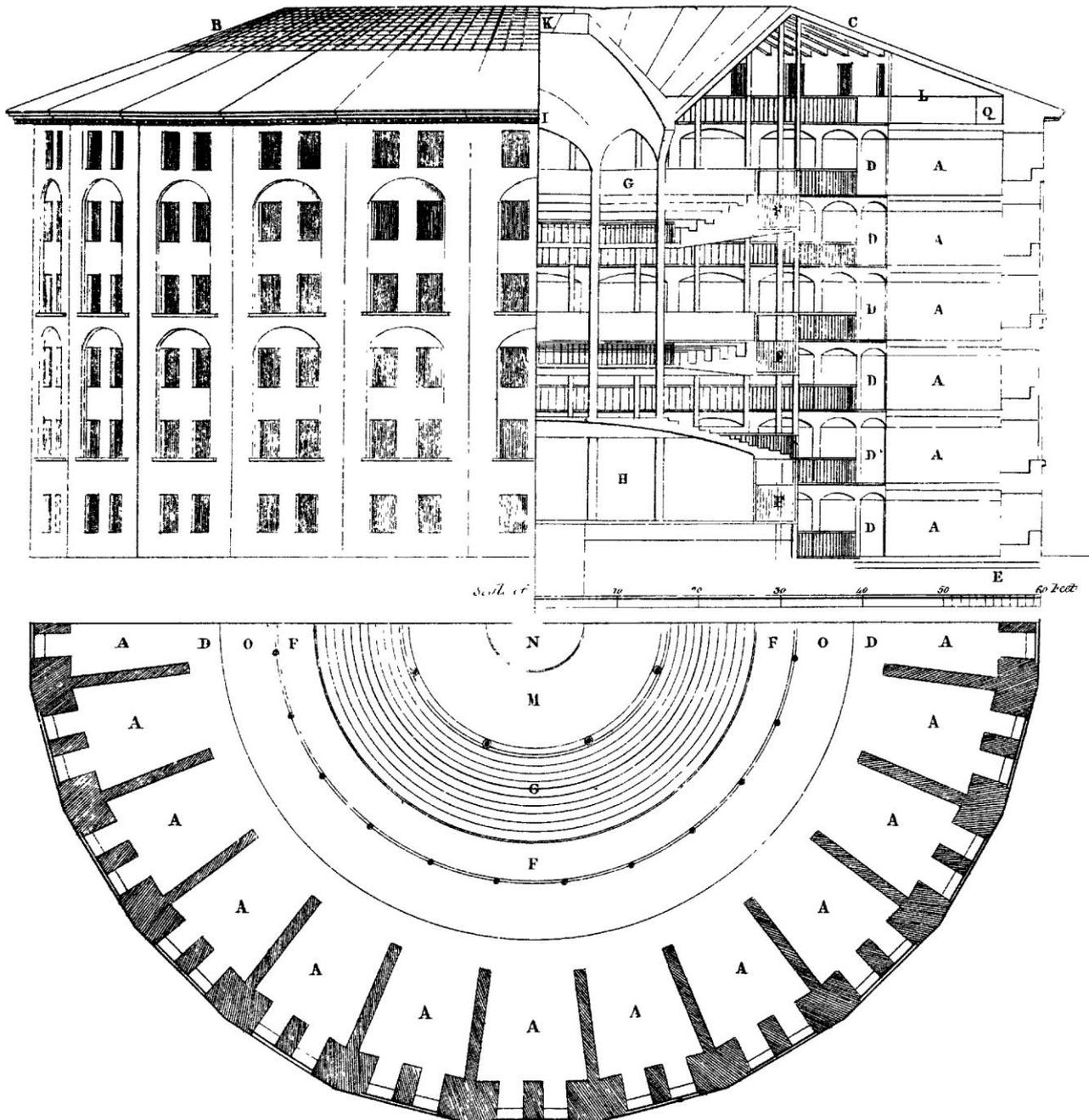
If you want to regain something, you can assume that you have lost "something", a possession or even a substance. This semantics is highly problematic in the case of the social. Presumably there is no place from which the righteous can work its way into society as an abstraction, and accordingly the speech is misleading: that we regain the social. In every form of society there are different principles and preconditions of what is meant by justice or solidarity. In the modern age, or in the present, contradictory processes occur, losses and, of course, always "losers" or even victims.

It is by no means absurd to point out primary social-ethical values and socio-political achievements that have been achieved in long struggles for modernization with a view to a perspective of justice. These values are high-ranking and worthy of protection, but they are not a unique and definitive possession of a form of society. Rather, they are in danger of being overshadowed by profound transformations. In a world dominated by the economy, the social is pushed to the brink of insignificance. Quite a few observers speak of tendencies towards a de-solidarization, some of them of a loss of self-evidence of the social¹⁸. It makes sense to examine these meaningful concepts more closely. The social has an meaning that is self-evident, that should never be doubted, but is in fact always in unrest and movement. The desolidarization is a danger for every community and this is true in many respects under the conditions of globalization. It is the simple questions and formulations that lead us on: Who deserves help, who can stand up for himself? Who must be helped in the sense of a welfare state principle, the social moral value of which is beyond question? Disputes about justice and social balance in communities always have different economic cycles, different climaxes; they have certainly produced moral advantages. Only with an expanded historical view, however, can one recognize more precisely under which circumstances one can speak of solidary relationships and moral principles in modernity.

It is well known that the idea of solidarity is associated with long and tenacious struggles for recognition and justice. It was put on paper in times of social change, when an older form of socialization was abandoned and new forms prevailed. It is well known that they were upheavals accompanied by violence and conflict, which required many victims and always produced few winners and many losers at the same time. Modernity has many descriptions and headings, and here we can simply assume that it means a special form of accelerated change that continues to this day. Epochal political and social upheavals gave the feudal world a boost and set in motion a rapid process of change. The denunciation of traditional patterns of inequality and the liberation of trade and market economy is only one known aspect. Modernity means moreover: the new appreciation of work and performance, the expansion of political power, rationalization and competition, the machinisation of production, state duties and control, but also new working conditions and new forms of discipline were linked to this change¹⁹. The advantages of this upheaval need not be enumerated here; they go hand in hand with scope for freedom and gains in modernization. But the downsides must come to the fore here:

It does not necessarily help to speak of losers of modernization, because this sociological way of speaking unintentionally obscures connections that are far more difficult. Rather, we can say that modernization and industrialization have been accompanied by severe sacrifices. The great challenge faced at the end of the 18th century was how to treat the masses of people who suddenly moved to the cities and had to take on new forms of work. It was at this time that the social question arose: how could the freedoms of the masses be used effectively, how could they be influenced with the least means?

Optimal control in closed institutions was the answer to the pressing questions of the time. The panoptic principle prevailed; people in institutions, homes, workhouses and factories were to be observed from a central point²⁰. It was a form of social discipline that gave rise to new hierarchies of high performers and low performers. The challenge was not only to calculate behaviour, to separate production system and social system, but to carry out inspections at all angles and corridors of the new working world.



Plan of the Panopticon. Source: Wikimedia Commons

The human being in the industrialized world was a being that was controlled and disciplined, that had to fit into a working and living world in which it was supposed to function. This means that the alienation that could spread in cities and factories could also penetrate social relationships. Correction and re-education were the measures that were effective for the great mass of the lower classes (the “proletariat”).

For those 10% of the less efficient, however, completely new measures have now been enacted. People were regarded as things: in other words, insane homes, homes for crippled persons, old people's homes and nursing homes were built to answer the social question with contemporary means. Institutions of custody and external care were formed. There was talk of the inferior, of the ballast of a society that would be influential until the end of the 19th century. Various factors of this social drift worked together: Darwinism had spread to the economic system and was now more than just a biological motive. The social groups, the church, the state, the bourgeoisie and the political parties used the language that proved to be ready to use violence against the weakest: it was about inferiors and subhumans. As is well known, these were gradually exposed to the social ostracism up to those moments of annihilation which do not have to be told here again.

Another way is to be shown, which deciphers the profound phenomenon of the lack of solidarization (in German: Entsolidarisierung). It would be difficult to show a line or a continuity at the historical point of Social Darwinism. Some of the critical potential may be lost. It would be more helpful to once again raise the question of how a modern society could position itself vis-à-vis the foreign and how it could develop its solidarity potentials. This requires no defeatism and no polemics, no totalitarian morality and no ethics of conviction. Rather, what is needed is a normative theory that is historically informed and "exposes" itself, so to speak, to the idea of the undeniability of the foreign. How Europe behaves towards the foreign is not a question of the "integrability" of non-members. We get closer to the phenomenon if we start from an indivisible, undeniable goal of all communitarization: whether and to what extent the bearing capacity for “something alien” has developed²¹. This is where the significance of an interexistential cultural theory becomes apparent. It is relevant to Europe and always points beyond Europe in all its references. It stands in the midst of the upheavals and conflicts of the present and yet gives an idea of the scope of an overarching culture that will be at stake in the future. Why Europe should be a form of fulfilment, this thesis will be understood in this context if fulfilment is translated as sustainability.

The dignity of the Other

Insights into what is going on in society are not always easy. On the contrary, looking at the conflict society with an open eye can be disturbing and irritating. This applies to current tensions as well as to past ones. It was only a few years ago that a sociological research group asked about "German conditions" – and in the process had to make gloomy experiences on a scientific basis²². The relationship of the German majority society to Islam was one of those critical points that pointed to profound conflicts. What applied there to the German reality has become more acute in some respects in the present – and the problems themselves cannot, of course, be viewed in isolation; they affect Europe in East and West, North and South. At the end of the 1990s, there was discussion about foreigner crime and social abuse, about parallel societies and educational deficits, about multiculturalism, which had failed. It were discursive orientations that shifted in part (think, for example, of the theoretical variants of multi-

culturalism and transculturalism), but there is also evidence of fatalistic continuities. Xenophobia has been allowed to spread on a large scale in society, however much enlightened voices resisted it. What is frightening is the simplicity of the xenophobic debates, which are aimed at the concern of one's own culture, which paint "alienation" on the wall as a picture of horror and seemingly speak without scruples of the *infiltration* of the German people²³. They were and are voices that do not strive for differentiation and conjure up the conflict; voices that may feel confirmed by the new social media. Against the language of hatred and violence in this situation the warning and moderating voices help again and again: Enlightenment in the better sense. Without any pathos, the aim would have to be to counteract the eruption of hatred and violence and at the same time to examine the category of the stranger in the broadest sense with a sense of proportion. Enlightenment, of course, does not mean "plain text" – the buzzword by which society is supposed to be enlightened about its supposed errors. Enlightenment would rather be equated with an attitude with which one confronts the inexplicable and the unknown without rhetorically arming oneself.

Once again, in view of these developments, the fundamental question of how Europe positions itself vis-à-vis the other should be raised. The position from which this question is answered naturally goes far beyond the mentioned "German conditions". The significance of the category is proving itself in several respects. With sociological sobriety one should ask about the current constitution and the sensitivities in which the European communities find themselves. One would have to ask with political clarity what the core of the new hostility towards humanity actually consists of, which emerges in this context. One finds what one is looking for at those interfaces between social and political factors that have always accompanied modern society: in the capitalist production of so-called "superfluous" people, in the consequences of the economization of society with all its distribution conflicts and feelings of powerlessness.

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However, one can also ask about the basic prerequisites that have made it possible that one has (still) developed a viability for something foreign – for which there are several expressions. The very question of whether and how strictly one distinguishes between a "we" and a "them" is an open one. Is it only about bearing the existence of others, of foreign groups in an open society? And wouldn't the categories already be tightened and narrowed because they start from a negative that disturbs the usual course in familiar orders? The structure of categorical prejudice weighs heavily in this case. At the same time, the bearing capacity realistically means a tension structure that is not completely harmonious. The example of the integration efforts of the last decades can be used profitably. Reforms that were demanded and implemented in the name and spirit of the integration movements were, as is well known, aimed at that scandal of social marginalization. They thematized the illusions of the market society, which put performance, happiness, success and power into a center, overlooking the unadjusted and marginalized persons. However, one may recognize progress here – the viability for the foreign proves to be a supra-individual category here as well. It is not about forcing people who are on the margins into a middle; it is not about including the excluded with all conceivable means. Rather, social and societal divisions should be addressed and avoided wherever possible. This requires structural reforms, but also effective ideas that "nestle" in social spaces. What is needed is social rationality based on political moral choice. Starting from a communal centre, this choice is based on the premise that human suffering is an inherent part of our existence. It is the excluded and repressed parts of ourselves that we place in the centre.

In such an abstract formulation, one finds a language that does not prematurely equate sustainability with the intolerable (and the disturbing existences) in society. Modern societies will prove to be resilient if they correspond to the unpathetic ideal of a communal center in their practice. In dealing with one another, in daily encounters, one learns trivially that diversity is not a threat²⁴. There is an ideal

that is practically unassailable and which we make possible through practical action. The foreign becomes a multiplicity, the threatening a chance, the hostile a positive cooperation. The danger of moving in illusions of an always already harmonious “togetherness” is obvious. Should we argue differently about this?

Only with a fundamental revision of the social can the inescapable conflicts be adequately countered. The inclusion of the other is more than a political project for which one only needs the formation of wills; it is also something other than a self-evident legal procedure. In relation to the other, the conditions of coexistence that have always been unsecured, risky and fragile can be seen. No unique philosophical concept can claim to eliminate these conditions once and for all. No philosophy of origin takes us back to the original state of which the philosophers dream: social cohesion was not finally “secured” in any epoch, but always endangered; maxims of justice and care have always had to prove their intrinsic value in concrete practice without being taken for granted; the ethical does not completely merge into the political, nor does the political disappear behind the veil of an all-encompassing morality. Only in the hegemonic struggles can these values, however they may be concretely understood, prove themselves.

The outstanding problem we face cannot therefore be solved with a political statement, a programmatic positioning, or even with a socio-political maxim. But only with the help of a theory of the social, in which the irrevocable foreignness is thematized.

The cardinal conflict lies between the social spheres, which claim to pacify the major conflicts. If all life situations could be made bearable by increasing purchasing power or by social benefits, socio-political utopias could prove their worth. If the existing conflicts were mitigated by the repeatedly emphasized self-creating forces of society, the path would already be prescribed. If the market or the welfare state could name an Archimedes point that determines a balance between beneficial reasonableness and excessive demands, one would have to worry less about the dignity of the individual²⁵. Beyond all these valid motives, the irreversible conflictuality persists. In essence, it is about the naked human being, who in modernity appears like a stranger, he is “alien” not because of his culture, the exterior and the visible, the habitus or the appearance. This person is naked, insofar as his dignity is always threatened in irrevocable asymmetrical constellations. The social help he hopes for consists in a socially predetermined situation. The exchange relations determine what we have to do under which circumstances: Reciprocity manifests itself in taking and giving; solidarity has a Janus face that always demands something and wants something back. The factuality of the stranger, of course, reminds us that the social in itself has no commodity character, or should have, that any standard of welfare is an illusion of the benevolent state; or more simply: that social help begins when it is not about the customer, not about purchasing power, not even about increasing a service.

Only a social theory that exposes itself to the fact of mutual interdependence can help here. Why one should accept challenges of a political nature at any price can only be explained in the horizon of a theory of the other. Fear and anxiety, the feeling of powerlessness and threat, the mistrust and judgement that we have made about others have always been part of such a practice. The risk is that even in times of violence, when social life forms come under pressure, one does not withdraw into the distance of a security, be it the security of bourgeois, state or moral origin. More clearly and unmistakably formulated: the form of living together (in Europe and elsewhere) begins at the moment of insight into historical violence, which we cannot ignore. In the relentless gaze of history, the social has always been unlocked, the other has always been exposed as a subject. This applies just as much as subjects prove their capacity for violence with all their hardness. None of these anthropological hardships prevents us from looking into the other in the face, from embarking on an adventure (T. Todorov) and from historicizing the other

in the sign of the other²⁶. This, of course, is not only possible in Europe, as if the philosophical path had been outlined here, which all lost philosophical wanderers would eventually have to follow. But Europe stands, one might regard this as the typical stumbling passage of history, at a historical, social, spatial and political landmark. To explain this is the common task – and to explain why self-centering is advisable in this case to prevent the final self-reference.



Maximilien Luce: Une rue de Paris en mai 1871. Oil on canvas, between 1903 and 1906. Source: Wikimedia Commons

Europe and the Other – what insights can we ultimately hope for? In the face of the history of European violence, in the face of the countless deaths of the past and the present, the sceptical tone of history would remain paramount. But it should be flanked by a social theory that proves to be responsive to the exposed other.

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