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Ricœur and Patočka on the Idea of Europe and its Crisis

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Abstract

This paper undertakes to reconstruct the idea of Europe in the writings of Jan Patočka and Paul Ricœur alongside those of their common inspiration, Husserl. In doing so, it shows that one of the main originalities of this standpoint is to characterize Europe's crisis as being a spiritual crisis, and its potential overcoming as being rooted in a specific attitude. With this ideal description in mind, the paper proceeds to descriptively assess the present day political situation in the European Union and the several challenges it faces, from the deep divisions between debtors and creditors following the 2008–2009 sovereign debt crisis, to the possibility of unraveling initiated by the Brexit process and the so-called populist threat lingering in different countries. Finally, it contends, following some insights by Patočka, Ricœur and Richard Kearney, that in order to avoid the decay or even death of the E.U. a rekindling of Europe's ideal is needed, one that is not based in a de facto dominance of some countries over others, or even in a totally homogenous and all-imposing narrative, but rather on mutual understanding through the sharing of stories that can perhaps refocus Europe's different peoples towards the reconstruction of common goals.

Keywords: Crisis, Europe, Hospitality, Human Rights, Husserl, Kearney, Patočka, Ricœur

Introduction

In this paper I analyze some of the contributions of two major 20th Century philosophers, Paul Ricœur and Jan Patočka, for whom philosophical reflection was not isolated in some sort of ivory tower and whose works thus displayed, albeit in different forms, specific mixes of philosophical, political and ethical analyses, and whose civic interventions were important contributions to the political situations of their own times. They

both also left specific marks on those younger philosophers and politicians who were connected with them. Patočka's influence on Václav Havel[1] is a well-known example and, curiously enough, Emmanuel Macron's[2] recent rise to power in France establishes a peculiar parallelism. Whatever judgment, more lenient or more critical, one may pass on the merits of Havel and Macron as politicians, the fact that both philosophers with whom we are dealing here had direct contact and influence in the formation of two major political figures is not without importance for the practical import of these two philosophies. And it is also proof of the capacity these philosophies have to let themselves be partially institutionalized.

As such, this paper will display a specific blend of normative reconstruction and philosophical critique or, in other words, it will place itself between ideal theory and a description of the current situation. More specifically, I endeavor to reconstruct the "idea of Europe" such as it can be found in the works of Ricœur and Patočka, and also in the work of their main common inspiration, Edmund Husserl, in order to pit the present-day situation against this ideal reconstruction and make a few suggestions concerning the possible solutions for what comes next.

Thus, in the first section, I start by recalling Husserl's and Patočka's depictions of the core traits of Europe. I present them alongside one another because it seems to me that Patočka's description of Europe is influenced to a great extent by Husserl, even though Patočka's bold and intriguing claim – according to which this core is none other than "care for the soul" – departs significantly from Husserl. The aim of this section will be to present a trait that is common to Husserl, Patočka and also, to a lesser extent, Ricœur: namely, that Europe is above all a cultural and even spiritual reality, marked by a certain kind of theoretical core and a very specific positioning towards tradition. I will not conflate the respective positions of these thinkers, given the significant differences that we can find in their writings on this matter, nor will I ignore some of the problems raised by their accounts: the limits to universalism and to what can be described as a Eurocentric standpoint. But I will nonetheless insist in this common

emphasizing of a cultural and spiritual Europe, over against thinner, more common accounts that stick to the political and economic dimensions of Europe and, more specifically, the European Union. In this longer section, I will not refrain from mentioning some of the historical political events that allow us to better understand how these philosophers looked at Europe (and which are of the utmost importance in the case of Patočka, given the extent to which he was personally implicated in them).

Then, in the second section of the paper, I describe and assess the present-day political situation in the European Union and the several challenges it faces, from the tensions between debtors and creditors following the 2008–2009 sovereign debt crisis to the possibility of unraveling initiated by the Brexit process and the so-called populist threat lingering in different countries. Against this backdrop, I then turn to Ricœur's and Richard Kearney's claims on the role of narrativity and imagination in the rethinking of European identity, and follow their support of hospitality as one of the core values to uphold in Europe, which of course is also rooted in a defense of human rights that finds in Patočka one of its most powerful symbols.

1. Husserl and Patočka on Europe: from the "Heroism of Reason" to "Care of the Soul"

It might seem odd and out of place to provide a thick account of European identity as being grounded not only on a cultural but even a theoretical and, as it were, "spiritual" level. This of course raises a number of significant objections that I shall evoke below. However, in the present context, it is important to recall why these features are also important.

We can trace a significant part of this ideal back to Husserl. In his 1935 lecture at the University of Prague (the so-called "Vienna Lecture") he laid down an influential description of what can very easily be called an "idealized Europe." And let us recall in passing that he of course did this at a moment when the barbaric ascension of Nazism was already taking place and as part of an effort to countervail the spirit of his time, i.e., the fact that "European nations [were] sick." (Husserl 1965, 150) According to Husserl, the "spiritual image of Europe" is marked

by an "immanent teleology" grounded in "rational ideas and infinite tasks." (ibid., 156) This view, as can easily be guessed, has its roots in ancient Greece and in the philosophical attitude. Indeed, for Husserl, in the VI and VII Centuries B.C., "[in Greece] grows up a new mode of sociality and a new form of enduring society, whose spiritual life, cemented together by a common love and creation of ideas and by the setting of ideal norms for life, carries within itself a horizon of infinity for the future – an infinity of generations finding constant spiritual renewal in ideas." (ibid., 160) And Husserl goes so far as to identify this mode of being, and the appearance of the so-called "special sciences," to borrow his phenomenological parlance, with philosophy itself. What is more, these ideal achievements grant mankind access to a qualitatively different type of temporality: "Scientific achievements, once the method of insuring their successful creation has been attained, have an entirely different mode of being, an entirely different temporality. They do not wear out, they are imperishable." (ibid., 161)

So we can see that, already for Husserl, the "idea of Europe" cannot be understood apart from a specific "way of living." We cannot understand the dedication to *theoria* without grasping the existential attitude that went along with it. Philosophy was almost communal in character, as if we could speak of some sort of philosophical *Sittlichkeit*: "These are the men who, not isolated but with each other and for each other, i.e., bound together in a common interpersonal endeavor, strive for and carry into effect *theoria* and only *theoria*." (ibid., 165) Of course Husserl did not mean that this way of living entailed that all people dedicated to it needed to coexist at the same time; but it does evoke the founding of the "standing on the shoulders of giants" (to borrow Newton's expression) type of attitude, since the notion of a dedication to the regulative ideal of the quest for truth as an all-embracing mission, each time broken down in several intermediary tasks, itself forms a tradition and is thus transmitted through time and generations. And, what is more, this is a type of attitude that, under the banner of quest for truth, is not grounded on pre-existing (mythical or religious) traditions. On the contrary, it is founded and exercised as a specific type of *critique* and

reasoning (and both go together, *logon didonai*, as Plato would put it): "a universal critique of all life and of its goals, of all the forms and systems of culture." (ibid., 169) And for Husserl it is this "community of ideal interests" (ibid., 175) that forms the basis of "supernationality of a completely new kind," i.e. "the spiritual form of Europe." (ibid., 177)

But it was precisely this entity that he diagnosed as being "ill," in a state of profound crisis, in 1935. According to Husserl, the crisis had its roots in a "mistaken rationalism," given that "one-sided rationality can become an evil." (ibid., 178 resp. 180) For Husserl, this was tied to the triumph of Enlightenment and its objectivistic, naturalistic version of rationality. However, Husserl's text ends with a note of hope and even "heroic" exhortation: "The crisis of European existence can end in only one of two ways: in the ruin of a Europe alienated from its rational sense of life, fallen into a barbarian hatred of spirit; or in the rebirth of Europe from the spirit of philosophy, through a heroism of reason that will definitively overcome naturalism." (ibid., 192) And he pushes "good Europeans" to "do battle with this danger of dangers with the sort of courage that does not shirk even the endless battle." (ibid.) For those who are acquainted with Husserl's other writings and with his almost ascetic phenomenological method, it is very striking to read these words which only attest to the graveness of the situation he was diagnosing.

Much of this ideal depiction makes its way through to Patočka who was a student of Husserl. In what follows I will mostly draw my reconstruction of Patočka's idea of Europe from *Plato and Europe* (Patočka 2002), a series of lectures he gave at friends' homes at a period in which he had been banned from academia by Czech authorities, and also, to a lesser extent, from the *Heretical Essays in the Philosophy of History*. (Patočka 1996)[3] Just like Husserl, Patočka saw in ancient Greece the ideal model from which Europe had allegedly been founded. He shared and even deepened Husserl's stance according to which Europe's sweeping characteristic was spiritual. And he emphasized the fundamental role of the philosophical attitude (also characterized by a fierce critique of tradition and a certain dedication to *theoria*) in the making of this supranational

whole. And indeed Patočka likewise saw himself as responding to a situation of crisis, and renewing an effort that he saw no one undertaking at that time; in fact, he claimed, no one since Husserl had taken upon himself to accomplish that fundamental task (Patočka 2002, 152).

Nevertheless, Patočka's intriguing conception of Europe has a certain set of features that make it unique. And one of the most salient is the peculiar claim according to which this spiritual unity was brought about by the Greek *care of the soul*. Patočka is of course not alone in this contemporary reappraisal of care of the soul in Antiquity. Pierre Hadot (Hadot 1995) and of course Foucault (Foucault 2005) did much to draw our attention to this phenomenon, albeit with greater emphasis on the Hellenistic period (with special attention to the Stoics) as well as on the more general notion, which Hadot draws from Ignacius of Loyola and retrospectively applies to that period, of "spiritual exercises." Nonetheless, as Petr Lom makes clear, Patočka goes further than Hadot or Foucault because he "gives care of the soul even greater importance, insisting it is the fulcrum for all the great thinkers of antiquity." (Lom 2002, xv)

Expanding on Husserl's earlier claims, Patočka maintains that European tradition "is a tradition of insight" and that "European civilization is abstract," which, for him, explains the fact that "European history could generalize itself in such a way." (Patočka 2002, 223) Moreover, this particular generalization principle brings with it the necessity to confront every "myth" or "tradition" with the standards put forth by reason. This, of course, forms what came to be known as Western rationality and it is not, Patočka himself acknowledges, without exercising a specific violence or domination against other cultures. Concerning the notion of history and its generality, Patočka mentions the "spiritual violence" done to other civilizations when imposing this Western conception (ibid., 222), and in this critique we of course find echoes of the first generation of Critical Theory.

However, Patočka's definition of Europe is ultimately more practical than theoretical (unlike Husserl's), given the importance ascribed to the "care of the soul" in its threefold aspect, well broken down by Petr Lom: a relation to truth and

individual internal transformation; a relation to justice and care for the community, and a reflection upon mortality (Lom 2002, xvii-xviii). This is all found by Patočka in Plato (Patočka, 2002, 180), but he extends this analysis to include aspects he also finds, for instance, in Democritus or Aristotle because, for him, Greek philosophers expressed freedom through this care of the soul (Patočka 2002, p. 13) whether they believed in its immortality or not (Patočka 2002, p. 13) – the overall claim thus being that "Europe […] arose out of the care of the soul." (ibid., 89)

Patočka was aware of the deeply paradoxical nature of this larger claim and maybe did not defend it *tout court*, but only drew attention to a much forgotten aspect of philosophical praxis and the way in which it can assume ethical, political and existential relevance. On the one hand, as Aviezer Tucker recalls, there is a connection between philosophy and politics that "is taken for granted in the Czech tradition." (Tucker 2000, 8) On the other hand, this recovery of an ancient topic felt even more needed because it was seen as a response to the deepening of a crisis. Patočka saw in the Hellenistic period the appearance of the "conception of mankind as something universal, where everyone has a share in the common" (Patočka 2002, 11), and likewise saw in the subsequent Roman Empire and Christianization of Europe some sort of high points of the expansion and universalization of this ideal he was aiming to reconstruct[4]. In Modernity and the Enlightenment, however, he saw pivotal points that began a movement of crisis that in his own time seemed almost unbearable, given they were reaching a state of extreme nihilism. Indeed, Patočka draws from Dostoyevsky and Nietzsche to posit a claim concerning a loss of meaning. In the *Heretical Essays*, commenting on Nietzsche, he affirms "let us be truthful, facing the fact that we are nihilists, not making ourselves believe what is not – thus alone will we be capable of overcoming the moral crisis which underlies and contains all else." (Patočka 1996, 92) This is conveyed as both a critical diagnosis and a timid hope, as we shall see. For Patočka, already with Francis Bacon and Descartes care of the soul was disappearing from the European horizon. And this disappearance is tied with the appearance of modern science. In his view, Renaissance science still had similarities with Greek

theoria but later science and mathematics, especially from the Enlightenment onwards are already "technical" in their aims (Patočka 1996, 86). Indeed, in their spirit of technological domination, they draw from Bacon's conception of knowledge as a form of power and from the Cartesian assertion according to which knowledge is to make us "masters and owners of nature." (ibid., 84) According to Patočka this results in a reversal of the ancient Greek world order. In a nutshell, care for the soul is transformed into "care to have,"[5] which, of course, is reinforced by the appearance of the capitalist world order: "The simultaneous organization of economic life along modern capitalist lines is part and parcel of the same style in principle." (ibid., 84) This same organization is one which, might we add, came to impose itself in such an automatic and one-sided manner as to constitute what Max Weber described in the stark terms of the famous "iron cage" analogy (Weber 2003, 181).

For all these reasons, Patočka's diagnosis was more sober than Husserl's. Lom sums it up as follows: the crisis "is the triumph of technical instrumental reason, which understands nature as a tool for domination and exploitation rather than for respect and contemplation." (Lom 2002, p. xviii) The result being, as Tucker contends, that "Husserl's poetic optimism had no credibility forty years later, when it appeared to Patočka that Husserl's first possibility, the downfall of Europe, had already occurred." (Tucker 2000, 69) Let us also not forget the difficult political circumstances in which Patočka was living. His pessimism stems not only from the awareness of what the rise of Fascism and Communism had done to Europe, with all the internal strife, intense suffering and crushing of human rights during World War II. More specifically, he certainly had in mind the crushing of the so-called "Prague Spring" in 1968, the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia and the significant political and social repression that followed, including Patočka's ban from academia. As is well known, these events took a tragic turn for the worse for him. Following the organization of Czech intellectuals around the Charter 77 movement and its defense of human rights, coalescing around Patočka as one of its main figures, the Czech phenomenologist died after a police interrogation at a time when he was already

in fragile health. However, in spite of his pessimism, what remains to be debated in this context is the ethical and political significance of the intriguing legacy that the "Socrates of Prague" left us.

As Ricœur himself puts it in his preface to the French edition of the *Heretical Essays*, the main question becomes: does "Socratic politics" have a chance? (Ricœur 1996a, xvi). Ricœur admits that "the diagnosis is more certain than the cure," given that the prospects of "the destiny of Western Europe beyond nihilism […] are not bright." (ibid., xv) But he does emphasize two very important traits to be drawn from Patočka: 1) the capacity to think of Europe through means of a collective appropriation of the individual, existential capacity to relate meaning, the absence of meaning and the search for meaning (ibid., xiv); and 2) the capacity of resistance in what Patočka called the "solidarity of the shaken." (ibid., xv) Ricœur also underscores the lesson according to which "politics is always of another order than economic management or the projection of humans in work" (ibid., viii) which is, of course, an Arendtian topic in Patočka that finds echoes in Ricœur himself.

Actually, it is not only that Ricœur paid significant attention to the situation in Czechoslovakia, namely to the Charter 77 movement, as well as to Patočka himself, it is also noteworthy that his important reflections (to be found in the "The Political Paradox," republished in *History and Truth*; Ricœur 1965) on the existence of a specific mode of political alienation, which is independent from but no less important than economic alienation, were written as a direct response to the shocking events that followed the Prague spring. Even though Ricœur was no resistant in a strict sense, at least not in the same way that Patočka was almost forced to be so, he was no less responsive to the political events of his own time[6]. He went from being a pacifist before World War II to being enlisted and captured as a part of the French army, spending almost all that time as Prisoner of War. He also wrote in a committed manner on the international political situation from the 1950s onwards for the influential French journal *Esprit* and had a very active involvement, for example, in opposing the Algerian war[7].

To be fair, as Tucker reminds us, Patočka did have a lasting influence, at least in his home country, given the fact that the Velvet Revolution of 1989 was so much inspired by the Charter 77 movement and its style as a political critique that expresses itself in strictly philosophical (and sometimes even pre-political) terms. This is something that, according to Tucker, is a Czech feature connecting philosophy, politics and history with the goal of letting ethics guide a non-technocratic form of politics (Tucker 2000, 8), and is certainly a hugely important legacy that can be applied to many different contexts. But how should we assess this idea of Europe today? Firstly, I think we should not hide some of the difficulties it encounters. The first one is obviously the danger of providing too thick a description. This is what Tucker calls Patočka's communitarianism. Patočka's account of a spiritual Europe seems to be at odds with thinner accounts of what binds Europe together. Also, Patočka's implicit link to some sort of Transcendence risks making us uneasy, causing a "fear of mixing spirituality with political or social life, because historically such combinations have been generally disastrous." (Lom 2002, xx) Certainly, his "conception of the good," to speak in contemporary political philosophy terms, over and above much more circumspect normative theories of the just, goes against the grain of the dominant liberal, Rawlsian or post-Rawlsian stances in political philosophy in the Anglo-American landscape, and in a way is more substantive than other communitarian accounts such as Charles Taylor's or Michael Walzer's.

To this problem we might add another one that Patočka's idea of Europe shares with Husserl's: namely, their strict universalism and what could certainly be called their Eurocentric vision. As Tucker contends: "in his attempt to find what is specifically European, Husserl displayed the cultural biases of his place and time against non-Western cultures." (Tucker 2000, p. 62) Even Patočka's notion of care of the soul could be said, at least in a weak sense,[8] not to be *really* exclusive to the Greek heritage. As Tucker notes, Eastern religions such as Buddhism seem to advocate a similar notion of spirituality (Tucker 2000, 64), even though with different political implications. Tucker also accuses Husserl and Patočka

of failing to acknowledge this due to "cultural biases" (ibid.) and is probably right in his claim.[9] Be that as it may, it must be possible to recover a subtler, less metaphysical notion of Europe as having an "ideal" or "spiritual" existence that is characteristic of its possible identity, without, however, falling back into the pitfalls of a Eurocentric worldview.

Husserl and Patočka might have been right in their claim that it was Western, i.e. European, thought that "invented" the forms of generality and universality that became characteristic of our own way of thinking and that were imposed everywhere (along with a specific type of violence that not only Critical Theorists and Post-Colonial thinkers admit to, but, as we have seen, Patočka admitted to as well). But to see this and other, let us call them, "cultural endeavors" and features as specifically European and even to grant them some sort of value does not, and indeed *must not*, *eo ipso*, entail their alleged superiority over other forms of rationality, thought, or modes of existence – quite the contrary. Even though the history of Modernity is, to some extent, the history of European peoples imposing themselves in other parts of the world, and even though this Eurocentric vision has been prevalent at least until the 20th century, we obviously have the duty to resist the absurd temptation to reproduce that same scheme of thought.

Now, with this more open and plural framework in mind – which is perhaps more in tune with Ricœur's own depiction of Europe; let us not forget that also for Ricœur Europe should focus on its ethical and spiritual realizations (Ricœur 1996b, 3) – the question that Patočka asks concerning the possible European unity remains: "You hear about the integration of Europe: but is it possible to integrate something regarding some kind of geographical or purely political concept?" (Patočka 2002, 179) According to him, of course, it is not. But the problem is that in the history of the European Union, the recent supranational entity with which we must grapple, European identity has indeed been thought of first and foremost as being political as well as economic. But we must side with Patočka and admit that at some levels this is not enough. What is more, as I shall contend in the next section, we are today once again living a European crisis and running the risk, as Patočka put it,

of Europe "stopping believing in itself." (Patočka 2002, 151) Ricœur, who was of course heavily influenced by Husserl, Heidegger, Arendt and also Patočka, partially partakes in the diagnostic that this section drew with Husserl and Patočka. But Ricœur's description of Europe and his proposal of possible cures for its ailments is perhaps less one-sided, more multidimensional, and more suitable to address the present situation, and thus I will leave it for next section, after a description of the current crisis.

2. *Quo Vadis* Europe? From the endless crisis to Ricœur's and Kearney's New Ethos for Europe

As Marcel Hénaff has recently claimed, it might just be that not only is Europe in crisis but also that it has *always* been in crisis and that the crisis is its own specific mode of being (Hénaff 2017). Others, like Myriam Revault d'Allonnes, go even further, tying the concept (or the metaphor) of crisis with the experience of Modernity itself (Revault d'Allonnes 2012). Revault d'Allonnes thus speaks of an "endless crisis" stemming from the modern experience of incertitude that is the result of the escape from ancient traditions. These accounts obviously run the risk of extending the notion of crisis so much that it might lose some of its relevance and distinctiveness. Be that as it may, as Runciman (2016) argues, also partially following Koselleck, at least one sense of the crisis is useful in practical terms, as it identifies a point in time that calls for fundamental decisions in response to a threat.

Europe is, of course, both geographically, culturally and, why not say it, spiritually, more than the supranational political entity that came to be known as the "European Union" (E.U.). Nevertheless, it is impossible, today, to think about the present and future of Europe without taking account of the E.U. And from its inception the E.U. has of course been fashioned as being rooted in an ideal of peace and prosperity. On the one hand, this is *the* project that, also by being partially founded in the strong defense of Human Rights in the wake of World War II, has been able to bring enduring peace to the most embattled continent in human history. On the other hand, the viability of this political project was by and large a result of

its economic success. Fostered by common shared interests and the liberal belief (and set of policies that went along with it) in the free circulation of people and goods, unequivocally accepting globalization and becoming a large player within it as it grew larger and eventually occupied almost the whole continent, the E.U. was – is? – a success precisely because it worked. The social model that went along with it, displaying a specific blend of liberal, democratic and open societies respecting human rights, striving for economic growth based on free trade and trying to provide its citizens with generous schemes of social protection was made possible not only because the bloc was economically viable, but also because it kept advancing. Europe was seen as an entity always moving forward, always striving for more integration, both in terms of new members joining the club and of more institutional solutions that made sure that more and more competences were transferred from a national to a supranational level.

In all fairness, it must be admitted that this was always a difficult process, and not a very democratic one. It is evident that its progress was only possible because national constituencies continuously elected representatives that were "pro-European" and were able to negotiate the adhesion or the specific aspects of each new solution, but the processes were almost always *top down*, driven by elites, and very seldom *bottom up*, that is, resulting from instruments of direct democracy, such as citizens' initiatives or referenda. On the contrary, the process of moving forward was often made despite a sentiment of popular suspicion in different countries, and when referenda were in fact held, they often resulted in the contrary of what elected, pro-European officials stood for: the two most striking examples being the rejection of the European Constitution in 2005 as a result of referenda in France and the Netherlands and of course the Brexit referendum in 2016 that will lead the United Kingdom out of the E.U. However, up until the last years of the first decade of this century the process did keep moving forward; but not anymore.

Today, Europe and the E.U. are faced with a set of unprecedented challenges. The rejection of the European Constitution in 2005 (solved rapidly by the adoption of the

Lisbon Treaty in 2007) was only a small presage of the problems that were to come. Starting with the aftershocks of the 2007–2008 subprime crisis that rocked the U.S. and the global financial crisis that ensued,[10] the E.U. was hit by what became a sovereign debt crisis in some of its weakest economies (namely in Greece, Portugal, Cyprus and Ireland, but also, to a lesser extent, in Spain and Italy), exposing the fragilities of the Eurozone: a system with a common currency but no common budget and no set of shared fiscal policies. This crisis, and the bailouts that followed, left a bitter rift between net lenders and net creditors, exposing some cultural prejudices, old national sentiments and sometimes leading to dramatic situations in terms of the loss of quality of living of some peoples, Greece's situation being a case in point.

These difficulties led to some deep and unforeseen changes in Europe's social reality, threatening to put at significant risk the old goals of social cohesion and ever-growing integration between member states. This claim is easily backed by data from recent European inquiries and reports. For instance, Diamond et al. (2015), analyzing this reality in the immediate aftermath of the economic crisis, offer a glimpse into the current situation in terms of 1) European economies and labor markets; 2) inequality and poverty; 3) education and health; and 4) politics and culture, showing how each of these domains was affected by the crisis. They notice that "the starkest divergence in living standards is between the north and south of Europe" (Diamond et al. 2015, 12) and that "trends on poverty have been significantly worse in more austerity-hit countries, especially Greece" (Diamond et al., 2015, 30). Another important rift is intergenerational and it too got worse with the crisis, given that "young Europeans are increasingly at risk of joblessness and social exclusion" (ibid., 34). With the stark increase of unemployment rates in those countries more affected by the crisis, the prospect of a "lost generation" was only mitigated by migration, but this only worsened "the endemic weaknesses in the southern labor markets" (Diamond et al. 2015, 36). In a nutshell:

Europe is increasingly a continent of division: of growth versus stagnation; rising real incomes versus falling real

incomes; impressive jobs growth versus markedly higher unemployment. The depth of this divide and its social and political consequences pose major questions about the future viability of the European project (ibid., 57).

These problems have been magnified by the intense rise of nationalism and populism,[11] which is not exclusive to the E.U. – lest we forget Russia or the U.S. – but that has been felt in an acute manner in places like France, Hungary or the U.K. and which, leading to a rise of euroscepticism and general distrust in the E.U., eventually resulted in the Brexit vote in 2016. As is evident, the exit of one of the bloc's most important members poses an unprecedented existential threat to the existence of the E.U. as such, given that it is the first time that one of its members will leave and the threat of contagion to other members that might follow it is real. At the same time, from a geostrategic standpoint, other difficult challenges lie ahead. On the one hand, Russia's occupation of Crimea in 2014 and the more recent isolationist tendency shown by the U.S., following the election of Donald Trump – also questioning the importance of NATO – leave the E.U. in a more fragile situation than that which it had envisioned for itself. Finally, amid the refugee crisis that resulted from the Syrian war, it can be argued that the E.U. has not been doing enough to uphold its ideal of defense of human rights and the welcoming of others, given the number of refugees turned down or left to die in the Mediterranean sea.

Lack of solidarity, existential threat, deep divisions. This is the image of the E.U. in 2017 and there is indeed the risk of a deepening of some or all of these problems, especially if populist right-wing parties keep becoming more popular and fueling xenophobic and anti-European sentiments. But the question then becomes: has European political leadership been doing enough to countervail these tendencies? And what does this situation entail in terms of Europe's capacity to live up to its ideals, think its identity and formulate its own political and, let us say it, existential project?

It is in this context that I would like to turn to some of Paul Ricœur's[12] and also, albeit to a lesser degree, Richard Kearney's intuitions and possible solutions. But first let me add

that Husserl's and Patočka's framing of the problem prove invaluable for understanding some of its *causes*. As I already mentioned, a large part of the problem lies in the fact that the E.U. has basically been a political and economic project that largely overlooks the importance of the cultural and spiritual European traditions. In that context, when the economy starts faltering, it is likely that political problems appear which, in turn, menace the whole project. As Ricœur shows in *Oneself as Another* (Ricœur, 1992), there is a fundamental difference between *power-over* (and the political alienation he denounced in the "Political Paradox," Ricœur 1965) and the exercise of *power in common* (Ricœur 1992, 220). The latter is an integral part of the making of a *project*, even a project of a good life "with and for others in just institutions" (ibid., 172) which is the definition he puts forward in the so-called "little ethics" of *Oneself as Another*. In the European context this means, firstly, that the relations between different "players" at different levels should perhaps be more horizontal and less vertical; not a *de facto* dominance, for instance of richer and more influential countries over the less influential ones. But it should also mean that citizens should be more actively empowered in the decision-making processes – and let me note in passing that the so-called citizens' initiative,[13] made possible by the Lisbon Treaty is already a step in the right direction – and involved in the dynamic renewal of institutions themselves.[14]

Second, there should be an assessment of what this European project stands for. In the *Lectures on Ideology and Utopia* (Ricœur 1986), Ricœur claims that societies have symbolic structures, a "social imaginary" which they rely on, both for constitutive functions of maintaining order and stability and for "subversive" functions that keep them open to change – these functions being mainly the work of ideologies and utopias. In this case, an ideology is what legitimates a certain use of power and, as it were, keeps together a certain collective entity because it allows it to keep finding in its history, its living traditions, the meaning for its existence and for the exercise of its shared practices – thus addressing, in some way, in its constitutive function, Patočka's worry about the loss of meaning. If this is so, then, can we not claim that the

E.U's ideology in its positive sense is precisely tied to the ideals of solidarity among its peoples and the defense of human rights so well exemplified by the Charter 77 movement? And can we not also argue that what we are faced with in the sovereign debt crisis, rise of nationalism and refugee crisis is some sort of betrayal of that founding ideology?

With this backdrop in mind, I would like to contend, following Ricœur and Kearney, that a possible solution to this thorny problem will at least partly have to resort, on the one hand, to a suppler notion of European identity (even though not renouncing its spiritual dimension, quite to the contrary) while at the same time finding innovative practical solutions to live up to the ideals of diversity, solidarity, hospitality and the more general protection of human rights as a whole. In "Reflections on a new ethos for Europe," an essay whose English version was edited by Kearney, Ricœur proposes that we should "formulate the problem of the future of Europe in terms of imagination." (Ricœur 1996b, 3) He underscores that envisioning a new kind of supranational entity is itself unprecedented and thus calls for a work of imagination that explores the possible new institutions needed for it. In this effort of political imagination, he emphasizes the need to count on the contribution not only of individuals but also "intellectual communities, churches and other religious denominations" because the ethical and spiritual activities of individuals and groups are fundamental for this task (ibid.). He makes clear that transfers of sovereignty that remain at a purely political or juridical level are itself insufficient, if they are not accompanied by "the will to implement these transfers deriving its initiative from changes of attitude in the ethos of individuals, groups and peoples" and that what is at stake is the combination between "identity" and "alterity" at numerous levels, adding that what we need are models that will allow us to think and put this combination into practice (ibid., 4).

Ricœur then goes on to list several modes of diversity that must be cherished and intersubjective relations that must be preserved in order for the European project to be a success. He mentions three possible models to mediate between the poles of identity and alterity and to help us in that fundamental

task: the model of translation, the model of the exchange of memories and the model of forgiveness. The first form of diversity that Ricœur mentions and wants to cherish as a part of our possible European identity is linguistic diversity. According to him "Europe is and will remain ineluctably polyglot." (ibid.) He acknowledges that this might constitute a risk, namely that of "a protective withdrawal of each culture into its own linguistic tradition" (ibid.), but advocates nonetheless that the right form to honor this diversity within a common European whole is to put forward an ethics of translation in what he calls *linguistic hospitality*. For Ricœur, translation is an a priori of communication, but one which must always be reinstated. As such, he proposes that in order to secure the protection of languages that are not in a dominant position, all over Europe one should encourage the teaching of at least two living languages (Ricœur 1996b, 5). Going a step further, into the "spiritual level," he proposes that the same principle apply to cultures themselves, in what he calls a "translation ethos" whose goal would be to "repeat at the cultural and spiritual level the gesture of linguistic hospitality." (ibid.) Indeed, as Scott-Baumann reminds us, Ricœur saw translation as a paradigm for philosophy and reciprocally ascribes to philosophy the need to model the process of translation (Scott-Baumann 2010, 70).

The second model, that of the exchange of memories, is effective at the level of the norms, beliefs and convictions. Ricœur is well aware of the fact that European identity is not monolithic. There are important differences in the customs and traditions that make up the different European national identities. But he does think that, on the one hand, these are not fixed structures, but instead are mutable, evolving entities with a narrative consistency (Ricœur 1996b, 6), and that, on the other hand, they have to be *shared* and *exchanged*. This is of utmost importance because it takes the ethical task to a higher level: "that of taking responsibility, in imagination and sympathy, for the story of the other, through the life narratives that concern that other." (ibid., 6-7) It is clear that what is at stake here are not only the lives and stories of individuals but also of peoples. Ricœur insists that this does not involve

abandoning important historical landmarks but rather "an effort of plural reading" (ibid., 7), which is one of learning to see through the eyes of the other and thus acknowledging the legitimacy of his or her own reading. To Ricœur, this means, at the same time, to respect the commemorations and traditions of other national cultures, including those of their ethnic and religious minorities, but also to let these traditions partake in an effort of renovation and plurality of readings that prevent them from becoming too rigid (ibid., 8).

Going a step further, Ricœur talks about the importance of reappraising traditions in terms of "discerning past promises which have not been kept" (Ricœur 1996b, 8), which brings us back to the constitutive function of the founding ideologies alluded to above. What Ricœur here calls the "unfulfilled future of the past" (ibid.) is actually an encouragement to hold present actions close to the expectations of the past. In what concerns the founding ideology of the E.U., this would mean to see whether or not it has lived according to its ideals, namely those of solidarity and defense of human rights. As I hinted, in these past few years it has *not* and it is not certain whether or not, amid the present complex crisis and the many threats it faces, it *will*. But it is of course part of our task to shed light on this disparity by means of this genealogical critique and "history of the present time."

Ricœur's third model, that of forgiveness, entails imagining the suffering of others in the past and in the present and being capable of "shattering the debt." (ibid., 10) In a moment when the discussion revolves so much on strict budgetary rules and sovereign debt levels, over and above care for the social conditions of European peoples, perhaps we could also find here an interesting suggestion – even though, of course, forgiveness stems from the logic of superabundance, not strict reciprocity, and is thus very difficult to institutionalize. Nevertheless, and drawing from the reflections that Ricœur offers on the possible conflict between respect for universal laws and respect for persons in *Oneself as Another* (Ricœur 1992, 262), perhaps it would not be absurd to suggest that in the present context a desire to live in common at the European level should do well to focus on collective wellbeing rather than in blind rule-following. Indeed, for Ricœur, "it is necessary that

the peoples of Europe show compassion for each other" (Ricœur 1996b, 11) and the same could of course apply to Europe's *others*, both within and without. To give just a simple example, a recognition of the Islamic tradition as being, alongside the Greek and Jewish traditions, an integral part of the making of European identity would of course be invaluable in easing some of today's tensions. Likewise, welcoming in a more proper manner forced migrants, refugees, the same way in which different European citizens were forced to flee and on many occasions were indeed welcomed in different countries during World War II, would certainly be tantamount to rekindling the European ideal I have been mentioning.

My concluding remarks highlight the need to find proper solutions which foster these values and which sometimes have to go beyond existing institutional arrangements. And it is in this context that I mention Richard Kearney's plea for a "mutual exchange of recognized narratives at a European level (Marcelo 2017, 788f.) and, more specifically, his activities at the Guestbook project[15] as a concrete step towards the promotion of the values I have been putting forward. In a recent interview I conducted with him, Kearney, following Ricœur, advances two tasks: "an exchange of narratives of the woundedness that we have suffered" and a recovery of the "therapeutic power of stories, the narratives of healing" (ibid., 789). He gives the very concrete example of interreligious exchange. If the public space is totally secularized in an enforced manner, a part of the (sometimes wounded) identities of individuals and groups are prevented from entering that public space of appearance and thus being shared and exchanged. As a consequence, Kearney argues, this forecloses the possibility of a genuine intercultural, interethnic and interreligious dialogue. This "pedagogy of narrative exchange" (ibid., 790) is where, for Kearney, the future of Europe lies. This is a future that, in the search of the best solutions, calls for affect and *phronesis* in the quest to recognize the "plurality of voices in our culture" in order to avoid the "rise of tribal extremism in our world." (ibid.) Likewise, the work he puts forward in the context of the Guestbook project, inviting divided communities to go from the

impossible to the possible, from hostility to hospitality, is certainly a first step towards this concrete instantiation.

To borrow two terms that were dear to Ricœur, maybe we could say that the E.U., and even Europe in its spiritual sense, is not a given but rather an *effort* and a *task* that really depends on the exercise of our collective will and choices. If today it is in crisis, as it has been so many times before, such as those that were denounced by Husserl or Patočka, it will perhaps be up to *us*, Europeans, to see whether or not it can still be reborn from its ashes.

NOTES

[1] Since this influence is obvious and well-documented, I do not need to spell it out in detail here. For the history of Czech dissidence from Patočka to Havel, see Tucker (2000). For a more detailed depiction of this influence, and also of Havel's intellectual legacy and political thought (including his insistence on meaningful political discourse and his conception of liberal agonism) see Brennan (2017).

[2] Macron was a one-time editorial assistant of Paul Ricœur. He contributed to the preparation of Ricœur's seminal *Memory, History Forgetting* (Ricœur, 2004) and the two became close acquaintances at that time (the original French version of the book was published in 2000). Even though knowing to what extent Macron's thought and policies are actually influenced by Ricœur's philosophy is a matter for contentious debate, the fact is that Macron often invokes Ricœur as a guiding inspiration.

[3] Although I am not analyzing it here, a fuller account of Patočka's claims on Europe should also take into account the texts published in French with the title *L'Europe après l'Europe* (Patočka, 2007). In that book Patočka puts forward a more elaborate description of the "planetary era," marked by a "Post-Europe" against whose backdrop we should assess the European heritage more carefully. It goes without saying that Central European and, more particularly, Czech political thinking produced many views on Europe, some of them emphasizing not so much its universal aspect, as Patočka and Husserl do, and more the specificity of Central Europe as an unwavering respect and cherishing of diversity. For a striking example of this latter view see Kundera (1984), who, in the 1980s, saw culture as a main locus of resistance, and its atrophy as one of the deep-rooted problems of the Central European identity crisis.

[4] This is made clearer in the *Heretical Essays in the Philosophy of History* (Patočka 2002).

[5] Notice here the echoes of French Christian existentialism, namely of Gabriel Marcel (Marcel 1949).

[6] Ricœur was, of course, one of the main French philosophers of the second half of the 20th century and among his many contributions to philosophy (for

instance to phenomenology or hermeneutics) the specific importance of his political thinking was not always emphasized. However, in recent times, the secondary bibliography on Ricœur definitely emphasized the usefulness and importance of his philosophy for political thinking. See, for example Michel (2006), Dauenhauer (1998) and Monteil (2013).

[7] On this, see Dosse (2008, 267-278).

[8] Tucker distinguishes a weak and a strict sense of care of the soul: in the strict sense, it would amount to a "life in truth that assumes the political freedoms that enable life in truth, justice" whereas in its weak sense "it is merely a certain concern for the soul that transcends everydayness, whether or not it involves life in truth" (Tucker 2000, p. 64). For a more detailed account of the Platonic care of the soul in Patočka, including the implications it has for his take on the problems of the world, subjectivity, meaning and life, see Merlier (2009).

[9] I believe this is a real problem that cannot be easily brushed off. However, as I stated, the Eurocentric vision is certainly more prevalent in Husserl than in Patočka. And, in all fairness, one must point out the existence of more benign readings of Patočka that try to reformulate his conception of European universalizable values in a way that is not Eurocentric and is thus more suitable to intercultural understanding. See Lau (2007, 2011 and 2016).

[10] I cannot mention here all the details of the so-called subprime crisis in the US, the housing market bubble or the financialization of capital that were some of its direct causes. For detailed accounts on this matter, see the Financial Crisis Inquiry Report (2011) and McLean and Nocera (2010). For a very exhaustive account of the way in which policy makers tend to downplay the likelihood of crises even though the warning signs might be there, see Reinhart and Rogoff (2009).

[11] Populism is another phenomenon with which we cannot deal here in a sufficient manner. I believe that, as Laclau (2005) contends, populism is a fundamental political logic. As such, and even though it has often had a very bad reputation in the social sciences, populism should not be considered a totally negative phenomenon, as it has the merit of shaking up the *status quo* and leading us to consider alternative political solutions, thus enlarging the domain of what is politically thinkable or even feasible. However, given that the dominant mainstream parties in Europe have been, in the last decades, favorable to the E.U. project, most of the "populist" projects that have sprouted throughout Europe in recent years have been Eurosceptic. Moreover, this phenomenon has spiked with the crisis and the debate on "austerity measures": "Austerity in particular appears to have driven support for both the populist left and right in Europe. In the south, the experience of austerity has driven voters towards parties determined to scale austerity back, while many voters in the north felt they have paid too high a price for profligacy on the Mediterranean" (Diamond et al., 2015, 48). It goes without saying that, in this specific case, many of these populist phenomena, especially those on the right (which are often xenophobic if not downright racist) are a threat to democracy and must be repudiated.

[12] Here I am concentrating on Europe's crisis, the crisis of its project, at a somewhat general level, and my use of Ricœur aims at providing some

indications of how to solve it at the political level by resorting to imagination and intercultural dialogue. This, however, is rooted in a desire to live in common and entails the protection of what Ricœur called the "capable human being." Elsewhere, I described the social consequences of the crisis in terms of what Axel Honneth calls "social disintegration" and tried to put forward what a "Ricœurian" answer to the crisis would be. These two aspects of the crisis, and of a "Ricœurian" solution to it are obviously tied together. See Marcelo (2013).

[13] The European citizens' initiative is a tool that allows citizens (at least 1 million of them from at least a quarter of member states) to ask the European Commission to propose specific legislation. As such, it is an interesting instrument to make possible the exercise of direct democracy and the discussion of matters that might be of real interest to European citizens.

[14] What I am suggesting, even though this aspect cannot be dealt with here, is that European decision-making processes should be increasingly *bottom-up*, i.e., more radically democratic (perhaps applying what Nancy Fraser has called the "all-affected principle") while European institutions, if they are to be actualized and kept alive, should, to borrow Axel Honneth's terminology, be geared towards the realization of social freedom and mutual recognition (Honneth 2014). This, in turn, is also part of Ricœur's conception of the good life, which, as recalled earlier, cannot refrain from striving for just institutions. Some of the pathologies of the European project I am invoking here are also, of course, structural impediments that might lead to the reification, decadence or disappearance of European institutions or the European project, and that must therefore be dealt with as swiftly as possible.

[15] See guestbookproject.org

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