

Facing Global Crises After Europe

Between Philosophy and Politics

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One cannot escape today the refrain that Europe is facing global and continental crises: economic, social, geopolitical and environmental. Yet there is no consensus on what defines these crises. Even the meaning of the subject, “Europe”, is a matter of contention. Is Europe the entity that shall face and possibly overcome these crises or is it only passively subjected to them? Over the last few years many attempts have been made by philosophers and intellectuals to write petitions and manifestos, in order to give answers to the lack of clarity about the very idea of Europe and the possible outcomes of its crises;¹ there is indeed widespread confusion and doubts not only amongst Europe’s political, economic and cultural elites, but also amongst its citizenry concerning Europe’s identity, task, role in the world, and even whether Europe exists in a relevant sense.

This Special Issue of *Metodo* aims at addressing the issue of “crisis” from different angles. Our contention is, indeed, that an analysis of the crisis concept, and in particular of the kind of crises which are currently affecting Europe, necessarily requires multidisciplinary insights into the problem, which range from philosophy to political theory, from economy to law. This Issue aims at generating an open debate on this topic, by engaging different approaches and languages.

In step with the general orientation of *Metodo*, we have also encouraged the submission of papers specifically focused on the issue of contemporary crises, in light of the concept (or concepts) of crisis, as it has been developed and

1 See PIKETTY et al. 2014; BALIBAR

expounded by phenomenological philosophy.² Can the phenomenological methods and the various traditions of phenomenological philosophy be of help in understanding the current crises in their intertwined social, political and economic dimensions? To answer this question we propose a twofold approach: first, philosophical arguments and suggested methods have to be historically contextualised and brought back to their leading intuitions. Second, these arguments can be tentatively applied to contemporary issues. With regards to the context in which phenomenology addressed the crisis problem, we might especially recall the aftermath of the First World War, as the time in which this field of studies emerged. In that hectic period, Max Scheler pinpointed the loss of political leadership of Europe and tried to envisage a new cultural global leadership for Europe.³ This diagnosis became even clearer after 1933, when Husserl detected the decline of the unitary spirit of the “European sciences” and pleaded for a renewal of Enlightenment and practical rationality, as the only chance to successfully contrast the spreading of totalitarianism in Central Europe.⁴ Even after the end of the war, however, while the EU institutions were being shaped through a vibrant confrontation between functionalist and federalist orientations, some of the most well-known heirs of Husserlian philosophy maintained a keen interest in the idea and construction of Europe. Among them, the Czech philosopher Jan Patočka coined in the 1970s the idea of “post-Europe”.⁵ With this phrase, Patočka did not aim to suggest a simple overcoming of Europe, neither as a geographical entity nor as a political project, but rather emphasized the necessity to create a post-European perspective, i.e. a new theoretical standpoint, from which one can look at Europe outside of its spatial and historical borders, giving up any strained syncretism aimed at the conciliation of the very different European realities under a principle of identity. Right on the contrary, a post-European perspective would consist, according to Patočka, in facing Europe and its crises, struggling to maintain widely open its inner complexity. After the Velvet Revolution in 1989, the foundation of the European Union in 1992, and the enlargement of the Union to Central and Eastern Europe during the following years, one can legitimately ask whether and how Patočka’s perspective can still supply valid arguments to the current debates on Europe’s status.

Besides the necessary contextualization, one might ask whether and how a phenomenological insight can be useful in light of the current version of the

2 See, in particular, Edmund Husserl, *The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology: an Introduction to Phenomenological Philosophy* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1970).

3 SCHELER 1960, 185.

4 See Hua VI.

5 See, in particular, PATOČKA 1988, 207-287.

European crisis. In other words, can phenomenology serve once again as a valid critical standpoint, and provide us with a valuable method for tackling the predominance of economy over politics, as it emerged over the last few decades, as well as the inability of European institutions to draft a shared political agenda, beyond individual economic interests? In light of this question, it is noteworthy that whilst Heidegger's critique of technique has recently become a commonplace in contemporary anti-capitalist doctrines, only little attention has been paid to Husserl's position, and to his account of the crisis of European reason. One of the aims of this Issue is precisely to create new intercontextual interactions between Husserl's insight into Europe's crisis and more recent analyses of the various fashions of today's crisis.

Many contributions to this Issue respond to this general aim. In his article, Kenneth KNIES particularly addressed Husserl's concepts of Crisis and Europe and provided a qualified defence of them against the critique of being philosophically and politically irrelevant. Husserl understood the "crisis of European civilization" as a crisis of rationality, i.e. as the loss of the belief that reason constitutes the means for a universal critique of life goals. For Husserl, Europe represents a historical, supranational unity which is guided by the idea of rational science as an infinite task of cultural renewal. In this regard, KNIES stresses that the primary focus of Husserl's *Crisis* do not lie in the epistemological critique of the life-worldly premises of objective sciences, but rather in counteracting the loss of their meaning, showing how this loss is mostly caused by the increasing narrowness of scopes and aims pursued by objective sciences. Whilst at the beginning of the 20th Century the hope that scientific reason would provide an ultimate critique of life seemed to be lost, Husserl claimed that objectivist specialization threatens to cause the "finitization" of the horizons of rationality and the application of scientific technology for misappropriating and de-humanizing ends – the more, indeed, scientific specialization drives technological progress, the more this specialization also shows how rationality is not concerned with ends. According to KNIES, this crisis cannot be historically circumscribed to Husserl's concerns regarding the turmoil of Central Europe in the 1930s, but is rather essentially related to science as such.

How can one successfully face this collapse of the belief in rationality? Husserl aims at showing that science can play the role for which it was meant, only if it is brought back to its original task. Renewing this task means reintroducing the idea of a universal science, whose genealogy goes along with the one of philosophy, and whose aim consists of fostering a radical reform and enhancement of human civilization.

European Renaissance especially embodied this task, as it believed in the transformation of humanity by means of universal reason. The European era, though, understood as the era in which scientific thought and technique blossomed, is vulnerable at its core and can easily cause unvertainty and scepticism, insofar as modern science is intrinsically entangled with methodological crises and existential problems due to its technological application. Particularly, the “finitization” of science’s universal horizon – which, from an encompassing critique of life-goals, ends up becoming a sheer implementation of objectivist procedures aimed at economic wealth – makes science even more vulnerable to the abuses that authoritarian and totalitarian political leaders are used to perpetrate. Indeed, once the faith in reason was lost, totalitarian accounts of nation, class and race hit Europe, and science became a tool for imperialistic projects – this is the link between the intrinsic crisis of the European sciences and the historical crises which are explicitly and implicitly addressed by Husserl.

KNIES claims that Husserl’s answer to the crisis is both philosophically (epistemologically) and (geo-)politically relevant: Europe as such was born when European intellectuals committed themselves to infinite tasks that undermined the ability of states to project an ultimate life-horizon for their citizens. As a consequence of this, the provinciality of home-nations became the main critical target of those European intellectuals who strived for a renovation on rational bases of local customs and norms. Accordingly, Europe became a supranational project, a spreading synthesis of nations not only united by their common origins but rather entangled in a rational exchange of ideas and infinite tasks.

But what if Europe, this supranational and rational project, fails? What if science loses its infinite horizon? What if its abuses for the sake of economy, of race or of state destroy the same civilisation from which it stemmed? Husserl identifies the only possible path out of the crisis in a renewed (European) “heroism of reason”.^[6] However, KNIES suggests that Husserl was wrong in believing that scientific rationality can be only European and suggests that decolonization may be an even more radical task to overcome intellectual provinciality.

The standpoints of modern philosophies in Asia, Africa and Latin America are in fact essential, according to Hans SCHELKSHORN, in order to address the crisis of universalism that pertains Europe since the end of the nineteenth century. Although universalism was not a European invention – pace Husserl – SCHELKSHORN acknowledges that since the fifteenth century European powers

6 Hua VI, 348; HUSSERL 1965, 192.

imposed a process of globalization through scientific and technological discoveries, capitalistic industrial production, as well as by struggling for the application of normative and legal principles that remained confined for a long time to the European soil.⁷ In few decades, the fall of Byzantium, the Spanish Reconquista and the so-called “discovery of Americas” brought European powers to a new global level. With the globalization of the conflicts among European powers, at the beginning of the twentieth century, war itself became global (even in its label of “World War”). The world became Europeanized as never before and Europe lost its hegemony, as it was split by the Iron curtain in two spheres of external influence. After the collapse of the Sovietic Union and a short decade of American predominance, the globus is now dealing with the adjustment of few regional powers, besides the U.S. SCHELKSHORN defines this situation in terms of a “polycentric global society” (*polyzentrische Weltgesellschaft*).

Which role can Europe have in the world to come? This is the question that SCHELKSHORN tackled while analyzing the *longue durée* of the strategy which aimed at delimiting Europe, by opposing to it ideas and values of the “East” (may be it Asia, Byzantium or Russia), and by excluding the Hispanic world (both the Iberian peninsula and Latin America) from Europe’s core. Since the fifteenth century, with the work of Juan Ginés de Sepúlveda, Herodot’s representation of the Persian wars, as the struggle between European freedom and Asiatic despotism, became central in the narrative “mytho-dynamics” (*Mythomotorik*) of Christian Europe against the Islamic world, as well as in the opposition against Russia.

SCHELKSHORN underlines the crucial role that this succession of eras played for the birth of modern Europe: from the *convivencia* in Al-Andalus (i.e. the multicultural society among Muslims, Christians and Jews under the Islamic domination in the Iberian peninsula), to the *reconquista* (i.e. the defeat of the Islamic power in Andalusia), until Spanish colonialism in Latin America.

By presenting Russian and Spanish thinkers that, throughout 19th and early 20th century, addressed the question of whether (and how) Spain and Russia belong to Europe, SCHELKSHORN deconstructs the narratives of Europe’s core, and thus contends that a critical revision of the stereotypes attributed to Europe’s counterparts (e.g. Asia, Islam, Russia or even Hispanic countries) is still necessary. Only through a critical acquaintance with the complexity of the histories of these identitarian attempts, can Europe seriously engage with its contemporary geopolitical challenges, especially regarding Russian regaining

7 See on this, Joas 2015.

of power at European eastern borders, the ongoing wars in the south-eastern coasts of the Mediterranean sea, and the tragic migration of thousands who are struggling to reach the European territory from both Africa and Central Asia. A post-imperial delimitation of European global responsibility is here at stake.

The “imperial dream” was until 1945 the only paradigm in European *Machtpolitik*. With the shift from a European to a global perspective, which the winners of the World Wars imposed to the remains of the modern European states, some intellectuals and politicians, committed to the European resistance and post-war reconstruction, revived the Kantian regulative idea of a cosmopolitan federation of republics. Roberto CASTALDI retraces this federalist tradition by addressing both Norbert Elias’ analysis of the decline of European civilization and Arnold Toynbee’s plea to European people: “unite or perish”.

In light of the current geopolitical and institutional crises, CASTALDI addresses the threats that “de-civilizing processes” such as the economic disparities, the crisis of the welfare-state, and the rise of populism and xenophobia, represent for Europe. What CASTALDI calls “European civilization” is actually a late achievement of few (Western-)European countries during the cold war. Shielded as they were by the American military protectorate on one side, and goaded on the other by the communist challenge, the states that built the European Communities ensured the respect of the rule of law that their constitutions guaranteed and implemented therefore innovative social democratic policies which were carried both by Christian democrats and socialists. The “Fall of the Wall” accelerated the transition from the institutional framework of the European Communities to the European Union. After a decade of relative quiet and prosperity within its borders – from which its neighbours did not benefit that much, as the Yugoslavian Wars bitterly showed – a cascade of events eventually shook the fragile pillars of the Union: the 2008 economic crises, the geopolitical turmoil in the Mediterranean sea that followed the so-called Arab Springs, and the imperialistic policy of Russia in Eastern Europe.

Despite the oft-told similarities between the financial and economic crisis of 2008 and the Great Depression of 1929 and its tragic aftermath in Central Europe, which paved the way to the Nazi takeover, the international community did not respond to the 2008 crisis with protectionist and nationalist politics, but it rather attempted to foster an international coordination. However, as CASTALDI stresses, this positive reaction remained stuck in inter-governmental agreements and the European Union was thus unable to achieve the implementation of supranational policies that the Commission and the European Parliament recommended. In contrast, long-lasting emergency

summits of the European Council led to the application of austerity politics, and to the implementation of ordoliberalist policies to single Member States (see on this Timo MIETTINEN's contribution to this issue). In this context, Germany took on, willy-nilly, the role of central power of Europe. This shift of power from the institutions of Europe to its most powerful member state revived the fear of the geopolitical issue of the *Mitte*, i.e. of Europe's core and pivotal space. While on the one hand, in nineteenth century, Bismark aimed by means of his *realpolitik* at ruling the *Mitte*, in order to achieve and maintain power equilibrium, on the other, in the aftermath of the first world war, the role of this political space became a prerogative of radical ideologies, like the one assumed by the third Reich. Against the background of this tragic past, contemporary German elites acknowledge their pivotal role and are thus prone to become economic leaders. Nevertheless they are unwilling to take the responsibility of representing the *Mitte* on a geopolitical level.⁸[8]

The decision of ruling the monetary union as the coordination of national politics led to a dysfunctionality of the euro, of which its designers – especially Germany and Italy – were well aware. Nonetheless, they decided to run the risk, in order to hopefully overcome France's resistance to share economic sovereignty. In 2008, Sarkozy's France was ready to share the burden of a supranational umbrella, while though Merkel's and Schäuble's Germany was not ready to do it any more. As a consequence of this, the monetary confederation imposed to the countries that adopted the euro more fiscal and economic constraints than it would be the case if they were part of a fully-fledged federation, without even relying on fiscal, economic and social federal adjustments. Therefore the EU started to demand more and to give less than a federation can do, and it consequently became a construction heavy enough to be blamed by its citizens, but not strong enough to guarantee economic order. The coordination of budget rules, without shared economic policies, caused a differential access to credit within the monetary union (the so-called spread), and created unequal conditions in the single European market, contradicting therefore the assumption of ordoliberalism that free economy can be functionally guaranteed only if the state ensures equilibrium and equality in the market.

Conceived by German economists as a moral stimulus to punish bad politics and to force reforms, austerity measures are in fact giving new impetus to populist movements all around the continent. The negotiations at the European summits are indeed perceived by the populations in a stereotypical way, as a mere rehashing of British and French imperial pasts, and of German

8 See on this, MÜNKLER 2015.

will to power. The Brexit campaign shows how strong the wartime image still is in collective imaginary, and how germano-phobic slogans can still be effective.

Like in the aftermath of the Great Depression, socio-psychological feelings of decline are spreading in many European countries, ending up generating xenophobic fears and the research of scapegoats. This dangerous mood became a wide-spreading political attitude in the West (especially in France) after the terroristic attacks of the ISIS network, as well as in Central European countries, which are now crossed by migration flows coming from the Middle East through the Balkans. In light of this situation, the legitimacy of European institutions to handle these economic and political problems is put into question by European citizens, who rather see in a comeback to a strong idea of national identities a possible path out of all these troubles. New forms of nationalism throughout the European countries can be explained as a consequence of the inability of Europe to effectively face its internal crisis. In order to contrast this tendency, CASTALDI proposes a federalist solution, which consists of a substantial enhancement of supranational institutions. For this to happen, it is of utmost importance rethinking the relationship between democracy and people, by decoupling the notions of state and nation, or at least of *ethnos* and *demos*, i.e. the sovereign community of the citizen on one hand, and their national and ethnic community on the other.

This was the idea at the core of Altiero Spinelli's federalist thought and political agency. Spinelli, an anti-Stalinist communist who was banned and imprisoned by the fascist regime, acknowledged in the 1930s that national and sovietic imperialisms were the main causes of the European wars and therefore identified in the federation of the European states the supranational authority that could ensure peace, constitutional freedoms, and economic wealth to European citizens. According to CASTALDI, Constitutional Europeism has both a cultural and an institutional aspect. He suggests that the European Union should enhance both its supranational and post-national characters. First, it should reinforce its supranational (i.e. federal) institutions, by turning the Commission into a real European governing body, which must take responsibility in front of the European Parliament and of the European Council, playing the role of a High Chamber that represents the member states.⁹ According to Habermas, sharing sovereignty with the Parliament and delegating the executive functions to the Commission, the Council would respect the double sovereignty that the European citizenship guarantees.¹⁰ [Every European citizen is, in fact, both citizen of a nation state and of the

⁹ Among the many suggestions in this direction, see SPINELLI GROUP 2013.

¹⁰ See HABERMAS 2014.

European Union. European Institutions must, therefore, respect the sovereignty of both European citizens and nations, which are represented by the Council. By sharing their power not only among each other but also and foremost with the European Parliament, the leaders of the Member States would pave the way for European post-national politics. Europe's self-limitation, in the frame of a polycentric society – as wished by Shelkshorn – can be ensured, according to CASTALDI, only within federal European institutions. It is, therefore, time to address the problem of sovereignty in view of the effective democratization of Europe: a democracy which takes into account both the single demos of the European citizen, as highlighted by the federalistic actions, and the different demoi of the nation states, as stressed by the theoreticians of "demoicracy".¹¹ The decision of Britons to leave the European Union and the discussions that are absorbing the European institutions between the supporters of "an ever closer union among the peoples and Member States of the European Community"¹² regard exactly whether and in which respect the Union should opt for becoming either a confederation of democratic states or the democratic federation of its citizens in one demos, or even a mix of the two. If Europe still believes that it consists of the supranational project of a spreading synthesis between nations that are not only united by their common origins, but that are rather entangled in the rational exchange of ideas in individual responsibility, as Husserl suggests, the European Union should look for the institutional framework that embodies and enables at best this ideal task.

Among the submitted articles, we present four complementary approaches to the crisis, understood as an economic, political and cultural issue. On one hand, James MENSCH and Timo MIETTINEN deal with the economic crisis that is afflicting Europe since 2008. While MENSCH proposes a psychological interpretation of the inner conflict between political and economic understandings of the European project, MIETTINEN analyzes the methodological background of the ruling economic policies, that is ordoliberalism, and in so doing goes back to Walter Eucken's interpretation of phenomenology. On the other hand, Rebecca DEW and Christian STERNAD situate the crisis issue within wider narratives regarding modernity and Europe. DEW acknowledges the presence of elective affinities among the critiques that twentieth-century German thinkers, such as Arendt, Jaspers and Strauss, addressed to modernity, which correspond for them to a dissolution of

11 See CHENEVAL/SCHIMMELFENNIG 2013, NICOLAÏDIS, Kalypso 2013.

12 See on this point, the report of the UK Parliament about the recurrence of this phrase over EU treaties: <http://researchbriefings.parliament.uk/ResearchBriefing/Summary/CBP-7230>.

values. From a different, but similar angle, STERNAD analyzes the understanding of the genesis of Europe, in terms of a philosophical and religious issue, following Husserl, Patočka, Zambrano and Derrida.

James MENSCH addresses in his article the current European crisis from a phenomenological-psychological perspective. Provocatively, he suggests to interpret the crisis of the European monetary union in terms of an identity split, which demands to be analysed in psychopathological terms, as a "multiple personality disorder". In line with Plato's analogy between soul and state, MENSCH drafts a psychological diagnosis, according to which the European monetary union presents different "personalities" that, on regular basis, take full control of its behaviour, while their respective memories are subjected to selective amnesia. By referring both to Husserl's understanding of egological identity and to Freud's teleological interpretation of post-traumatic strategies, MENSCH applies these paradigms to the European Union. In this perspective, he maintains that the European project results from the traumas that marked Europe during the first half of twentieth century. Unable as it was to properly elaborate these traumas, Europe remained stuck between two "personalities", i.e. two fundamental aims: on one hand, the political task of establishing a peaceful system, based on freedom, democracy and cooperation, and of guaranteeing fundamental social, political, and economic rights; on the other hand, the hidden dream of recovering the centrality that Europe had in the past, when it was the strongest world power. MENSCH identifies two strategies, behind this contradictory identity. On one side, he highlights the presence of a personality that fears that World Wars were caused by economic catastrophes (high inflation-rate in Germany, Great Depression, etc.), and reassures itself by mastering economy by political means, and by guaranteeing civil and social rights, as well as the welfare state. On the other side, there is another personality that, conversely, believes that World Wars were caused by political nationalism, and, therefore, hopes to overcome the crisis by integrating the different European economies and by depriving them of the independence they require to fight each other. This personality split shows its pathological effects in the current institutional crises of the Union, which is not able to provide an institutional framework to integrate and overcome this contradiction.

In fact, as MENSCH shows, political and economic collectives behave according to opposite forms of recognition: while those who live within a democratic framework are at the same time, in their quality as citizens, makers of laws (through their representatives) and subjected to them, as workers, on the other side, they alienate their political rights to their employers. After the 2008

financial crisis, the citizens at the periphery of Europe discovered the loss of their rights as citizens, as soon as the “executive agency” was claimed by the holders of their countries’ bonds, and not anymore by their political representatives, who were forced to calm the markets by implementing reforms. Because of their high debt level, many member states of the European periphery were forced to outsource their political sovereignty to financial capitalism, in order to pay back the political time they have bought in the previous decades by short-term borrowings.¹³

The economic tradition that is currently leading Europe is German ordoliberalism, an economic position that corresponds much more to a moral stance than to a specific economic doctrine. PIANA proposes an in-depth analysis of the philosophical background of ordoliberalism, by focusing on the figure of Walter Eucken who is considered its symbolic father. MIETTINEN sketches the historical background of the *Methodenstreit* among economists in late 19th Century and situates Eucken’s approach in the historical context of the Freiburg university, where he was one of the very few who attempted an intellectual response to the political and economic crisis of the by 1930s, by combining a scientific critique of the centralized approach of national-socialism and Stalinism with his personal engagement in the Freiburg resistance circle.

Eucken’s liberal stance is characterized by a strong emphasis on constitutional choice and institutional issues. According to this view, the core of economic life is identified in the economic constitution (*Wirtschaftsverfassung*), and not for instance in the division of labour, or in the relation of power and technological level. Unlike neoliberalism, the central element of economics consists of the law, and not of individual choices. Considering the legal and moral order as the basis of liberalism (hence the word “ordoliberalism”), economics is understood as the normative science of ideal forms that have to be implemented in the life-worldly economy, in order to guarantee order, norm stability and the dismantling of monopolies.

Whilst Foucault considered Husserl’s phenomenology *toutcourt* as the main background for the idealistic approach of ordoliberalism, MIETTINEN refers this approach back to Eucken’s reading of Husserl, and thus shows how Eucken conflates Husserl’s accurate distinction between several realms of idealities, especially ignoring the concrete bond that, according to genetic phenomenology, links material (i.e. non formal) idealities to their life-worldly horizons.

While Husserl’s ethics situates the maxim: “do your best under the given circumstances” in concrete and individual situations as a plea for renewing

¹³ See on this, STRECK 2014.

decisions and even norms, Eucken's ordoliberalism neglects, in MIETTINEN's reading, the inequalities that are *de facto* widespread among market actors. According to ordoliberalism, economics should be understood as an exact science, and should therefore deal with ideal forms rather than with concrete production and exchange. When, after the Second World War, ordoliberalism became the leading school of thought in the German Federal Republic, it led, on one side, to the design of an ideal legal framework and of an impartial and strong governance; on the other, it also led to a strict separation between economics and politics.

The fundamental decision for this economic system is the only political moment where economics and politics converge. Besides that, there is no longer space for genuine politics within the economic domain. This stance was probably motivated by Eucken's resistance against national socialism in the 1930s: by pleading for a free economy, arbitrated by a fair and impartial state, Eucken stood for liberalism both in economics and politics. He therefore stressed the rule of ideal laws against the thread of pressures by economic and political groups. Nonetheless, his understanding of economics as a realm of exact idealities led to a problematic hypostatization of law and order as the basic tools of economic policies. In this respect, he neglects the more dynamic aspects of Husserl's understanding of the role of ideals in concrete moral life. Eventually, MIETTINEN concludes his historical and philosophical reconstruction, showing how the current governance of the monetary union is driven by the ordoliberal credo.

Rebecca DEW addresses the crisis concept by dealing with Hannah Arendt, Karl Jaspers, Leo Strauss, and their critiques of modernity, which she understands as "thoughtful perspectives in a thoughtless age". Starting from the overlapping of the anti-modernist stances, which are present in these philosophers' thought, DEW comes to show their affinity with Heidegger's account of Western metaphysics, as well as with his project of forcing a new metaphysical beginning.

A sort of "thought deprivation" is one of the shapes that, according to Arendt, decline takes in modernity and especially in modern philosophy. For Arendt, modernity is at its core a crisis of forgetfulness, the loss of tradition and authority in politics and education. Jaspers used similar terms, while dealing with modernity in terms of a process of bureaucratization and technologization, of which isolation, consumerism, and the emergence of mass society were the most apparent traits. Strauss stressed, on his side, the devastation of traditional ways of living, which according to him was mainly caused by Western thinkers, such as Nietzsche and Kierkegaard. Common to

all these interpretations – as well as to Heidegger's – in an understanding of modernity as tragically detached from a past "golden age", in which a greater level of truth and authenticity characterized human existence.¹⁴

Whilst Jaspers pleads for human responsibility, as a way to contrast of the atomic threat, whose catastrophe he understands as the symptom of the application of specialized sciences to the world of human affairs, Arendt suggests that modernity itself is a catastrophe of thought and of language: a worldless era, in which humankind lives in isolation and alienation, under the "law of the desert".¹⁵ According to both Strauss and Arendt, philosophy is a core element of modernity; whilst the former, though, identifies modern philosophy in the works of Hobbes, Rousseau and Nietzsche, for Arendt the site of rupture, which determines the birth of modern thought, corresponds rather to Descartes's methodological doubt. In Strauss' reading, the spreading of this generalized mistrust in the world manifests indeed better than anything else the crisis and instability of contemporary society.

In order to contrast modern scepticism, these thinkers invoke a reduction of the claims of science, which should not to be understood as the topos of human rationality, but rather as a limited academic endeavour, with restricted political applicability. Moreover, today's science should refer its ancient-Greek models, in order to re-establish the centrality of thinking, in our thoughtless era. Following this arguments, DEW goes as far as to foresee the possible rising of a new form of polity to come, which would be heir of both the Roman republican and of the nation-state models and of the nation-state tradition. This new political conformation might be able to provide his members with a new "home", i.e. with new sense of ownership, belonging, and continuity, which would be founded on a renewed care for natality, beyond any ethnical and religious prejudice.

Christian STERNAD follows in his reconstruction of Europe's genealogy a similar interpretative path. After having pinpointed what for him are the limits of Husserl's reduction of "spiritual Europe" to a form of universal rationality, STERNAD undertakes a deconstruction of Husserl's unilateral account, by problematizing the role that Christianity played in the European construction. In so doing, he goes along with Patočka's, Zambrano's and Derrida's attempts

14 This sense of loss, and of nostalgia for a greater past, cannot be limited to philosophical research, but is rather widespread in the various intellectual accounts of the crisis of modernity, which emerged in the first decades of twentieth century. See on this, for instance, SPENGLER 1926-28; ORTEGA Y GASSET, *Man and Crisis* 1958; HUIZINGA 1936.

15 Interestingly enough, this same metaphor also emerges in Heidegger's *Schwarze Hefte*, denoting modernity's effects, which Heidegger understands though as caused by the Jewish machinery. See on this, DI CESARE 2014.

to overcome Husserl's rationalism.

According to STERNAD, Husserl's understanding of Europe, as it is solely grounded on a philosophical stance, risks to cause a "mystification of the history of culture". This phrase was coined by Derrida, in order to pinpoint the hypocrite nature of any mono-genealogical account of Europe's origins. STERNAD argues that Husserl's attempt to save rationality led him to the exclusion of religious traditions, understood as historical, cultural, social, political and even ethical forces. According to this interpretation, Husserl's plea for cultural renewal by means of practical reason is interpreted as an attack against traditional forms of life conduct.

Unlike Husserl, Patočka considered Europe both a rational *and* a Christian project, distinguishing thereby between theoretical logos and religious rationality. The theoretical stance can be either scientific, i.e. aimed at coping with reality, or philosophical, as it is oriented toward the essence of what is. Religion, on the other hand, corresponds in its core to a a-theoretical form of rationality, which cannot be properly grasped by philosophy. Patočka criticizes therefore Husserl for having overlooked, in his genealogy of European rationality, Europe's hidden religious component. Since reason has two complementary faces – one based on mystical worship, and one on sober intellectualism – problems emerge as soon as the latter demands universal validity. In this respect, STERNAD lingers on Patočka's suggestion that Europe has not been able yet to develop a properly Christian rationality. This kind of rationality might indeed become the most powerful recovery from the decadence that the oblivion of the care for the soul and the predominance of technical administration in modern times have caused.

Whilst Patočka underlined the need to intermingle theoretical and religious reason, Maria Zambrano dealt with Catholicism in terms of the authentic Augustinian philosophy. Doing this, she interpreted religion as the *vera philosophia* that the Greeks prepared and the Church later fulfilled, by attempting to realise the *civitas Dei* on earth. Following this interpretation, the crisis to which First World War gave birth is essentially a religious crisis.

As for Derrida, STERNAD shows how he started in 1989 a reflection upon Europe's identity and future, in light of the events which marked Eastern Europe and also of the bicentenary of the French revolution. In the aftermath of the wars of twentieth century, Derrida pleads for an unrealized Europe, an idea that has yet to rise, and for a Europe that cannot accept to be identical with itself. Any discourse about Europe in form of an autobiography should be therefore be replaced by a narration from a point of view of alterity.

Starting from Patočka's claim that Christianity is still the unthought-of

element of Europe, Derrida stresses that Christianity as such is still yet to come. Expanding on this idea, he suggests that an authentically Christian Europe, in order to be developed in its full-fledged potentialities, should get rid of every Greek remains. He indicates the platonic *polis* as the obstacle to the full unfolding of authentic Christian politics. According to Derrida's speculations, Europe can have a future only if it takes a distance both from Athens and Rom, breaking up with Greek-platonic-roman politics. Only by doing this, it could eventually reach an authentic religious experience, or *mysterium tremendum*.

Following the steps of Patočka, Zambrano and Derrida, STERNAD ends up arguing that an understanding of Europe that does not rely only on its origins, but that rather tackles the contradictions which inhere to its conflictual identity and that refuses any unilateral account of reason, is necessary.

We are honoured to share in the section "Path of Method" Giovanni PIANA's reflections upon phenomenology as a method, translated from the Italian by Michela Summa.

PIANA's quest for a rigorous phenomenology begins with a disambiguation of phenomenology's famous plea: "back to the things themselves". Reading this claim against the background of *Gestalt* psychology, PIANA argues that it is not a generic plea for philosophical innocence or the appeal to an aware dismantling of every kind of unconscious prejudices, but rather the uncovering of a set of well-determined opinions, with precise theoretical consequences, mostly inspired by psychological associationism.

PIANA distinguishes the theoretical core of phenomenology as a philosophical method (distinguished from preliminary stages of psychological research) and Husserl's attempt to use it for answering his time's appeals and tensions. The problem of method became for Husserl entangled with ethical tasks, while phenomenology took more and more the shape of a philosophy of subjectivity, until the idea of phenomenology was presented as the only answer to the concept of crisis. PIANA is quite sarcastic about re-propositions of this overlapping of method and crisis: While the rhetoric of the crisis gets poorer the more it is iterated outside of its historical horizon, the theoretical core of phenomenology as a method can be grasped in its validity only beyond it as the analytic task driven by a theory of the intentionality of conscious acts.

In the line of this analytic interpretation of phenomenology, PIANA sets clarity as the first goal of philosophy, i.e. bringing order in thinking. And, for the sake of clarity, he does not hesitate to define phenomenology as a – rather complex and sophisticated – intuitionistic method. However, intuition has not to be intended as a special form of knowledge for otherwise inaccessible truths, not as the only leap into metaphysical realms, but rather as a method to trace

modes of being by describing structural modes of manifestation. The goal is not to describe phenomenological givens, but phenomenological rules or structures: it is to sketch a phenomenologically grounded ontology. Philosophical analysis deals with the process of “concept formation” from the inner structures of experience up to more independent idealities, from general regularities that are directly graspable in the configuration of what is given to more abstract concepts.

Finally, PIANA underlines that his structural approach to phenomenology, presented also through the metaphor of “a geometry of experience”, radically departs from existentialistic motives present in the tradition of phenomenology.

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