

Abstract paper Shifting paradigms in Europa?

“Facing Change by Delving into History and Tradition. A Cultural Philosophical Reflection on the Use of ‘Pure’ European and Christian Narratives”

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Change is an integral part of human life and history. However, the pace at which change happens today is relatively new and is easily experienced as destabilising and uprooting. Tradition is then often seen as a stabilizing factor and seemingly readily available in identity construction. To find solid ground beneath one's feet again, people look to history and tradition. Especially in religious and philosophical movements, looking back to/on what is handed over, i.e., *traditio*, has a strong persuasive force. Is this always unproblematic or even possible?

In facing change in Europe, two major cultural sources receive ample attention, namely Greek culture and Christianity. The former often for the sake of democracy, the latter because of the lofty ethics and ideal of charity. Delving into these traditions leads to several challenges. On the one hand, Christians see their tradition being used/reduced to serve political gains and they try to resist the reduction. Nevertheless, also Christians can reduce their own tradition. They do so by not being able to reckon with the profound ambiguity of their tradition that equally contains violent and charitable aspects. On the other hand, providing a clear-cut definition of Greek culture, and Europe's relationship to it, is a Sisyphean labour. For example, Athenian democracy is not simply the same as contemporary democracy. This raises important questions on how to understand and responsibly integrate religious and philosophical sources and arguments in contemporary identity and cultural constructions.

In my paper, I will first show that Christianity and Greek culture are not pure wells or monolithic constructions from which to draw clearcut answers for contemporary problems. Cherry-picking from an idealised tradition easily turns into blatant self-deception. Secondly, I will present and briefly develop two images with an analytical potential to find steppingstones for a constructive way out of the abuse or misuse of traditions. On the one hand, the idea of the *invention* of Christianity, as presented by Roselyne Dupont-Roc et Antoine Guggenheim, helps conceptualising and nuancing the necessity of introduction in, and construction of tradition(s), in particular of Christianity. On the other hand, cultural philosopher Guido Vanheeswijck captures the complexity and interrelatedness of Europe and its culture with a retelling of the story of Penelope. This story of the faithful and shrewd wife of Odysseus offers inspiration for a renewed understanding of culture and memory. Penelope's weaving exemplifies the continuous work of identity construction and its interrelatedness of different strands that compose the fabric of identity.

In a third and final movement, these two analytical images are brought together to show one way out of the reductive, simplifying, or uncritical use of Christianity and Greek culture. By linking these two major sources of European culture to their geographic locations, Jerusalem and Athens, as a *pars pro toto*, the instability of European identity construction is made clear. This paper is then a plea to appreciate the (inter)woven and construed nature of European identity and to consider it not as mono-, bi, or trifocal, but as multifocal.