

# Euroamericanism Subject & Chaos

Marcus Steinweg

## A B S T R A C T

*Philosophy always unites the divided: the finite and the infinite, the fathomable and the unfathomable, created and creator, Man and God. Whenever I think, my thought unites what must remain divided: immanence and transcendence, consistency and inconsistency, European originality and American horizontality. Art and philosophy indicate the contingent nature of reality. They generate resistance against established realities and the dispositives that organize them. Their aim is not to flee from reality but rather to intensify contact with reality by maintaining a distance from it.*

## K E Y W O R D S

Happiness, Confinement, Enlightenment, Courage, Pathos and Stinging Eyes.

Staatliche Akademie der Bildenden Künste Karlsruhe  
Art Academy Karlsruhe, Karlsruhe, Germany

*Happiness* François Jullien demonstrated that the idea of happiness was among the least questioned premises in Western thought. As long as this idea remains tied to a vision of a goal in order to inscribe itself in a teleology with a happy ending, it will belong to the Europeanism of the happy life, which “singled out the idea of happiness from the continuity of process and set it forth as ‘the desirable’ par excellence.” As always, Jullien approaches the deconstruction of one of the core categories of the European history of ideas from the outside, taking a detour through China, which did not undergo the separation of day-to-day living and the desire for happiness in order to nurture life independent of happiness. Nurturing life away from happiness means living it without any particular idea of happiness, beyond the dramaturgy of unfulfilled desire, without the romanticization of happiness. One thing that’s notable about this comparison between European goal-orientedness/purposefulness and Chinese purposelessness/goallessness is that it leaves unmentioned the emergence of a conception of happiness within the field of Western philosophy that is freed from the categories of sense, from determination, and from telos. Nietzsche reactivated the antique and Spinozist heritage of an immanence of *beatitudo* in the materialistic horizon of existence. Spinozian/Nietzschean affirmationism, saying yes to life in its nonliving, would be another strain of Western thought that locates happiness within its incommensurability — instead of construing it beyond life. Being happy simply means living. There is no life beyond life, beyond its violence and nonliving.

*Confinement* Has anyone ever done more violence to *logos* than to confine it in the prison known as logic? And what if speech, language, or reason known as *logos* were convicted of the inconsistency of its promise, known as logic? Among heretics, an exactingness caused by excess is proper to thought, which tempts *logos* to break

with its principles. Thinking means showing *logos* its own fragility.

*Enlightenment* Should we call enlightenment the thing that spreads “trace elements of reason ... through the world,” or is it rather “trace elements of chaos ... that bring forth enlightenment?” Alexander Kluge directs this question at Heiner Müller, who recognizes that the “purpose of intelligence” is “to create chaos” in order to “question all illusions, all coalitions, and all alliances.” Ultimately, the point is to complicate the opposition between reason and chaos. What else is reason doing than bringing chaos into the world, and what does chaos produce if not the hyper-reasonable questioning of this chaos of reason, which is rationalistic totalitarianism? The dialectic of enlightenment causes reason and chaos to interact in a way that does not privilege either side. We’ve gotten used to describing the birth of *logos* out of chaos or myth as the emancipation of thought from the irrational. At the same time, we know that the emergence of reason in the prerational sphere of chaos represented a violent event that generated chaotic effects. Translated to the system of nature/culture, it means that we distance ourselves from the myth of a culture that replaces “wild” nature, and cannot simply switch over to an opposing ideology of nature robbed of its “innocence” by culture. Nature isn’t wild, pure, or innocent; nor is culture civilizing or violent. To formulate it as primitively as possible: one isn’t better than the other. Nature isn’t good, culture isn’t bad; nor vice versa. Enlightenment begins with the suspension of these anthropomorphisms. Articulating oneself beyond good and evil is part of the complexity. The interest-oriented, strategic, or irrational violence, brutality, and horror that happen in the name of (generally fascistic) naturalism and (ideological, religious) culturalism is the product of the subject’s exit from the dialectic of enlightenment. Instead of acting at the level of the world’s complexity, it reduces this

complexity in favor of one-sidedness that it calls truth or justice. If it made sense to speak of truth or justice in this context, then the dialectic of enlightenment would teach us that they are on the side of complexity rather than one-sidedness.

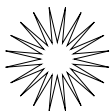
*Courage* In Kant's essay *What Is Enlightenment?* (1784), Michel Foucault recognized a "call to courage." The renowned challenge — addressed to all of humanity — to emerge from immaturity implies a *sapere aude*: the courage to think, the emancipation from subjection to the thought of others. Kant is touching on the human ability to become conscious of one's own heteronomy in order to gradually free oneself from it. In the context of further considerations that stray from Kant, Foucault spoke of the "courage of truth," which is tantamount to his definition of philosophical thought. The courage of truth turns out to be the courage of thinking. The act of thinking, which includes processuality and interminability, includes working on the truth, the "analysis of the relations between the subject and truth: that of relations of power and their role in the interplay between the subject and truth." The courage of truth must question its instrumentalization and fusion with established power. Far from dismissing truth as a metaphysical concept — with and without Kant — Foucault defines the task of his thought as truth analysis. Courage demands this analysis, if only because, as a critical project, it cannot trust any simple solutions — as far as, for example, the alliance between knowledge and power goes. Strictly speaking, it can't trust anything. The courage of truth is inherent to the tradition of enlightenment, not only in the form of a challenge, but also as a problem and aporia. You could call Foucault the thinker of this inherence. His entire body of thought expresses consciousness of the aporia of thought concerning truth. This is why it is thought — because thinking doesn't mean searching for solutions. Thinking means working through problems that

elude solvability. Kant was also clear on this. The subject is bound. That's what the subject's humanity consists in: being in contact with questions and problems that it can neither dismiss nor solve. And that's what requires courage.

*Pathos* Thinking that thinks itself — the self-reflection of the logos, the cogito, or the subject — implies the veritable pathos of reason. There is no doctrine of reason that is not a doctrine of emotion. The reasoning subject cannot think itself without being confronted with its own fragmentation, the pain that belongs to self-awareness. The Ancient Greek verb *páschein* means *to suffer* or *to endure* — and what is suffering other than an experience that pushes the subject to its limits? Pathos expresses the experience of unresolvable conflict, which is why there is no philosophy that isn't pathetic in this sense. It may be a matter of the discreet pathos of mathematical thinking, or the lines of argument pushed to their breaking point. It may be the polemic pathos of reason run riot, which we are familiar with from Nietzsche's final books and Artaud's strident invectives (from his "animalistic and superhuman, shrieking, shrill, brutal" speech). The pathos of dry subjects, abstraction, sobriety, and coldness also expresses the pain of thought, in which thought "loses itself," as Hegel says. Thinking means getting lost again and again. The self grinds itself down by its conflicts instead of synthesizing them dialectically. The movement of reason traces its restlessness. Thinking is a passion that makes the subject tremble in the face of truths that undermine its realities.

*Stinging eyes* To look truth in the face — that is the cliché of thought because it can only do so in the face of a truth that remains faceless. "What thing," asks Jean-Luc Nancy, "can be looked at directly in the face? If looking something 'in the face' means seeing its 'truth' or 'evidence,' then there is never any direct face-to-face. Every

face is a bedazzlement, terrible and marvelous.” We know that Lacan calls the faceless face of truth the real. Freud speaks of the unconscious, Heidegger of being that collapses into nothingness as nonbeing. There is no philosopher who hasn’t found their own term for the truth without a face. Plato evokes the image of the shining sun, the burning light that stings the eyes. The sun inflames and irritates the subject. If it does not cause blindness, then, at least, it bedazzles. Like Freud’s unconscious, Lacan’s real, and Heidegger’s being, does not give of itself fully; it withdraws and withholds itself. It doesn’t divulge itself directly. The subject communicates with these entities only at the cost of relative blindness. The truth generates a subject with stinging eyes. You can also refer to “reddened eyes,” as Rancière does in a commentary on Deleuze. With Deleuze, chaos blinds the subject and causes it to slide. What Deleuze and Guattari, together with Nietzsche, call chaos can be interpreted as a translation of the Lacanian real into the dispositive of immanent thought. The planes of immanence lie like a filter or a “screen” over chaos. They muffle the contact with nothingness. Just as the antique logos already represented a neutralizing figure for the *alagon*, the immanence filter lies over the faceless chaos of truth in order to give it a face that stings less the subject’s eyes. To look truth in the face means assenting to being blinded, which promises some minimum of insight. This perhaps impossible promise is the promise that philosophy makes to itself.



Born in 1971, Marcus Steinweg lives and works as a philosopher in Berlin. He is a Professor at the Art Academy Karlsruhe. His recent books include: *Duras* (with Rosemarie Trockel, Berlin: Merve 2008); *Politik des Subjekts* (Zürich/Berlin: Diaphanes 2009); *Aporien der Liebe* (Berlin: Merve 2010); *Kunst und Philosophie / Art and Philosophy* (Cologne: Walter König: 2012); *Philosophie der Überstürzung* (Berlin: Merve 2013); *Inkonsistenzen* (Berlin: Matthes & Seitz 2015); *Evidenzterror* (Berlin: Matthes & Seitz 2015); *Gramsci Theater* (Berlin: Merve 2016); *Splitter* (Berlin: Matthes & Seitz 2016); *Subjekt und Wahrheit* (Berlin: Matthes & Seitz 2018). Some of his books are published in english by The MIT Press.