

LSE

THE LONDON SCHOOL
OF ECONOMICS AND
POLITICAL SCIENCE ■

LSE Research Online

[Simon Glendinning](#)

Nietzsche's Europe: an experimental anticipation of the future

**Article (Accepted version)
(Refereed)**

Original citation: Glendinning, Simon (2016) *Nietzsche's Europe: an experimental anticipation of the future*. [Journal of the British Society for Phenomenology](#), 47 (3). pp. 276-291. ISSN 0007-1773
DOI: [10.1080/00071773.2016.1180850](https://doi.org/10.1080/00071773.2016.1180850)

© 2016 [The British Society for Phenomenology](#)

This version available at: <http://eprints.lse.ac.uk/68203/>
Available in LSE Research Online: November 2016

LSE has developed LSE Research Online so that users may access research output of the School. Copyright © and Moral Rights for the papers on this site are retained by the individual authors and/or other copyright owners. Users may download and/or print one copy of any article(s) in LSE Research Online to facilitate their private study or for non-commercial research. You may not engage in further distribution of the material or use it for any profit-making activities or any commercial gain. You may freely distribute the URL (<http://eprints.lse.ac.uk>) of the LSE Research Online website.

This document is the author's final accepted version of the journal article. There may be differences between this version and the published version. You are advised to consult the publisher's version if you wish to cite from it.

Nietzsche's Europe:
An Experimental Anticipation of the Future

Simon Glendinning

Democracy's Children

Nietzsche is a thinker of Europe as something to come, a thinker of Europe as having a future not just in some already well and widely anticipated “tomorrow” – but from a distance that looks towards “the day after tomorrow”. And Nietzsche is not just predicting some happy outcome for this Europe, but wants to contribute to making it so. He writes from some kind of “today” with the untimely ambition that the day after tomorrow will belong *to him*.

Nietzsche's horizon-tracking takes its bearings from the movement of modern political democratization which was beginning to dominate Europe in his “today”. As is well known, he finds very little to cheer in that development. Nevertheless, he sees in its unfolding the potential for the creation of a European configuration beyond its present configuration, and in particular, beyond what he regards as the stupidly nationalistic configuration that marks its “today”, and threatens its “tomorrow”. But beyond this *dis-integration* of Europe into petty nationalisms Nietzsche reads inside its present form a movement towards the democratisation of Europe itself, the creation of a European political unity beyond nationalism. This remains to come, but it is (he thinks) beginning: a feeling and desire is already underway among some cultured Europeans. And it expresses one general ambition: an emerging European spirit that “*wants to become one*” (BGE, p. 169).

Like Kant a little over one-hundred years earlier, Nietzsche himself has a feeling that a new political order will emerge in the old world of Europe: a new and unprecedented European political union. Unlike Kant, however, Nietzsche does not see this development as an unambiguous good. This movement towards the political *integration* of Europe will not, he thinks, produce free modern citizens living in democratic peace, but rather, and for the most part, the most repellent “levelling and mediocritizing” of European people, making Europeans into serviceable herd animals, “weak willed highly employable workers”. The general trend of European democratization is simply a movement towards the production of a type that is, as he puts it, “prepared for *slavery* in the subtlest sense” (BGE, p. 154).

However, this movement is not simply a linear story of ever greater levelling. The *same conditions* may also, although “involuntarily”, bring about something Nietzsche thinks really is worth hoping for. They are also the conditions for producing “a new supra-national and nomadic type of man”, people “detached from any definite milieu” who will have as their distinction “a maximum of the art of and power of adaptation” (BGE pp. 153-4) – and *these* Europeans will form “a new caste” that can eventually “dominate[] all Europe” so that the latter “*acquire[s] a single will*” (BGE, 119).

Ultimately, Nietzsche thinks that the democracy of the present will give birth to a new “synthesis” of old European spirits (plural) (BGE, p. 170), a new cosmopolitan “plant ‘Man’” (BGE, p. 54) capable of flourishing independently of any “definite milieu” (BGE, p. 153), and capable of bringing Europe under the domination of a new spirit (singular). While democratization thus brings about conditions for slavery in the “*subtlest sense*” for most Europeans, he also thinks it will bring about something like

its exact (and hence equally subtle) opposite too: “the breeding of *tyrants*” (BGE, p. 154).

So, even though it is predominantly a movement of weakening and levelling, it is also a process in which “strong individuals” can emerge in Europe once more, “stronger and richer than has perhaps ever happened before”. In virtue of their “unprejudiced schooling” (having liberated themselves from the deformations of a nationalist outlook and formation), and as a consequence of the “tremendous multiplicity of practice, art and mask” made available to them in the new synthesis, the emergence of a newly effective and distinctively *European* “ruling caste” (BGE, p.154): the rule of “we good *Europeans*”, the “Europeans of the day after tomorrow”. And as I say even if Nietzsche is in some sense predicting these events, he is also sending himself off in a future producing way: “the day after tomorrow belongs to me”, says Nietzsche (AC, p. 114). Nietzsche, here and now, elects to speak to the friends, the good Europeans, who, as we will hear Nietzsche insist later, he “as yet knows none” (OGM, p. 135). But, as Derrida notes, he sends himself off to speak to those friends *so that there may be such friends*, to “form and forge” (PF, p. 43), to “conjure” (ibid.) them at a distance of time of who knows how long – in writing that “produces an event” “here and now” out of the possibility of its own “will have been” a speech to these friends, “a teleiopoetic propulsion...produces an event, sinking into the darkness of a friendship which is not yet” (ibid.).

In the wake of Kant, Europe’s self-understanding had been framed by a profoundly teleo-messianic discourse of universal history: a movement of the history of “Man” from primitive and savage animality to rational and civilised humanity, with European

humanity at the head. In Nietzsche's writing on Europe another discourse of European humanity makes its way. And it makes its way through a new hidden hand, a new cunning of reason within the tidal wave of "the *democratic* movement in Europe" (BGE, p. 153). It is into this wave that Nietzsche sends an untimely message-in-a-bottle of his own future arrival. I will turn now to examine Nietzsche's call to the future – the future of a certain friendship of we good Europeans.

Nietzsche's Arrow

Nietzsche is a European philosopher. From Europe. Like many others. A thinker *of* Europe. Like many others. However, it is as a thinker who promises to overcome what I think can be regarded as the fundamental self-understanding of Europe itself, and yet who wants to do so *in the name of Europe* that I want to consider him here. However, before I follow this ode to Europe in Nietzsche's text, I want briefly to raise the question: *why Europe?* *why good Europeans?* In its opposition to the nationalist appeal in Germany to "good Germans" why wouldn't Nietzsche say, simply, "we *whomevers*". One might want to excuse Nietzsche by referring to his times: the world was not so big then, the horizon for his thinking was European because his world was. But that is nonsense. Nietzsche's work is peppered with non-European references, and often, typically even, positively so. He asks "What Europe owes the Jews?" (BGE, p. 161), but not "What does Europe owe the non-European in general? Nor even just the non-European migrants. Nietzsche thinks that Europe has been a site of "great things" (BGE, p. 13) – but he does not think that Europe has a monopoly on that at all. So why the limit to the cosmopolitan plant to a European milieu? Is it racism? parochialism? pragmatism? My suspicion is that it is none of those. It is... German. As we shall see, the German question ("What is Germany?") casts a profoundly

determining shadow over Nietzsche's reflections on Europe. In this essay I will only track that. However, it deserves something more ambitious, and my hypothesis would be that Europe is itself a German thing: that when Germany thinks itself it thinks itself in an essentially European horizon that *it* produces and projects as the context of its spiritual destiny. I do not mean this to imply that we must always be on our guard against what Habermas has called a "fatal" temptation for Germany to "succumb to power fantasies" of achieving "'semi-hegemonic status'" in Europe (http://www.socialeurope.eu/2013/05/democracy-solidarity-and-the-european-crisis-2/?utm_source=dlvr.it&utm_medium=twitter). No, the European horizon is just as visible in Habermas's calls for Germany finally to give up that fantasy as some kind of repentance for its indulging them, "and that it is in our national interest to permanently avoid" them since not doing so leads only to "catastrophe" (ibid.). But it is still the same programme: German interests and German destiny are inseparably connected to a European future, namely the success of a "European Union". And for Habermas too "the German government holds the key to the fate of the European Union in its hand" (ibid.). These intertwined fates and fatalities belong, I think, to "the German question", making of it at once what Habermas calls "the European question" (ibid.).

There is a wonderful illustration of this in a recent history of Germany by Hagen Schulze, which will bring us back to Nietzsche. Writing shortly after the second great German reunification in 1990, Schulze maintained that, in fact, the German question had finally been answered:

For the first time in history, the German nation state is "fulfilled in the present," as Ernest Renan said with reference to France. Nietzsche once

observed, “The Germans are from the day before yesterday and the day after tomorrow – as yet they have no today.” This was so in his day because from the time the idea of a nation state was born at the beginning of the nineteenth century, the nation and the state were always two different things. The early nationalists dreamed that they might recreate the medieval empire, a vast territory including Bohemia and northern Italy, but led by Germans. Later, many people regarded Bismark’s Small German state as only a down payment on a Great German empire, which they would own in the fullness of time. The Weimar Republic was torn apart in a struggle to undo the Treaty of Versailles and restore the pre-1919 eastern border, while the partial nation that was the Federal Republic declared it politically imperative to re-establish the frontiers of 1937.

In other words, the form of the state at any given moment was never enough; it was always just a provisional solution, a way station en route to a utopia that could be attained either through force or not at all. This was why the expression of German nationalism and the search for identity took their particular neurotic forms. That phase of German history is now over. As of October 3, 1990, the Federal Republic of Germany is the only conceivable form that a state for the German nation could take; it has no legitimate competition whatever in the minds of its citizens. For the first time, the question once posed by Ernst Moritz Arndt – “What is the German fatherland?” – now has an unambiguous and lasting answer. (Hagen Schulz, *Germany: A New History*, Harvard University Press, 1998, pp. 336-7)

Turn a couple of pages, to the final page of this New History, and this lasting answer begins to look a little more like a new way station:

As long as no corresponding institutions legitimated by democratic elections are available on a European level, there is no alternative to [the German nation state] in sight. (ibid., p. 340)

In other words an alternative to the German nation state *is* in sight – on a European level on the horizon. In that event’s coming Germany might then really finally become what it is already beginning to be: “a necessary part of the European system, even as a future major power” (p. 338)

Schultz is hopeful that “Germany’s ties to Europe will hold it steady” (p. 340). This is a common theme in post-War Germany, alive as it is to the anxiety that Germany might once more, as Habermas puts it, “succumb to power fantasies” and try to create a “German Europe” instead of a “Germany *in* Europe” (op. cit.). The distinction between the Europeanization of Germany and the Germanization of Europe look like two totally different ways of thinking through the German question. Indeed, we tend to welcome the first and fear the second. However, it may be a distinction without much of a difference, especially if Europe is already something of a German thing. Even in political terms it may not always be a significant contrast. Indeed, the fearful version, which Nietzsche explicitly affirms, can amount to almost the same thing as the welcome one, precisely by its *stemming* German nationalist tendencies within a finally united Europe. And the welcome version, which Schultz and Habermas affirm, can amount to the same thing as the fearful one, when Germany “holds the key” to the success of the Union – on a plan of its own and as a “major power”.

Europe may be something of a German thing. But of course it is not only a German thing, or cannot long remain an uncontested German thing. Other becoming

Europeans will have their own ideas. As Bjarke Hansen has noted, there has been an especially intense “quarrel between Germany and France” over Europe’s spiritual identity:

a quarrel that took place and revealed itself in the so-called “*Querelle des Anciens et des Modernes*”. Or, to put it otherwise, who were the rightful heirs to the heritage of Greek antiquity, *and thus the future of Europe?* France, on the one hand, is imitating the Ancients thereby being caught in Latinity (their relation to the “original source”, as it were, is filtered through the Roman and Renaissance imitation of the Greeks), while Germany, on the other hand, is “the land of the poets and the thinkers” (Heidegger’s words) that characteristically lacks an attained identity – Germany, as Lacoue-Labarthe provocatively states, does not exist as anything *present*. It is for this reason that Winckelmann’s statement becomes decisive in consideration of the German question: we must imitate the Ancients in order to make ourselves inimitable in turn. In other words, the Germans must out-Greek the Greeks (who wound up belonging to Latinity).

In a recent discussion of the German sword-in-the-tree called “Nothung” that cuts through Wagner’s Ring cycle, Stephen Mulhall invites us to follow something of Nietzsche’s claim to see “the Wagnerian representation of Wotan’s overthrow...as itself the refounding of a new, non-Christian culture that might run counter to the philistinism of contemporary *Germany* by reconnecting *Europe* to its sources in Greek culture” (*The Self and Its Shadows*, p. 22, my stress). Mulhall speaks here about Germany/Europe and its genealogy not in geopolitical terms but geophilosophical terms: *through its Greek origin*. Germany, attaining itself by out-Greeking the Greeks would amount to an authentic repetition of the inimitable rather

than the mere predecessor of imitating Rome, and thus “belonging to Latinity”, a repetition that would enable Europe too to attain to “the innermost course of its history” which was “originally ‘philosophical’” (Heidegger, *What is Philosophy?*, London: Vision Press, 1958, p. 31). Nietzsche felt that “late Wagner” lost his way and began to “preach *the road to Rome*” in his *Parsifal* (BGE, pp. 171-2). “Is this still German?” asks Nietzsche, with barely disguised disgust, in a rhyme that closes the “Peoples and Fatherlands” chapter of *Beyond Good and Evil* that I have been citing here, closing the rhyme by asking again “ – Is this still German? – Reflect! And then your answer frame:– For what you hear is Rome – *Rome’s faith in all but name!*” (BGE, p. 172). Whether it should be described as the Germanization of Europe (though the overturn of Latinity) or the Europeanization of Germany (with the authentic repetition of the originary source of Europe) barely makes a difference.

On the other hand, the “Germany or France” quarrel does not take into consideration the one other European nation given special consideration in Nietzsche’s experimental synthesis: that most semi-detached of European states: Britain (which Nietzsche always calls England). Always on the verge of some kind of Brexit, always ready to oppose itself to a “Continental Europe” that is itself (primarily) the divided German/French Europe, Britain too will have its say. Mulhall notes, for example, that the British Arthurian legend embodied in the (not actually the) sword-in-the-stone called “Excalibur” represents a myth of British national identity “that is historically constructed (and repeatedly reconstructed) in opposition to the very aspects of Northern European culture...with which [Wagner] proposes to reconstruct German life and values” (op. cit. p. 22) – and hence, we might say, European life and values.

As we shall see, Nietzsche's experimental synthesis is in fact primarily Germano-Franco-Britannic – with a debt to the Jews. However, this on its own does not explain why it should be called European. Or at least it leaves it open that it is European only in the weakest possible sense: that it comprises a synthesis of already identified as European attributes. But what is it that makes them one and all European? Is it geography? No. Or rather the geography is spiritual not geographical. Indeed, the geopolitical question of European unity in Nietzsche is subsumed by a geophilosophical conception, and we have already begun to see, a genealogical one. Nietzsche's thought of Europe is in my view *fundamentally philosophical*, and not simply geographical or political. And this is another way of framing the European question in Nietzsche as a German question: it is as a philosophical formation with its origin in Greece that German thought figures the European spiritual configuration. And if we ask why Nietzsche is so interested in Europe and its future, we can simply say: because he is, first of all, a (German) philosopher.

Why should we think of Nietzsche's thought of Europe as having such a *fundamental* character? A clue can be found in the particular way that his readers say so too – but say so without saying so, without realising what they are saying. Here is Robert Pippin:

Nietzsche places a great deal of emphasis on two influences, or institutions in his narrative of the Western experience, institutions he calls "Platonism" and "Christianity". (p. 79)

Pippin finds it hard sometimes to stick to this formula. Indeed he seems almost immediately to de-emphasise one of the two legs or legacies:

According to Nietzsche, all the major institution of modernity – modern science...liberal democratic politics, romanticism, humanism, “free-thinking”, socialism – should be interpreted as essentially Christian. (p. 79.)

Still the idea clings on throughout that for Nietzsche

Modernity...[is understood in terms of] its unique extension of “Platonic”/“Christian” ideals. (p. 80)

And he later concludes – in concluding a shallow story of Nietzsche’s intellectual influence – more rightly than he realizes:

All of which seems to have made Nietzsche central in everything “European”. (p. 81)

My starting point will be to assume that it is the specific character of Nietzsche’s *target* that makes his thinking so pointedly and all-embracingly European. He is the thinker whose target is not just this or that European idea, or one idea of European origin among other, but if we follow Emmanuel Levinas’s philosophical protocol for reading Europe, a thinker of Europe as such: “Europe”, Levinas remarks, “is the Bible and the Greeks”. Levinas is not just saying here that two “events” in the distant past have been particularly important in the development of Europe’s history. He is not outlining the “origins” of an empirical history of *a particular region* of the globe, but specifying the historical opening and *becoming-European* of a certain *world*.

On this view, the coming into being of Europe involves the emergence and elaboration of a distinctive understanding of the world and the significance of our lives. And the heirs of this understanding have their being in this European world, whether they like it or not, and indeed whether they know it or not – and, moreover, whether, geographically speaking, they are “in Europe” or not.

What is at issue here is the emergence of what Heidegger would call the “clearing” or “there” of a determinate historical existence: the opening and holding sway of a world – a particular “configuration of spirit” – marked by distinctive forms understanding, imagination and feeling: the localization of the *cogito* of European subjectivity. This understanding/sensibility belongs to the very element of their historical existence, fundamental to the localization of their being, fundamental to their being-in-the-world, and the meaning of their “I am”. At issue with “the Bible and the Greeks” are the sources of the world-understanding that is the “clearing”, the ‘there’, the *somewhere where I am* of *European* humanity. These sources are the European arche, *and they are not over*: we Europeans are in this Greco-Biblical event. In this section I will try to explain Nietzsche’s conception of and response to its trajectory into our time.

Europe is the name of a privileged site for Nietzsche, a site of “great things” (OGM, p. 135). But it is now, in a time that is perhaps still our time, a site of degeneration and decay: those with a nose to smell it, those who have some reverence for its history, are aware that the existence of European humanity has become something “indecent, dishonest, deceitful” marked now by “feminism, weakness, cowardice” (ibid).

Most today are likely to associate the onset of tyranny with political failure, and are equally likely to think that the advance of feminism within the democratization of Europe is a distinctive mark of political success. I know I do. And Nietzsche is aware that his own words are “bound to make a harsh sound and not easy for ears to hear”

(BGE, 106). It is a massive provocation against the prevailing political tide and its commitment to justice as equality. The idea that the most important, leading and governing principles of society should be based on interests or rights that are common to all, the equality of all in the political community, and “faith in the community as the *saviour*” (BGE, p. 107), all this revolts Nietzsche. And his is a recoil against all those who he feels typically crowd out anyone who aspires to be “set free from the crowd” (39), a recoil then from the self-righteousness of “progressives”, “liberals”, and “socialists” who are so fundamentally sure that their values are on the side of the angels.

“Men of ‘modern ideas’ seem so sure that they “manifestly *know*...what is good and evil” (106). We (and I say that advisedly) strive in our politics for equality of rights and the alleviation of suffering. So a counter-recoil against Nietzsche is not only an understandable reaction: it can seem an overwhelmingly *just* reaction. I will come back to this, but for now I will for my part tolerate Nietzsche’s hostility towards the mainstream of European politics (including in that “the lands where Europe’s influence predominates” *ibid*, 106), and its (and basically my own) egalitarianism. And I will tolerate this because I also basically accept Nietzsche’s assessment that Europe’s *current* “democratic era” is genuinely incapable of “great things”; that is to say, as Wittgenstein put it, “the spectacle afforded this age is not the coming into being of a great work of culture” (CV 9). I realise that what Nietzsche would doubtless want me to see as the “herd animal” in me feels prepared to sacrifice Nietzsche’s taste for greatness in the interest of democratic equality. But I hesitate to embrace that interest unconditionally because I too see it as entangled with the disappearance of culture and hence also entangled, I think, with a main current in

Europe that seems hell-bent on becoming, as Heidegger put in in 1941-2, “a single office [Büro]” in which “the ‘co-workers’ [become] the staff of their own bureaucracy [Bürokratie]. (GA 71: 100).

What interests me is Nietzsche’s conviction that the movement towards this pathetic condition does not mark a simple end of the line, a terminal finality for Europe. On the contrary, he still finds something “reserved for Europe” as its other future (“the day after tomorrow” which is irreducible to its own future (“tomorrow”): a process of self-overcoming which may last as long as the two-thousand year long movement of the becoming European of European humanity that went before it. The world of the Bible and the Greeks “must now be destroyed” says Nietzsche. Indeed he thinks “we are standing on the threshold of this very event” (ibid). But this, for Nietzsche, holds out a promise. What is happening? Specifically this: we are, in our time, coming to realize that the world-understanding that belongs to Europe’s dominant heritage, the idea that there is an underlying “moral world-order” and an irreducibly “divine” or providential significance to the whole of history and of human life (ibid) – this “logos” which was believed to *be* objective reality, believed to be *there to be known by a rationally adjusted mind* – this ideal order has been exposed as a dogma that we can no longer believe. Or better: it has exposed itself as such, devalued itself.

Christian truthfulness...finally draws its *strongest conclusion*, its conclusion *against* itself; this will occur when it asks the question: “*What is the meaning of all will to truth*”... And here again I touch on my problem, on our problem, my unknown friends (–for as yet I know of no friend): what meaning would our whole being possess, if we were not those in whom this will to truth becomes conscious of itself as a *problem*?... There is no doubt that from now

on morality will be *destroyed* through the coming to consciousness of the will to truth: this is the great drama in a hundred acts which is reserved for Europe over the next two thousand years, the most fearful, most questionable and perhaps also most hopeful of all dramas... (OGM, p. 135)

The defeat of this idea, the defeat of the Europe of this idea, would indeed be massive: its disappearance will leave us with no way of giving content to the idea that what gives life a meaning or purpose is something real and objective – no way of making sense of the idea that living a good life is a matter of adjusting one’s beliefs to how things are, a matter of attaining an anterior truth or meaning about the world and ourselves in the world. Indeed, according to Nietzsche, striving for such truth has ultimately turned against the idea of attaining it: that kind of reassuring moral *cognitivism*, Nietzsche demands that we admit to ourselves, is not to be had – and it never was, even when “European Man” lived a life which was firmly convinced there was – and became great as a result.

In the Preface to *Beyond Good and Evil* Nietzsche identifies our time as a threshold at which what he calls this cognitivist “foundation-stone” for Europe will be revealed as “a grotesque”, “a nightmare” from which Europe must recover and so learn to “breathe again”, a recovery from “the most dangerous of all errors”. And the grotesque monster here is, once again, not one European idea among others but “Plato’s invention of pure spirit and the good in itself”. And, lest this Europe look too Greek he immediately continues:

But the struggle against Plato, or to express it more plainly and for “the people”, the struggle against the Christian-ecclesiastical pressure of millennia – for Christianity is Platonism for “the people” – has created in Europe a

magnificent tension of the spirit as has never existed on earth before...

European man feels this tension...

“European man” must overcome himself, send himself in a new direction and can do so: for “with so tense a bow one can now shoot for the most distant targets” and the “good Europeans”, have “the arrow, the task and, who knows? The *target*...”

Who knows... But wasn't “modern man”, man of European modernity, meant to be the one who broke from the past and forged a new way of self-legislation? Why do we need to look forward to “we Europeans of the day after tomorrow” (p. 128) when we already have democratic modern (I mean rational, technical, scientific, egalitarian) Europeans of today?

Those for whom the day after tomorrow belongs are those among us who experience democratic modernity not as “progress” towards a glorious future of equality and a new “brotherhood” (107), but those (those brothers? those friends?) who, when they encounter this democratic taste, feel (Nietzsche says) “one more kind of disgust than other men do”.

“Modern ideas”, “democratic taste”, the whole “democratic movement” is the movement that understands itself in terms of its disgust with Europe's old Christian order, the divine right of Kings, and so on. Nietzsche shares that disgust. He too thinks that the time in which Christian Europe could achieve anything “worthwhile” (93) is decisively past, exhausted. But Nietzsche insists that these moderns are really not so modern at all. On the contrary, “the democratic movement inherits the Christian” (107), he says. Hence Nietzsche's *extra* feeling of disgust is directed

towards the taste of those who are run through by what in reality remains wedded to that old heritage: those who approve and promote democratic taste, above all the taste for equality.

Nietzsche's thinking is thus directed most aggressively against that movement in our time – a movement marked for him most prominently by “the brotherhood fanatics who call themselves socialists” (107) – which is the faded hang-over of European Christianity, its ethics of good and evil, and its cult of equality before God.

Nietzsche's extra disgust is disgust for modern man himself and the “herd-animal morality” that has “broken through and come to predominate” in modern Europe (106), breaking with the cult of equality before God – but maintaining it in a secularized variation of equality before the law.

Postmodern Nietzsche

So egalitarians and socialists of the enlightenment, the inheritors of Christian morality, are in reality “levellers” (53, TI p. 92); tamers of the European promise, not its great liberators from dogmatic tradition and superstition. For Nietzsche, the values of the typical progressive modern European – equality, tolerance, altruism – are simply an expression and symptom of our contemporary weakness:

In all ages one has wanted to “improve” men: this above all is what morality has meant. But one word can conceal the most divergent tendencies. Both the taming of the beast man and the breeding of a certain species of man has been called “improvement”: only these zoological termini express realities – realities, to be sure, of which the typical “improver”, the priest, knows nothing – wants to know nothing... To call the taming of an animal its “improvement”

is in our ears almost a joke. Whoever knows what goes on in menageries is doubtful whether the beasts in them are “improved”. They are weakened, they are made less harmful, they become sickly beasts through the depressive emotion of fear, through pain, through injuries, through hunger. – it is no different with the tamed human being whom the priest has “improved”... There he lay, now, sick miserable, filled with ill-will towards himself; full of hatred for the impulses towards life, full of suspicion of all that was strong and happy. In short, a Christian... (*TI* §2.)

On the other hand, as I noted at the start, Nietzsche retains a hope: “the greatest possibilities of man are still unexhausted” (109). Just as the Bible and the Greeks were the source of European greatness, so also it will be *out of that legacy* that Europe can forge a vital future, and remain something to come: a Europe beyond modernity. And it will involve nothing short of *a new conception of man*. For Nietzsche, that is to say, the primary “target” (*qua* goal) is not a new *political* construction, but, rather, as we shall see, a new *philosophical* conception. The task is a task not for politicians to come but for what he calls “philosophers to come”: those concerned, above all, with *the meaning of man*, and with creating a new meaning of man.

The old Greco-Christian anthropology – where Man is distinguished because he is made in the image of God or has the nature of the rational animal – is decisively turned by Nietzsche but it is not abandoned in its mission. Philosophy, *European philosophy*, was and had always been the site of thinking not a regional European distinction but the universal human distinction. And history is then the unfolding of this distinctive nature in time towards its proper end. In the movement of its own deconstruction Nietzsche turns this towards a new variation, proposing a specifically

non-metaphysical and non-theistic variation: “man is the animal *whose nature has not yet been fixed*” (BGE, p. 69) and “in man, *creature* and *creator* are united” (p. 136). Man gives himself a meaning through what Nietzsche regards as “artistic fashioning”, of auto-teleiopoiesis. In reality, according to Nietzsche, Christianity attempted this too with the ascetic ideal. But what did they achieve in their work on “the boldest animal” (ibid)? *Since Nietzsche* it has been hard to ignore the possibility that what they achieved was – an “abomination”, an “abortion”: modern man, the egalitarian herd animals of the nations of Europe.

Since Nietzsche. Are we not in his wake? Do we not live in a time in which, more and more, we feel what he felt: the loss of a teleological sense or meaning or truth of human history? Are we not alive in our time, perhaps especially after the horrors or Stalinism and Nazism in the twentieth century, to the fact that a framework of making a teleological sense of the world and the significance of our lives is *lacking*?

This meaning could have been: the "fulfillment" of some highest ethical canon in all events, the moral world order; or the growth of love and harmony in the intercourse of beings; or the gradual approximation of a state of universal happiness; or even the development toward a state of universal annihilation--any goal at least constitutes some meaning. What all these notions have in common is that something is to be achieved through the process--and now one realizes that becoming aims at nothing and achieves nothing. (Will to Power, 12)

In the face of an uncanny nihilistic anxiety that a human being can never entirely free itself from, Christianity (Platonism for the people) had been Europe’s great achievement: its teleo-messianic eschatology imbued life with meaning. Nietzsche

offers a distinctive interpretation of modernity: the movement of resistance to the hegemony of Christian ecclesiastical authority (resistance to what we might call the power realm of Christendom) that takes place through “democratic enlightenment” (political democratization and the rise of socialism) – this movement is not a new era of modern progress but is Christian Europe in decline. Indeed it is conceived as the leveling and the diminution of man into a herd animal, an animal, the most promising animal, that has lost its capacity to make something great of itself. Nevertheless, as we have seen, despite that reading of events, Nietzsche still conceives those developments as potentially belonging to a step forward, a hopeful event for Europe. Let’s follow his line of hope.

In Nietzsche we can identify a new task in our time: to make propaganda for philosophical self-overcoming and hence for a new “artistic refashioning of man” (71). Nietzsche incites us to become the new philosophers he heralds. What might this mean? In question is a reversal of the philosophical idea of a philosopher king. The old Platonic idea was that the philosopher was distinguished not because he has special knowledge about the best or most just way of engaging in this or that human occupation (a doctor, a soldier, a builder, a teacher), but because he has insight into the just form of life for man *as such*. The philosophical investigation of justice claims to attain insight into the ideal form of life for man.

Nietzsche regards the cognitivism of this Platonism as a pure fiction – but he holds on to the idea that the philosopher, uniquely, carries “the most comprehensive responsibility” (67): responsibility for the meaning of man as man. In Nietzsche the old “knowing” of the philosopher becomes a form of creating: the artistic refashioning

of man, the construction of a new subjectivity. But Nietzsche's refashioning, unlike the Greco-Christian one, does not aim to escape the "conclusive transitoriness" that belongs to our newly decentred self-understanding. On the contrary, he wants to embrace it without flinching. Hence it will be a conception in which "man" is, as he puts it, "no longer [even] the collaborator, let alone the centre, of becoming." (WP, 12)

So a new ambition: from realizing an objectively ideal social and individual condition of "man" under the guidance of the philosopher King, in whom justice and power are ideally united, to creating a new meaning of being human in the wake of the death of God. An honest self-overcoming for the animal that is artistically self-creative.

There is a way of interpreting Nietzsche on this shift of ambition which might be especially attractive to those who have altogether lost confidence in the kind of responses to our condition that European *politics* has provided: one might think that the Nietzschean project of self-overcoming is now dislocated from a political and social project. Nietzschean overcoming might be thought an exclusively personal and individual affair. This is one way of taking Nietzsche's relentless criticisms of the (let's say) communism of the modern movement of democratization, and his emphasis on being a "friend of solitude".

Richard Rorty encourages this "privatized", "individualized" construal of Nietzschean propaganda: give up on political ideals of social transformation (give up on getting rid of exploitation, for example) and become a private work of art all on your own.

However, what this reading overlooks is that Nietzsche does not simply place his emphasis on the arrival of a new kind of individual, or a new kind of genius – though no doubt it will require great individuals – but on the fact that these individuals must be, as I am emphasizing here, *philosophers*. And *that* qualification of the individuals that Nietzsche identifies means that at issue are those willing to take on the absolute maximum of responsibility. Hence it is a class or “caste” who – in a great Platonic tradition – “should *rule*” (112). While it belongs to the overcoming of onto-theological metaphysics Nietzsche’s arrow is also *very* political.

The Nietzsche that Rorty champions, by contrast, will insist that the revolution or upheaval that is needed is not a shift from liberal democracy or ideals of socialism to a new kind of “philosopher king” (the new now-subtle-tyrants who take maximum responsibility for the who that we are), but a shift from the public and political to the personal and private. This conception of Nietzsche fits very neatly with something else that Rorty wants to foreground in his elaboration of the outlook of what he calls the “contemporary liberal ironist”. This might be called the liberal interpretation of the postmodern condition: we postmodernists are skeptical about “the whole idea of finding a comprehensive outlook that would hold [private] self-creation and [public] justice, private perfection and human solidarity, in a single vision” (xiv).

Nietzsche would be seen, on this understanding, as situated on one side of a divide between (*on the one hand*) those old modern philosophers like Kant, Hegel or Marx who see the project of self-realization and the project of achieving a just society as fundamentally the same (political) project – “metaphysical or theological attempts to unite a striving for perfection with a sense of community” – and (*on the other hand*)

those postmodernists who see that whole Greco-Christian project as one which simply sacrifices self-realization in the name of the solidaristic “community”.

What we need, Rorty suggests, is to “drop the demand for a theory which unifies the public and the private” and be content with the thought that “the demands of self-creation and of human solidarity are equally valid yet forever incommensurable” (p. xv).

The basic incommensurability here is this: there is no way of simultaneously respecting the demands of public virtue and of private virtue. One can only choose a path of *either* “the general good” of the community *or* the path of one’s own good. It is, as Rorty puts it, a choice between “speaking the language of the tribe and finding our own words” (p. xiv). It is because one cannot do both things at once that the task of a unified theory in which we square public solidarity in a community and private fulfillment for an individual. That old project should be abandoned.

The distinction between public and private goods – between communal and individual fulfilment – is not, I believe, peculiar to modern political liberalism or socialism. But, and rather more interestingly, it belongs to what we might call the classic European idea of the political as such, and to the concept of the *res publica* – of the idea of public things, or distinctively public affairs – which dominates that European idea of the political. Rorty’s postmodern liberal is the one who has given up an idea of justice that was central to the Platonic tradition in European politics: that justice in one sphere can only be brought about where there is justice in the other – that realizing a just society can only be achieved where that society maximizes individual flourishing

too. Justice in one sphere must be essentially compatible with justice in the other: after all both aim at the same thing: *justice*. And the voice of justice must be at one with itself.

Rorty's postmodern liberal retains the distinction between spheres but gives up on that old hope of achieving a conception which can unify justice in both spheres at once. Rorty does not give up on the idea of the univocal voice of justice altogether but places it on only one side of the old distinction: he distinguishes "the vocabulary of justice", which is social, from the "vocabulary of self-creation" which is individual. He supposes that as long as one stays within a single vocabulary one can get along fine; the only radically abyssal question – left to each individual – is the choice between incommensurable vocabularies: social justice in a community or self-creation for an individual. Nietzsche sides with the latter. (This is also a good way of getting out of trouble with respect to reading Nietzsche's recoil from democratic taste – its just his business.)

It is significant, I think, that Rorty will distinguish the voice of justice and the voice of self-creation, as if justice has nothing to do with how things are at an individual level. Nietzsche, like Plato (which is really to say, like the entire European tradition), does not tolerate that idea. Justice cannot be confined to the sphere of the social.

As we have seen, Nietzsche recoils in disgust from what he calls the "community as saviour" idea so loved by those moderns with a democratic taste for equality. The fundamental feature of such a taste in politics is, for Nietzsche, a fundamental insistence on the value of what is common to us all. It is the idea that there should be,

for example, “everywhere equality before the law” (BGE, p. 34). This call for equality sounds, precisely, *just*, at least as far as the social dimension is concerned. Nietzsche is clearly hostile to that. So on Rorty’s reading he must be one of those who opts for self-creation instead.

But Nietzsche refuses to accept that justice only applies to the social domain. Like Plato he does not think that the question of justice is indifferent to the outcome for individuals. However, for Nietzsche, unlike Plato, justice is not univocal: “Equality for equals, inequality for unequals” – that would be the true voice of justice”. (TI p. 102).

We have seen that for Nietzsche so-called political progressives, the egalitarians and socialists of the enlightenment are, in reality, “levellers” (53, TI p. 92). In terms of justice one can put it like this: this movement is not, for Nietzsche, simply against justice, but it is one sided, and hence its sense of justice remains, as it were, unjust. We need *also* to acknowledge, *justice would demand* that we acknowledge the *inequality of unequals*. That too needs to be *equally* respected.

Nietzsche will have no hesitation in distinguishing “the best” from “the rest”. But his point about justice which subtends social and cultural “order of rank” is not itself separated out in an aristocratic way. It is not that we have the equals here, who can be treated equally, and the special ones, the few, the unequals, there, who should be given special treatment. On the contrary, Nietzsche’s point about justice is universal (one might say “democratic”): insofar as we are all equals, then we should be treated as such. But insofar as we are all unequals, then we should be treated as such too. This

is not an incommensurability of social justice and personal fulfillment but incommensurability within justice itself: an irreducible *aporia* within the true voice of justice. How to live with that *aporia* – that is a question of *politics*. And it is to that question I will now finally turn – and will finally turn against Nietzsche.

The Germanization of All Europe

As I indicated at the start, the movement of political democratisation in Europe that unfolds from the French Revolution holds within its formation the creation of a European configuration beyond petty nationalisms: equality for all cannot finally be radically (or arbitrarily) restricted to “we French” or “we Germans” or “we English”. As we have seen, Nietzsche sees the trajectory of this movement as two-sided: “subtle slavery”, on the one hand, and the ruling “tyranny” of self-overcoming “good Europeans”, on the other

Such Europeans are not mono-cultural but in themselves distinctively multi-cultural and “*supra-national*”. Nations may seem to fade into the background here. However, in the construction of this new European humanity, *Germany*, the nation Nietzsche regards as the most *stupidly* nationalistic (because so promisingly European) of the silly European nations, remains, *exemplary* for the good Europeans to come:

The German soul is above all manifold, of diverse origins, more put together and superimposed than actually constructed: the reason for that is its source [viz] a large number of souls. As a people of the most tremendous mixture and mingling of races, with perhaps even a preponderance of pre-Aryan elements, a “people of the middle” in every sense, the Germans are more

incomprehensible, more comprehensive, more full of contradictions...than other peoples are. (BGE, p. 155)

As a “thinker who has the future of Europe on his conscience” (163) this “German” characteristic is central to Nietzsche’s constructive task which is precisely a matter of *selective-inheritance* (“breeding”) from the old European “stock”. And he takes this multi-cultural German characteristic as giving rise to a built-in capacity for what he calls “development”: it is capacity to exist as a movement of *becoming*, and in the case under construction of *becoming European*, where that is precisely not *being* European (as such) at all, or being such only in the sense of being in a condition of always holding open “the question” of what Europe is: of, always eluding “*definition*” (ibid., p. 155). This is the first and most compelling “ruling concept” in his affirmation of what he calls the “Germanization of all Europe” (ibid., p. 156). It would lie not in making Europeans more comprehensible, less comprehensive and less contradictory, but *retaining* those German characteristics as part of its vital mix.

But the German “model” that Nietzsche embraces is itself contradictory, and not unproblematically so. And I believe that something of what is *rejected* by Nietzsche still inhabits the new construction. That there was a gesture of rejection belongs to the formation of the very idea of “we good Europeans”, which was coined very precisely *against* the nationalist rhetoric of “we good Germans”. In the 1880’s Nietzsche toyed with Swissification, predicting and promoting the emergence of “a European league of nations within which each European nation...will possess the status and rights of a canton” (HH II, 2, p. 292). However, eight years later, when “the Germanization of all Europe” comes to the fore in “the breeding of a new ruling caste for Europe” (164),

the emphasis on its unity has taken on a stronger form. At issue for this multiplicity of souls is a Europe that “*wants to become one*” (169)

Nietzsche sees here the possibility of Europe acquiring a new “*single will*”: a supra-national *European* “single will” that would largely displace the “outmoded feelings” of national belonging. Emerging, he speculates, through the formation of a resolve to fight existential threats from India or China or (most of all) Russia (p. 119), this single will would take Europe into a space of what he explicitly calls a “grand politics” that would replace the petty politics and divided wills of Europe’s “petty states”. (ibid). He recognised that even “good Europeans” would occasionally lapse into old and “outmoded” “atavistic attacks”, but they would be short-lived and they would be quickly “restored” to their good Europeanism (152).

Nevertheless, and despite his willingness to hammer at the narrow nationalism of his own people, the segue between a distinctively German condition and a potentially pan-European one remains as troubling as it is seamless. Just as the “manifold soul” of the German seems to be exemplary for the European to come; just as the always open question “What is German?” provides the best model for the question “What is European?” (it “never dies out” (p. 155)), so the form of future European integration Nietzsche envisages is conceived on the model of what *integrated* Europe together in the time *before* its contemporary national *dis-integration*: namely, integration “under the dominion of the German spirit” (120).

Nietzsche’s Europe of the future is not exclusively German, of course, or is through and through German only because the German soul is already many. And Nietzsche

does look beyond Germany in his “new synthesis” that constructs experimentally “the European of the future” (170). Those new European supra-nationals who have got over the stupid nationalism of Europe today, will most resemble, Nietzsche suggests, “such men as Napoleon, Goethe, Beethoven, Stendhal, Heirich Heine, Schopenhauer..., Richard Wagner..., writers from French late romanticism of the same period (especially Delacroix)”. A good mix of French and German figures there. Nietzsche will often refer to such individuals as “European events” rather than national ones. These are figures “like Goethe, like Hegel like Heinrich Heine [and] Schopenhauer” (TI, p. 79) all who avoided, for the most part, identification with a “fatherland” (p. 170) – and in this case who were all German. Indeed, Nietzsche suggests that there is a greater chance of greatness that is due to the Germans in view of the fact that “we... are still closer to barbarism than the French” (171). The French get a pretty good run for their money nevertheless, and have “three claims” to superiority in spiritual culture over any other Europeans, and, Nietzsche stresses, they too “understand things that an Englishman will never understand” (168).

Ah, the English! English figures don’t really figure in this Nietzschean inheritance – or rather they *only* appear when what is at issue is, for example, the *low* point of European “feeling” where “the same European destiny that in Beethoven knows how to sing found its way into words”, words that Nietzsche clearly finds utterly unmusical: “Rousseau, Schiller, Shelley, Byron” (p. 159, cp. p. 165).. (It must be admitted that in this context Schumann gets the worst write-up: with him “*the voice for the soul of Europe*” is in danger – “sinking into a merely national affair” – but Nietzsche’s talent for uncharitableness to his fellow Germans does not outweigh the

respect he has for those not-simply-German Germans he admires. (ibid). Again, the mark of being not-simply-national is credited *above all* to the Germans.

On the face of it, then, England is not a great contributor to this new Europe. The English are, Nietzsche thinks, “a race of former Puritans” (p. 139) who are clever enough to make Sundays so “boring” that people look forward to going back to work on Monday (p. 94). We (and I say “we” here deliberately once again) are “clumsy” and “ponderous”, our literature is “impossible” (even Shakespeare takes a hit, p. 134), and our special vice is “cant” (ie whining and whinging) (p. 138-9). We cannot “dance”, indeed Englishwomen can hardly “walk” (p. 165). We are marked by our “profound averageness” (p. 166), and the Utilitarians are “herd animals” who, preaching “one morality for all”, are fundamentally detrimental to the “higher men”, and whose so-called “happiness of the greatest number” is, in reality the happiness of England, and hence are in reality affirming that this “English happiness” is the “true path of virtue” not realising, according to Nietzsche, that “what is right for one cannot by any means therefore be right for another” (p. 139) (He makes this point again, more clearly, with the thought that “they generalize where generalisation is impermissible” cp. 101). In short, since the future rulers are philosophers, the English contribution is minimal: “they are no philosophical race” (“it was against Hume that Kant rose up”), and “what is lacking in England” is “real power of spirituality” and “real depth of spiritual insight” (164-5). They are, in sum, in the list of the most contemptible: “shopkeepers, Christians, cows, women, Englishmen and other democrats” (TI, p. 92 – see also p. 97).

There is a certain representativity of *everything awful* about Europe...in the English. For Nietzsche the “profound averageness” of the English is precisely what “the *German* spirit has risen against in profound disgust” (97). And as we have seen, what should be preserved from the good German spirit is best understood as, precisely, the leading spirit of the new good European.

But note, finally, despite the fact that while it seems to Nietzsche that no Englishman has been a “European event” he seems to think that, nevertheless, it would be “useful for such spirits to dominate for a while” (p. 165). Ha! And having been given the floor by Nietzsche (for now), I would like to suggest immediately and in closing that what Europe needs today, tomorrow and any day thereafter, really is not the German ideal of unity through domination. Let’s call that German interpretation of “ever closer union” as the one that conceives it on a becoming increasingly more federal model. Instead, I would urge a (genuinely) more modest proposal, where “ever closer union” simply means cultivating conditions in which war between the nations of Europe becomes increasingly less likely. We (if you don’t mind me speaking in the third person plural for now) are a unity only of the singular: “we Europeans” can be drawn together as *one* (spiritually) precisely *because* we are not *one* (spirit). *We are the one that is not one.*

This is what Nietzsche sees in the German multiplicity too. But there is a worrying (let’s say) “German spirit” in Europe that Nietzsche is not free from when he speaks of the “amalgamation” of nations, or domination of Europe by a single will, a spirit which I think threatens to close off the very possibility that Nietzsche hopes for Europe: the possibility of this Europe *having a future of “having a history”*. Indeed,

my greatest worry is that in those Germanized conditions Europe could become, as John Stuart Mill had supposed China in his time to have become, precisely, “stationary”.

We Europeans are in trouble again now, in our today. Not because of some threat from outside us, but because of what we are now making of ourselves, because, in fact, of what a perhaps “German” spirit within us is now increasingly *desiring* for ourselves: the uniformity of a “single will”. This tendency could produce an odd kind of stationariness for the once great Europe: one that allows change – but just so long as all now change together, as one. “We should think we had done wonders if we had made ourselves all alike”, says Mill.. “We have a warning in China.” (Mill).

The “English” spirit in Europe simply holds fast to Nietzsche’s acknowledgment of “manifold souls”. What made us a “we” really worthy of the name – what made it worth speaking about us Europeans all together as one and all distinctively *European* – is... our “individuality”, the “singularity” of the people and peoples within the diverse nations of Europe, and their “unlikeness” one to another (Mill).

And there we (English) spirits *stick*. Yet today, Mill says – Mill in his today which is very close to Nietzsche’s and not so very far from our own – today this modest union is being swept aside by forces – let’s say “German” spiritual forces – which favour the very worst form of a totally assimilating, amalgamating “we”:

What has hitherto preserved Europe from [becoming another China]? Not any superior excellence in the [European family], which, when it exists, exists as the effect not as the cause; but their remarkable diversity of character and

culture. Individuals, classes, nations, have been extremely unlike each other: they have struck out a great variety of paths, each leading to something valuable; and although at every period those who travelled in different paths have been extremely intolerant of one another, and each would have thought it an excellent thing if all the rest could have been compelled to travel his road, their attempts to thwart each other's development have rarely had any permanent success, and each has in time endured to receive the good which the others have offered. Europe is, in my judgement, wholly indebted to this plurality of paths for its progressive and many-sided development.

What we need is a united Europe of states, not a United States of Europe. Despite the fact that Kant above all others knew this, we have a warning...in Germany.