

‘We Good Europeans...’: Genealogical Reflections on the *Idea* of Europe

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How can Friedrich Nietzsche’s genealogical ethos contribute to our contemporary thinking about the meaning of the European idea? In seeking to answer this question, the following article sets out by outlining the main aspects of Nietzsche’s genealogical approach. The article then identifies the growing debate on the contemporary ‘crisis’ and ‘meaninglessness’ of the European idea as a site where Nietzsche’s genealogical reflections can be applied creatively and innovatively. There are at least three benefits that emerge from such an engagement. Firstly, Nietzsche’s genealogy of European nihilism can assist in explaining the pessimism that is frequently displayed by contemporary scholars and policy-makers in response to the perceived absence of a more meaningful vision of Europe. Secondly, Nietzsche’s genealogical analysis exposes some of the historical limitations that characterise much of the contemporary debate on the idea of Europe, pointing instead to an alternative conception of the ‘good European’ that seeks to address these limitations. Finally, and most importantly, Nietzsche’s genealogical method is capable of provoking a valuable experience of autonomy in relation to many previous constraints of European culture. Nietzsche’s genealogical ethos can, therefore, be of considerable use in delineating a way of thinking about the European idea in the twenty-first century that neither posits an essentialist idea of Europe, nor restricts itself to a technocratic or functionalist approach to European governance.

Nietzsche: Towards a Genealogical Approach

Nietzsche’s *Towards a Genealogy of Morals* (1887) constitutes a good starting point in seeking to understand his genealogical approach. Of course, Nietzsche himself did not delineate anything like a general ‘genealogical method’ in this book. He was, after all, far too critical of systems to do anything of the like, noting famously once that ‘I mistrust all systematisers and avoid them’.¹ Nor did he seek to offer a specific definition of genealogy, again noting how ‘only that which has

1. Friedrich Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols*, trans. R.J. Hollingdale (London: Penguin, 1968), ‘Maxims and Arrows’, §26, 35. See also Paul Saurette, “‘I Mistrust All Systematisers and Avoid Them’: Nietzsche, Arendt and the Crisis of the Will to Order in International Relations Theory”, *Millennium: Journal of International Studies* 25, no. 1 (1996): 1-28.

no history is definable'.² The task of outlining the general characteristics of his genealogical ethos is, thus, not an easy one. It is further complicated by the fact that the genealogical approach insists, from the outset, on the necessity of allowing for a plurality of appropriations. Nothing, in other words, would contradict the intentions of the genealogist more, than to attach only a single meaning to the term 'genealogical'. Nor do the various aspects of the genealogical approach form a coherent, harmonious and parsimonious whole; rather, there is often a creative and productive tension between its various constituent components. Despite these tensions, however, there are at least four aspects of Nietzsche's *Towards the Genealogy of Morals* that broadly outline the main attributes of his approach and that have subsequently served as the inspiration for other, similar studies.³

In the first instance, and at the most basic level, a genealogy is a specific type of historical inquiry. Nietzsche's own *Genealogy of Morals*, for example, turned quite explicitly towards the history of morals in Europe. Yet, a genealogy is not merely an ordinary history, if there is such a thing. For, a genealogy is primarily concerned with providing a *history of the present* rather than a history of the past.⁴ Instead of 'writing a history of the past in terms of the present',⁵ or even in terms of some idealised future,⁶ a genealogy serves to illuminate the present from the perspective of the past. Indeed, as Jens Bartelson notes in his study of sovereignty, 'a genealogy has not as its task to tell what actually happened in the past, but to describe how the present became logically possible'.⁷ The first characteristic of a genealogical approach, then, is that it is a historical study that turns towards the past, not for its own sake, but in order to explain something that remains

2. Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals*, trans. Walter Kaufmann and R.J. Hollingdale (New York: Random House, 1967), II, §13, 80. This is, of course, not to insist that definitions are irrelevant, but rather that they always already entail 'an enormous sphere of human evaluations'. See Hideaki Shinoda, *Conflicting Notions of National and Constitutional Sovereignty in the Discourses of Political Theory and International Relations: A Genealogical Perspective* (Ph.D. diss., London School of Economics and Political Science, 1998), 13.

3. Michel Foucault, for example, once noted that '[i]f I wanted to be pretentious, I would use "The Genealogy of Morals" as the general title of what I am doing'. Michel Foucault, 'Prison Talk' in *Michel Foucault: Power/Knowledge*, ed. Colin Gordon (London: Harvester, 1980), 53. See also Alan D. Schrift, *Nietzsche's French Legacy: A Genealogy of Poststructuralism* (London: Routledge, 1995); and Michael Mahon, *Foucault's Nietzschean Genealogy: Truth, Power and the Subject* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1992). For some examples within the discipline of International Relations, see James Der Derian, *On Diplomacy: A Genealogy of Western Estrangement* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1987); Richard Ashley, 'The Geopolitics of Geopolitical Space: Toward a Critical Social Theory of International Politics', *Alternatives* 12, no. 4 (1987): 403-34; Steve Smith, 'The Self-Images of a Discipline: A Genealogy of International Relations Theory' in *International Relations Theory Today*, ed. Ken Booth and Steve Smith (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1995); and Jens Bartelson, *A Genealogy of Sovereignty* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

4. See Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan (London: Penguin, 1979), 31.

5. *Ibid.*, 31.

6. Bartelson, *A Genealogy*, 7.

7. *Ibid.*, 8.

problematic in the present. It is, in short, a history of how we have become what we are.⁸

Secondly and closely related to this first point, a genealogy is also a *critique* of the present. As David Owen rightly observes, in the Nietzschean usage a genealogy aims at 'providing a history of the present in order to facilitate critical reflection on the present'.⁹ It is critical in the broader Coxian sense, rather than the narrower Habermasian one, in that it does not simply take the prevailing order for granted but rather seeks to inquire into how this order evolved historically;¹⁰ it is, in the words of Hideaki Shinoda, 'a philology of the history of human evaluations'.¹¹ Much in this vein Nietzsche himself insisted in the *Genealogy of Morals* that

we need a *critique* of moral values...and for that there is needed a knowledge of the conditions and circumstances under which [morals] grew, under which they evolved and changed...a knowledge of a kind that has never yet existed or even been desired.¹²

The point of his genealogy, in turn, was to gather the requisite knowledge in order to facilitate such a critique. This critical perspective also serves to explain why Nietzsche chose to subtitle his *Genealogy of Morals* a *Streitschrift*, a polemical treatise aimed at provoking controversy about the moral imagination of modern Europeans. Later, Foucault would similarly draw upon a genealogical approach in order to challenge many of the ways in which Europeans traditionally thought about power, knowledge, sexuality, punishment, etc. Following Nietzsche's earlier maxim of only attacking that which is successful,¹³ both Nietzsche and Foucault demonstrated how the genealogical approach can be used in order to reflect critically on some of a society's most cherished ideals, 'especially as they pretend to be compelling and absolutely obvious'.¹⁴ In addition, then, to being a history of the present, a genealogy is usually also a *critical* reflection on something that is predominant in the present.

8. David Owen, *Maturity and Modernity: Nietzsche, Weber, Foucault, and the Ambivalence of Reason* (London: Routledge, 1994), 163.

9. David Owen, *Nietzsche, Politics, and Modernity: A Critique of Liberal Reason* (London: Sage, 1995), 39.

10. See Robert Cox's useful distinction between *critical* theory and *problem-solving* theory. Robert W. Cox, 'Social Forces, States and World Orders: Beyond International Relations Theory', *Millennium: Journal of International Studies* 10, no. 2 (1981): 126-55.

11. Hideaki Shinoda, *Conflicting Notions of National and Constitutional Sovereignty*, 13. See also Shinoda, *Re-examining Sovereignty: From Classical Theory to the Global Age* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2000).

12. Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, §6, 20.

13. Friedrich Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo*, trans. Walter Kaufmann and R.J. Hollingdale (New York: Random House, 1967), 'Why I am So Wise', §7, 232.

14. Eric Blondel, 'The Question of Genealogy', in *Nietzsche, Genealogy, Morality: Essays on Nietzsche's Genealogy of Morals*, ed. Richard Schacht (London: University of California Press, 1994), 310.

In order to facilitate such a critical history of the present, a genealogical approach, thirdly, does not usually seek to recount the entire history of a phenomenon from the time of its historical emergence through to the present day. Rather a genealogy is usually *episodical* in the sense that it restricts itself to those historical episodes that are of decisive importance in seeking to understand that phenomenon in the present, which is singled out as being problematic.¹⁵ To this extent, a genealogical investigation is also much more interested in a phenomenon's descent, or *Herkunft*, than in its origin or *Ursprung*. The reason for this lies partly in Nietzsche's own warning that 'the cause of the origin of a thing and its eventual utility...lies worlds apart'.¹⁶ The utility of a present value may be altogether different from the reasons or conditions under which it first emerged, and a confusion of the two should be avoided. In this vein, Nietzsche's own genealogical study of morality was also partially directed against Paul Rée's book, *The Origin of the Moral Sensations* (1877), in which the latter had used a social-Darwinistic perspective in order to demonstrate that the modern individual constituted the highest product of a linear, human evolution.¹⁷ The fault of this book, Nietzsche argued, was that it reduced the history of morality to the notion of its utility in the present.¹⁸ Nietzsche, however, wished to contest these neat and linear conceptions that couched the question of morals exclusively in terms of utility, disagreeing with the book pretty much proposition by proposition.¹⁹ It is also in this same sense that Foucault later echoed in his article 'Nietzsche, Genealogy, History' that the genealogist 'must be able to recognise the events of history, its jolts, its surprises, its unsteady victories and unpalatable defeats—the basis of all beginning atavisms, and heredities'.²⁰ In the third instance, then, Nietzsche's genealogical approach does not seek to simply recount the historical continuities that lead to the present, but rather wishes to recover the important ruptures, detours and discontinuities that gave rise to the present, the 'accidents, the minute deviations—or conversely, the complete reversals—the errors, the false appraisals, and the faulty calculations that gave birth to those things that continue to exist and have value for us', as Foucault put it.²¹

Fourthly and finally, the genealogical approach, as a critical and episodical history of the present, readily acknowledges that it is always already situated in a particular historical and cultural context. A genealogy, in other words, is self-consciously immanent.²² Moreover, it claims this status not only for itself but also

15. Bartelson, *A Genealogy*, 8.

16. Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, II, §12, 77.

17. *Ibid.*, Preface, §4, 18.

18. David Couzens Hoy, 'Nietzsche, Hume, and the Genealogical Method', in *Nietzsche, Genealogy, Morality*, 251.

19. Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, §4, 18.

20. Michel Foucault, 'Nietzsche, Genealogy, History', in *The Essential Works of Foucault*, vol. 2, *Aesthetics, Method, and Epistemology*, ed. James D. Faubion (London: Allen Lane, 1998), 373.

21. Foucault, 'Nietzsche', 374.

22. See, for example, Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, §3, 17 and Foucault, 'Nietzsche', 382.

for the phenomena it investigates. Foucault emphasised this point with reference to Nietzsche in his aforementioned essay when he noted how the genealogist

finds that there is ‘something altogether different’ behind things: not a timeless and essential secret, but the secret that they have no essence, or that their essence was fabricated in a piecemeal fashion from alien forms. Examining the history of reason, he learns that it was born in an altogether ‘reasonable’ fashion—from chance.²³

In this sense, a genealogy is also an exercise in what Foucault calls an ‘effective history’; it seeks to distance itself from the metaphysical assumptions that characterise much of traditional history, such as the correspondence theory of truth, the notion of transcendental subjects, the present as a progressive unfolding of the past, the possibility of a suprahistorical perspective, etc.²⁴ Indeed, the genealogical ethos might even be seen as an alternative to the traditional ontologies of the Cartesian or Hegelian philosophical traditions in that, as Alexander Nehamas explains, ‘[i]t allows for many alternatives, and it neither discovers nor imposes once and for all a ready-made reality because it depends on the indeterminate picture of the world provided by the will-to-power’.²⁵ Thus, a genealogy is, in the fourth instance, also self-consciously immanent and remains sceptical of the possibility of transcending this position. Bearing in mind once again that these attributes frequently stand in a creative tension with one another, and that the genealogical approach will always remain open to a plurality of appropriations, it could be said that a genealogy in the sense pioneered by Nietzsche in his *Genealogy of Morals* is a historical, critical, episodic and effective account of a contemporary phenomenon that is deemed to be problematic. What remains to be investigated in greater detail, however, is what the merits of drawing upon Nietzsche’s genealogical ethos are for our current thinking about the meaning of the European idea.

The Debate on the *Idea* of Europe

In many ways, the contemporary debate on the European *idea* constitutes an ideal site for genealogical reflection. After all, the recent attempt to shift the focus away from the functionalist and technocratic domain and towards the cultural realm by debating the meaning of the European *idea* itself, constitutes one of the novel and most striking features of post-Cold War reflections on Europe.²⁶ As one scholar

23. Foucault, ‘Nietzsche’, 371. The reference is to Friedrich Nietzsche, *Daybreak: Thoughts on the Prejudices of Morality*, trans. R.J. Hollingdale (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), §123, 77.

24. See Foucault, ‘Nietzsche’, 379-81; and Owen, *Maturity and Modernity*, 147.

25. Alexander Nehamas, *Nietzsche: Life as Literature* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1985), 104.

26. See, for example, Peter Gowan and Perry Anderson, eds., *The Question of Europe* (London: Verso, 1997).

observes in this regard, '[n]ot since the end of the last "World" War has the notion of Europe *in its totality* been so incessantly interrogated'.²⁷ This attempted departure from a merely functional approach to European integration on behalf of many policy-makers and scholars over the course of the past decade might broadly be referred to as the 'post-functionalist' moment in the European debate.

In line with Nietzsche's genealogical approach, it is of interest to trace the various locations from which this post-functionalist demand is being articulated; to ask, with him, 'who is speaking?' There are at least four different groups that can be identified in this regard. Primarily, and not surprisingly, the demand is voiced by policy-makers wishing to drive the institutional project of Europe forward. In 1989, for example, Francois Mitterand argued quite explicitly in a press conference that '[t]he Europe of the Community will not work, in the short-term, if it doesn't have a vision, a perspective'.²⁸ Throughout the course of the 1990s, Jacques Delors similarly and repeatedly urged scholars to identify and articulate a more meaningful vision of Europe; a task that has subsequently been assisted through the financing of several research programmes.²⁹ Many scholars of European integration, in turn, have not been averse to this demand. Taking up this task in his function as the president of the Trans-European Policy Studies Association, Jacques Vandamme, for example, noted how 'a political entity such as the European Union is inconceivable without the existence of a collective identity for its citizens'.³⁰ Thirdly, this need for the articulation of a more meaningful idea of Europe in the post-Cold War era is displayed quite rigorously by many of those intellectuals and politicians who wish their countries to join the European Union in the future. Vaclav Havel, for example, has repeatedly argued over the course of the past years that as Europe goes ahead with its economic and political unification, 'it has to rediscover, consciously embrace, and in some way articulate its soul or its spirit, its underlying idea, its purpose, and its inner ethos'.³¹ Fourthly and finally, this demand for a more compelling conception of Europe is expressed by some critical political theorists, as can be seen in the example of Chantal Mouffe, who has insisted that '[i]f Europe is not to be defined exclusively in European terms of economic agreements and reduced to a common market, the definition of a common political identity must be at the head of the agenda...'³² Over the past

27. J. Peter Burgess, 'On the Necessity and the Impossibility of a European Cultural Identity' in *Cultural Politics and Political Culture in Postmodern Europe*, ed. J. Peter Burgess (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1997), 19.

28. Cited in Alan Clark, 'Francois Mitterand and the Idea of Europe' in *The Idea of Europe: Problems of National and Transnational Identity*, eds. Brian Nelson, David Roberts and Walter Veit (Oxford: Berg, 1992), 156.

29. Celine Belot and Andy Smith, 'Europe and Identity: A Challenge for the Social Sciences' in *Political Symbols, Symbolic Politics: European Identities in Transformation*, ed. Ulf Hedetoft (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1998), 84-85.

30. Cited in Belot and Smith, 'Europe and Identity', 83.

31. Vaclav Havel, *The Art of the Impossible: Politics and Morality in Practice, Speeches and Writings: 1990-1996*, trans. Paul Wilson (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1997), 247.

32. Chantal Mouffe, 'Preface: Democratic Politics Today', in *Dimensions of Radical Democracy*, ed. Chantal Mouffe (London: Verso, 1992), 8.

decade, then, there has been, from a variety and plurality of perspectives, a sustained attempt to delineate a more meaningful and compelling vision of Europe.

Despite this widespread desire for the articulation of a more meaningful and less technocratic idea of Europe, however, it has actually proved profoundly difficult to do so in the post-Cold War era. The growing debate on the European idea has, in other words, not so much culminated in the articulation of a more compelling vision of Europe as it has in a plethora of pessimistic accounts of a culture unable to articulate a more meaningful vision of itself. Already in 1984 Milan Kundera had voiced his concerns about the state of the European imagination in his widely read article 'The Tragedy of Central Europe', published in *The New York Review of Books*. At a time when Europe was still divided by the Cold War, Kundera openly lamented that a meaningful conception of Europe no longer existed in 'western' Europe.³³ Since the collapse of the Berlin Wall, however, these sentiments have been expressed much more widely and forcefully. Coming from a Hegelian perspective, the American scholar Robert Pippin, for example, has chosen to emphasise the contemporary and pervasive dissatisfaction of European high culture with itself and its ideas,³⁴ while Agnes Heller has argued that Europe has similarly been engaged, over the past decades, in 'a crash course in relativising its own culture, so much so that it arrived at a stage of advanced cultural masochism'.³⁵ Europe, she observes, lacks any future-oriented social fantasy apart from its technological forms of governance. 'European culture', she starkly concludes, 'can legitimately be considered the cadaver of its own self-image'.³⁶

These kinds of views have also come to resonate within the discipline of International Relations. Theorising a more global and universal loss of meaning within the context of the end of the Cold War, Zaki Laïdi, for example, has observed in his book *A World without Meaning* that Europe is suffering from an acute crisis or loss of meaning and that '[i]t has trouble metaphorising its own destiny, dramatising it'.³⁷ Similarly, Stanley Hoffmann has lamented in his article entitled 'Europe's Identity Crisis Revisited' that contemporary Europe is characterised by an acute lack of leaders and elites with a daring vision that contains a 'sense of direction', a 'clear identity', a 'higher purpose', and a 'common enterprise'.³⁸ In doing so, Hoffmann enunciates particularly clearly the attributes that many scholars and policy-makers have in mind when they refer to the need for articulating a more *meaningful* idea of Europe. Crucially, moreover, in Hoffmann's account the absence of such an idea additionally signals an absence of 'spiritual vitality'. Indeed, he concludes his article by noting that, '[i]n 1964 I

33. Milan Kundera, 'The Tragedy of Central Europe', *The New York Review of Books*, 26 April 1984, 33-38.

34. Robert B. Pippin, *Modernism as a Philosophical Problem: On the Dissatisfaction of European High Culture*, 2d ed. (Oxford: Blackwell, 1999), xii.

35. Agnes Heller, *The Postmodern Political Condition* (Cambridge: Polity, 1988), 154.

36. *Ibid.*, 155.

37. Zaki Laïdi, *A World Without Meaning: The Crisis of Meaning in International Politics*, trans. June Burnham and Jenny Coulon (London: Routledge, 1998), 76.

38. Stanley Hoffmann, 'Europe's Identity Crisis Revisited', *Daedalus* 123, no. 2 (1994): 1, 15 and 18.

wondered about Western Europe's spiritual vitality. I still do'.³⁹ What remains problematic for many scholars and policy-makers in the current debate on Europe, therefore, is the inability to actually delineate an idea that might inform the political project of Europe. In light of this pessimism, Anthony Smith has succinctly summarised Europe's perceived dilemma in the post-Cold War era as facing 'a choice between unacceptable, historical myths and memories on the one hand, [and] on the other a patchwork, memoryless scientific "culture" held together solely by the political will and economic interest that are so often subject to change'.⁴⁰

This widespread lamenting of the contemporary 'meaninglessness' of the European idea, and the concomitant effort to reflect on the meaning of 'Europe' allows, in theory, for at least three different genealogical trajectories that could be pursued. Firstly, it would be possible to undertake a genealogy of 'Europe' itself; to inquire why and how we have come to think about the idea of Europe, why the term 'Europe' is being used so incessantly once again, and what are the plural ways in which this concept is appropriated despite the claims about its vacuity. Secondly, it would be possible to pursue a genealogy of the current claims about the 'meaninglessness' of the European idea. This trajectory, perhaps, would analyse in greater detail why this debate is being perpetuated, why there is this propensity to view European culture as being in 'crisis', how these claims operate in contemporary politics, and what kinds of strategies of meaning they seek to legitimise. Indeed, Hoffmann himself provides a clue to where such a debate is heading when he notes quite candidly that 'it is the elites and the governments that will have to take the decisive steps' and who will have to articulate a 'daring vision' if there is to be a European 'nation of nations'.⁴¹

This article, however, wishes to turn to a third and, perhaps, more fundamental genealogical trajectory, namely, that of reflecting critically on the implicit conception of 'spiritual vitality' that informs much of the contemporary debate on the respective meaning and meaninglessness of the European idea. For, the notion of 'spiritual vitality' that implicitly underpins many of these accounts, and Hoffmann's in particular, is understood in terms of the ability of a culture to identify common and overarching meanings. By drawing on Nietzsche's own earlier genealogy, this article inquires critically into how we have historically come to equate 'spiritual vitality' with the possibility of postulating overarching and common identities. Specifically, it asks how it has come about that the inability to articulate a more meaningful idea of 'Europe' so frequently results in pessimism both about the political project of Europe in particular, and about European culture in general.⁴² While such a move means postponing, for the time being, the first two

39. Ibid., 22.

40. Anthony D. Smith, 'National Identity and the Idea of European Unity', in *The Question of Europe*, 338.

41. Hoffmann, 'Europe's Identity', 21.

42. The frequent conflation of the institutional and cultural meanings of the term 'Europe' is one of the most striking and problematic features of the contemporary debate.

trajectories, it simultaneously challenges, as will emerge below, the contemporary debate on the *idea* of Europe in a more effective way.

Nietzsche and the 'Spiritual Vitality' of Europe

How, then, have so many Europeans come to equate 'spiritual vitality' with the ability to posit common and overarching ideas and identities? In *Towards the Genealogy of Morals*, Nietzsche himself already provides his readers with a genealogy of how European culture has historically come to experience the need for positing greater, overarching meanings and how this process became increasingly untenable in modern times, thereby giving rise to the widespread experience of pessimism.⁴³ Drawing upon Nietzsche's earlier genealogy, albeit in reverse chronological order, it is possible to trace at least five important episodes in European history that have all contributed towards the tendency to equate 'spiritual vitality' with the ability to posit common and overarching identities. In line with the account of the genealogical approach provided earlier in this article, these instances are to be understood as constituting contingent episodes within European history that are of great importance for allowing the present understanding of 'spiritual vitality' to emerge.

Post-Functionalism and Functionalism

The current inability to articulate a more meaningful idea of Europe is usually traced back to the functionalist approach to European integration pursued since 1945. It is precisely the attention paid to economic and technical questions at the expense of a more explicitly meaningful vision of Europe that is often seen to lie at the heart of the current impasse in the European debate. Michael Brenner, for example, has argued that 'Maastricht, the ultimate embodiment of benign technocratic management, is in one sense the endpoint of a logic that places material gain at the apex of social values. However, it may be a dead end as far as political union is concerned'.⁴⁴ How, yet another scholar inquired, can one possibly 'ask millions of citizens to think in European terms, to give up the usual national state framework and to adopt a new entity with a symbolic value reduced to rules, regulations and quotas'?⁴⁵ To this extent there clearly is a growing conviction amongst Europeanists in the post-Cold War era that the functionalist wager on European integration cannot, in its own right, create a more meaningful European

43. Later, he would also summarise this process succinctly in a passage from *The Twilight of the Idols*, 'How the "Real World" at Last Became a Myth', 50-51. For an interesting discussion of this passage see William E. Connolly, *Political Theory and Modernity* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1993), 141-44.

44. Michael Brenner, 'EC: Confidence Lost', *Foreign Policy*, no. 91 (1993): 26-27. See also Ralf Dahrendorf, *Whose Europe? Competing Visions for 1992* (London: Institute of Economic Affairs, 1989); and William Wallace, *The Transformation of Western Europe* (London: Pinter, 1990).

45. Ariane Chebel D'Appollonia, 'National and European Identities Between Myths and Realities', in *Political Symbols*, 65.

community. Tracing the descent of the current impasse to the functionalist approach alone, however, is insufficient, in that it can neither explain why this approach was adopted in the first place, nor why the absence of a more meaningful idea of Europe should actually be perceived as a problem in the current context. It can only tell us why a more meaningful vision is deemed to be lacking in the political project of Europe. In seeking to trace the current pessimism through Nietzsche's genealogy, therefore, it is necessary to turn towards an earlier moment of European history, namely the time following the Second World War.

Functionalism and Ideology

A return to this earlier period of European history suggests that the decision to adopt a functionalist approach to regional integration was, in fact, a quite deliberate choice made against the background of the prior experience of the Second World War. Following the war, the 'founding fathers' of the European institutional project had deliberately adopted a policy that did not explicitly cast the European question in spiritual or philosophical terms. Instead, their approach placed economics before politics, making the latter a function of the former, and relied primarily on the logic of the market to drive forward the political project of Europe.⁴⁶ To this extent the functionalist approach was also an example of, as Hoffmann points out,

the old Saint-Simonian dream of depoliticised progress, accompanied by one idea that, at first sight, seemed on the contrary quite political: the idea that the gradual dispossession of the nation-state and the transfer of allegiance to the new Community would be hastened by the establishment of a central quasi-federal political system.⁴⁷

Functionalism opted for technical and functional solutions, rather than talking overtly of 'meaning' and specifying the content of the European idea that informed this project. In fact, Mitrany himself had pointed out that '[t]he functional way may seem a spiritless solution—and so it is, in the sense that it detaches from the spirit the things which are of the body'. The reason for this, he further explained, is that '[n]o advantage has accrued to anyone when economic and other social activities are wedded to fascist or communist or other political ideologies; their progeny has always been confusion and conflict'.⁴⁸ In light of the ideological clashes that Europe witnessed in the first half of the twentieth century, explicit talk of metaphysical meaning was not, in the functionalist account, seen as the most promising way to proceed. This means, moreover, that to no small measure the

46. Hoffmann, 'Europe's Identity', 16.

47. Stanley Hoffmann, 'Reflections on the Nation-State in Western Europe Today', *Journal of Common Market Studies* 21, no. 1 (1982): 29. See also Tony Judt, *A Grand Illusion? An Essay on Europe* (London: Penguin Books, 1996), 37.

48. Cited in Brent F. Nelson and Alexander Stubb, eds., *The European Union: Readings on the Theory and Practice of European Integration* (London: Boulder, 1998), 113.

current impasse is the result of a deliberate choice. Yet, what still needs to be further explored in greater detail from a genealogical perspective, is how European history could develop in such a way that the ‘founding fathers’ of the institutional project of Europe would perceive themselves to be forced to make such a choice. To this extent, it is necessary to turn towards an even earlier rupture within European history, namely the rise of those modern ideologies that contributed to the world wars and against the background of which the functionalist approach to European integration was developed.

European Secularisation and Ideology

In light of the ideologically charged atmosphere of the first half of the twentieth century, functionalists had chosen a more scientific and technocratic path to integration over and above a more explicitly ideological programme that would seek to determine the deeper meaning of the European idea. These ideologies were often seen precisely as attempts to discern and pronounce the deeper meaning of European history. ‘We shall conquer’, Goebbels pronounced, ‘because it lies in the logic of history, because a higher destiny wills it,...because without our victory history would have lost its meaning; and history is not meaningless’.⁴⁹ In modern Europe, History, with a capital ‘H’, had increasingly become one of the primary contexts within which modern Europeans would look for a greater purpose, or meaning, of human existence. This belief in History held out for many modern Europeans the assurance of a meaningful existence that resided not so much in a redeeming afterlife, but rather in the secular promise of a more meaningful *future*. What is more, Michael Allen Gillespie notes, History also led to conflict as ‘[t]he exclusive and ever more fanatical claim of every ideology necessarily [brought] it into conflict with every other ideology’ ultimately culminating in ‘a “propaganda war” or a “struggle of world views to determine in Nietzsche’s words “who shall be master of the earth”, i.e. which ideological interpretation will direct the conquest and exploitation of man and nature’.⁵⁰ It is this kind of logic that the functionalists understandably wished to eschew in the aftermath of the Second World War and that they also sought to replace with a strategy that, if not less ideological, at least refrained from fixing the deeper meaning of the European idea. What the functionalist move arguably failed to appreciate, however, is to what extent the rise of both scientific and ideological forms of governance are actually two mutually constitutive responses closely related to the underlying process of European secularisation. As Gillespie further notes with regard to modern Europe:

[t]here are two great intellectual forces in the modern world, science and history, and while they seem mutually antagonistic they are in fact fundamentally complementary. Modern science determines the causal laws

49. Cited in Ashley, ‘The Geopolitics’, 413.

50. Michael Allen Gillespie, *Hegel, Heidegger, and the Ground of History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), 130.

that govern the motions of matter but, in contradistinction to ancient science, eschews teleology and thus any determination of human ends. While it may thus present humanity with supreme knowledge of the mechanisms of nature and open up the possibility for the technological conquest of the natural world and indeed of human nature itself, it does not and in principle cannot tell us what we ought to do or how we ought to live. It is this question that history answers.⁵¹

It is only with the prior advent of European secularisation, what Nietzsche frequently referred to as the 'death of God', that the rupture emerges between a scientific and 'meaningless' European culture, on the one hand, and the vicious ideological clashes for the determination of the meaning of Europe, on the other. It is, therefore, also precisely the matrix of European secularisation that provides the parameters within which much of the debate over the European *idea* has been conducted in modern times. On the one hand, functionalists placed their wager on a more technocratic form of governance, while others, both from the Left and Right, called for the explicit articulation of a more meaningful vision of Europe. This also means, however, that if one wants to understand why the absence of a greater meaning underlying European existence continues to be deemed problematic today, one has to examine an even earlier turn in European history, namely the rise of Christianity. As Foucault once noted, '[w]e have to dig deeply to show how things have been historically contingent, for such and such a reason intelligible but not necessary'.⁵²

European Christianity

'[T]he philosophy of history', the twentieth-century German philosopher Hans Blumenberg once suggested, 'is an attempt to answer a medieval question with the means available to a post-medieval age'.⁵³ The interpretations of History, in other words, that led to conflict and European destruction in the course of the twentieth century, and in response to which the functionalist approach was initiated, can also be seen as a modern attempt to re-inscribe a greater sense of meaning onto existence after the collapse of Christianity as the overarching spiritual structure. In this sense, Europe's Christian heritage too is of great importance in seeking to trace genealogically the current experience of meaninglessness within the political project of Europe. Indeed, it was the 'Christian continent' that, in the first instance, served as the basis for the European *idea*.⁵⁴ From a genealogical perspective, however, what is more important than the Christian content of the European *idea*,

51. Gillespie, *Hegel, Heidegger*, ix.

52. Michel Foucault, 'Friendship as a Way of Life' in *The Essential Works of Foucault*, vol. 1, *Ethics, Subjectivity and Truth*, ed. Paul Rabinow (New York: The Free Press, 1997), 139.

53. Quoted in Robert B. Pippin, *Idealism as Modernism: Hegelian Variations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 271.

54. See, for example, Denys Hay, *Europe: The Emergence of an Idea* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1957).

is that it was also Christianity as a cultural force that historically endowed the majority of Europeans with the belief that there actually exists a greater or deeper meaning underlying all of European existence. With its promise of a redeeming afterlife and its conception of a monotheistic universe, Christianity could address the problem of human suffering by 'inventing' a deeper and more meaningful world that lurked behind the flux of day-to-day existence. As Nietzsche noted, events and 'experiences shone differently because a [single] god shone through them'; even "'Truth" was experienced differently, for the insane could be accepted formerly as its mouthpiece—which makes *us* shudder or laugh'.⁵⁵

Not only, then, did Christianity form the initial foundation for an overarching idea of Europe, but, more importantly, it actually instilled and spread amongst Europeans the belief that beyond the daily flux of existence there does, in fact, reside a deeper meaning. This habit and belief, moreover, might well need to be addressed long after the specifically Christian content of the European *idea* began to lose its credibility. Indeed, it is, perhaps, precisely this residual desire for a greater meaning underlying European existence that many of the modern ideologies were able to address in the aftermath of the 'death of God' and that remains unanswered in the current debate on Europe, thus giving rise to an impasse. In this sense, the rise of Christianity constitutes one of the most crucial episodes in explaining the contemporary discussions about the meaning of the European *idea*, and for why this experience of meaninglessness continues to remain problematic for Europeans even today. Yet, a Nietzschean genealogical analysis cannot come to a rest here. For, as Nietzsche himself once noted, Christianity itself was only a form of 'Platonism for the people'.⁵⁶ It is necessary, in other words, to take at least one more genealogical step and return to one more moment in European history, namely the rise of Platonism.

Platonism

While Christianity as a cultural structure may have spread the belief in a deeper meaning underlying European existence, the *Herkunft* of this belief structure actually precedes the rise of Christianity in Europe. In seeking to trace the current impasse in the European debate it is necessary to go at least as far back as Plato. For, as Nietzsche pointed out, it is precisely in the texts of Plato where the will-to-truth finds its clearest and strongest expression. It was, in Nietzsche's account, Plato who, through his postulation of the world of the non-empirical and eternal Forms, was amongst the first to posit a deeper meaning underlying the daily flux of existence. Despite the multifarious aspects of his texts, Plato can thus be seen as quintessentially exemplifying an important disposition and relation to the world that has resonated throughout the course of European history, and that still finds

55. Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Random House, 1974), §152, 196-97.

56. Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil: Prelude to a Philosophy of the Future*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Random House, 1966), 2.

strong echoes in the current debate. Indeed, Plato initiated the tendency to denigrate the sensuous world in favour of some higher and truer world, a move that was later rehearsed in many different variations in European philosophy.⁵⁷ As David Toole has noted:

Since Plato, there has been a tendency in the West to give meaning to this world—the world of our daily lives, filled as they are with violence, suffering, injustice, deception, and so on—by invoking *another world*, a true world, on the basis of which we determine the aim, unity, and truth of *this world*.⁵⁸

It is this distinction that traditionally ensured the possibility of establishing a more meaningful idea of European existence. Indeed, it was also Plato who, over two thousand years ago, raised the crucial question of whether it would be possible to imagine a city where the *idea* of a city was no longer recognisable at all.⁵⁹ Since Plato, in turn, there has been a host of writers who, through to the present day, have answered this question in the negative, insisting, as we have seen, that a more meaningful idea of Europe is necessary in order to have a vibrant and ‘spiritually vital’ Europe. It is with Plato, therefore, that these genealogical reflections will come to a rest, at least for now.⁶⁰

Nietzsche’s genealogy of European nihilism, then, can actually go some way towards illuminating the current impasse in the European debate. The deeper, metaphysical idea initially governing European existence was a Christian one. This Christian idea, in turn, can be seen as a more widespread and religious appropriation of an earlier structure of thinking and disposition towards the world exhibited by Plato. In modern times, however, this governing idea had collapsed with the rise of modern science, leaving many Europeans to understand themselves as being caught, on the one hand, between a scientific account of existence that seemed to eschew questions of meaning and, on the other, ideological accounts of existence that appealed to a deeper sense of metaphysical meaning cultivated by Europe’s Christian legacy, whose essence no longer resided in the promise of a redeeming afterlife, but in the progressive unfolding of History. Following the collapse of Christianity as the governing cultural structure, the ‘idea of Europe’ became the intellectual space within which countless writers and philosophers have sought to retain the depth of the European culture and its metaphysical legacy. In light of the vicissitudes of secular ideologies in the first half of the twentieth

57. Nietzsche, here, is also responding to the Christian appropriation of Plato’s initial distinction.

58. David Toole, *Waiting for Godot in Sarajevo: Theological Reflections on Nihilism, Tragedy, and Apocalypse: Radical Traditions* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1998), 32.

59. See, for example, Hans Georg Gadamer, ‘The Idea of the University—Yesterday, Today, Tomorrow’, in *Hans-Georg Gadamer on Education, Poetry, and History: Applied Hermeneutics*, ed. David Misgeld and Graeme Nicholson, trans. Lawrence Schmidt and Monica Reuss (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1992), 54.

60. For a more detailed treatment, see Stefan Elbe, *European Nihilism and the Meaning of the European Idea: A Study of Nietzsche’s ‘Good Europeanism’ in Response to the Debate in the Post-Cold War Era* (Ph.D. diss., London School of Economics and Political Science, 2001).

century, however, functionalists chose to eschew overt talk of a deeper meaning to European existence. Yet, the functionalist path remains a strongly contested one, as can be seen by the contemporary pessimism, because it does not adequately address the residual demand for the identification of a deeper meaning underlying European existence. In other words, it does not fully come to terms with the deeper implications of secularisation.

Nietzsche’s genealogy of European nihilism, then, also illustrates why the absence of a more meaningful idea of Europe continues to lead to a pessimistic appraisal of both the political project of Europe in particular, and of European culture more generally. Making explicit and illuminating the contingent descent of the propensity to equate ‘spiritual vitality’ with the ability to identify overarching meanings, in turn, constitutes the first merit of drawing upon Nietzsche’s genealogical approach in our contemporary thinking about the meaning of the European idea. For, the current debate flourishes precisely on the basis of this implicit equation. The next section, in turn, considers a second benefit of drawing upon Nietzsche’s genealogical ethos, namely its ability to expose some of the limitations and historical prejudices that characterise much of the contemporary debate on the European *idea*, and its ability to point instead to a conception of the ‘good European’ that seeks to take into account these limitations.

We Good Europeans...

A Nietzschean genealogy, it was noted in the first section, is not only an episodic and effective history of a contemporary phenomenon that seeks to illustrate how the present became logically possible, but it is also a *critical* history. In Nietzsche’s own words, the enterprise of the genealogist is ultimately an incessant ‘battle with hateful truths’.⁶¹ Nietzsche’s own genealogy of morals, it will be recalled, was conducted under the conviction that ‘*the value of these values themselves must first be called in question*’.⁶² Nietzsche was, thus, not only interested in the genealogical origins of phenomena in order to better understand the present, but also because he wished to ask whether these values had

hitherto hindered or furthered human prosperity? Are they a sign of distress, or impoverishment, or the degeneration of life? Or is there revealed in them, on the contrary, the plenitude, force, and will of life, its courage, certainty, future?⁶³

61. Friedrich Nietzsche, *Nachgelassene Fragmente 1887-1889*, vol. 13, *Kritische Studienausgabe* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1988), §11[108], 51. Note translated by Karen Leslie Carr, *The Banalization of Nihilism: Twentieth-Century Responses to Meaninglessness* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1992), 44.

62. Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, §6, 20.

63. *Ibid.* §3, 17.

The goal of the genealogist, Foucault later echoed in a similar vein, is to demonstrate to people that 'what exists is far from filling all possible spaces',⁶⁴ and 'that they are much freer than they feel, that people accept as truth, as evidence, some themes which have been built up at a certain moment during history, and that this so-called evidence can be criticised and destroyed'.⁶⁵ In this sense, then, a genealogy also aims at providing a kind of counter-history to the present, one which exposes and unmasks the current impasse as 'forgetting'.⁶⁶

By way of extension, a genealogy of contemporary European pessimism seeks to suggest that it might not at all be necessary to articulate a common and overarching *idea* of Europe in order to demonstrate one's spiritual vitality as a 'good European'. Indeed, in contradistinction to those who, in response to Plato's initial question, insist on the necessity of a common and overarching idea, it would seek to problematise this assertion and point towards an equally potent alternative. One of Nietzsche's major contributions as a thinker and philologist in this regard, was precisely to raise the question of whether the metaphysical heritage that Europe inherited from ancient Greece and Christianity might not be the sign of a culture that is declining rather than one that is gaining in 'spiritual vitality'. Indeed, it was the ascetic ideals of the past that, as early as Plato, were already signs of a declining spirit intricately bound up with the resentment of what Nietzsche referred to as 'slave morality'. In line with this more critical assessment of Europe's Christian-Platonic heritage, Nietzsche subsequently sought to conceptualise a notion of 'spiritual vitality' that consists of resisting this heritage. It is in this context that he developed his idea of the 'good Europeans'. These 'good Europeans' and 'free spirits' who Nietzsche hoped would emerge at some point in the future, are particularly relevant for the contemporary debate on the *idea* of Europe in that they would actually share with contemporary scholars the conviction that there no longer exists a deeper or common idea that could serve to underpin the institutional project of Europe.⁶⁷ With the advent of the 'death of God' any such dualistic conception of European existence becomes increasingly untenable.

Where Nietzsche's 'good Europeans' crucially differ from contemporary scholars and policy-makers, however, is in their response to this impasse. For, what Nietzsche's notion of the 'good Europeans' suggests, is that, in principle, the modern experience of meaninglessness could, contra Hoffmann and others, actually be the sign of an increased 'spiritual vitality'. In this alternative response there is no *prima facie* reason why there should be a greater meaning underlying all

64. Foucault, 'Friendship', 140.

65. Rux Martin, 'Truth, Power, Self: An Interview with Michel Foucault', in *Technologies of the Self: A Seminar with Michel Foucault*, eds. Luther Martin, Huck Gutman and Patrick H. Hutton (London: Tavistock, 1988), 10.

66. Foucault, 'Nietzsche', 385.

67. Nietzsche used the expression 'good Europeans' and 'free spirits' interchangeably. In the preface to *Beyond Good and Evil*, for example, he refers to 'we good Europeans and free, very free spirits...' Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, 3. See also Josef Nolte, *Wir guten Europäer: Historisch-politische Versuche über uns selbst* (Tübingen: Narr, 1991), 202.

events and consequently also no *a priori* reason why the inability to articulate an overarching and common idea of European existence should necessarily lead to a pessimistic account of European culture. Conversely, there is also no initial reason why the inability to articulate an idea of Europe that delineates a 'higher purpose', a 'clear identity', or a 'common enterprise', to use Hoffmann's criteria, should be a cause for great concern. If anything, to claim the absence of meaning in contemporary Europe would still be to judge European existence according to Christian-Platonic criteria that, following the 'death of God', have themselves come under critical scrutiny. It is, therefore, precisely by recognising the questionable status of Europe's Christian-Platonic heritage itself that Nietzsche could insist that the pursuit of critical distance from this heritage constitutes a sign of strengthened spiritual vitality. Indeed, he noted in this regard, 'the spirit may have grown so strong that previous goals...have become incommensurate'.⁶⁸

What Nietzsche's 'good Europeans' and 'free spirits' discover with the absence of an overarching idea of European existence, then, is not a pessimistic world that has deserted their ideals, but much rather a creative experience of freedom and a '*great separation*' from previous constraints that have directed European thinking for over two thousand years.⁶⁹ This experience of freedom, for Nietzsche, is the 'decisive event' for the 'free spirits' as well as the 'good Europeans,' and is marked by a 'dangerous curiosity for an undiscovered world [which] flames up and flickers in all the senses'.⁷⁰ It is, moreover, precisely this *ethos* of pursuing a thinking that seeks to free itself from many of the historical constraints of European culture that could be said to constitute a vibrant alternative to the pessimistic assessments of European culture that predominate today. In this case, however, the inability to articulate a more meaningful idea of Europe would not so much be a sign of a weakened 'spiritual vitality' as it could be the sign of a strengthened and, in Nietzsche's view, 'free' and creative spirit. Indeed, it would be indicative of a 'good European' who is 'good' in the sense that he no longer seeks out the 'idea of Europe' as a space for maintaining Europe's metaphysical heritage, but tries instead to problematise this heritage and seeks critical distance from it.

In Nietzsche's account, then, it was those aspects of the European tradition that had been seen as signs of spiritual vitality that actually turn out to be its opposite. Consequently, '[t]he self-overcoming of nihilism' would also have to consist in 'saying yes to all that has previously been denied and rejected'.⁷¹ This insight helps to explain why Nietzsche himself once insisted that

68. Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, trans. Walter Kaufmann and R.J. Hollingdale (New York: Random House, 1968), §23, 17-18. I draw on this book only as a source of English translations.

69. Friedrich Nietzsche, *Human, All Too Human*, trans. Marion Faber and Stephen Lehmann (London: Penguin, 1984), §3, 6.

70. Nietzsche, *Human, All too Human*, §3, 6.

71. Friedrich Nietzsche, *Nachgelassene Fragmente 1885-1887: Kritische Studienausgabe*, vol. 12 (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1988), §9 [164], 432.

I have a subtler sense of smell for the signs of ascent and decline than any other human being before me; I am teacher *par excellence* of this—I know both, I am both...I turned my will to health, to *life*, into philosophy.⁷²

Realising the radical nature of his thinking and anticipating the resistance it was likely to encounter, Nietzsche wrote to Georg Brandes: 'I've asked myself what mankind has always hated, feared, and despised the most—and precisely out of this I've made my gold'.⁷³ Nietzsche, in other words, challenged a central assumption that runs through much of European intellectual heritage and made the resistance to any such articulation a kind of virtue within the context of his notion of a 'good European'.

What Nietzsche's notion of the 'good European' also suggests for our contemporary thinking, then, is that being a 'good European' might well reside in resisting altogether the debate on the meaninglessness of the European idea and the concomitant desire to articulate an overarching idea of Europe commensurate with the times. Indeed, Nietzsche's genealogical ethos is more prone to refuse the articulation of an overarching and common meaning that could easily be inserted into the current political infrastructure of the European institutions. Unlike Plato, Nietzsche had no ambition to 'travel to Syracuse' and to educate its rulers. Nor, however, does such a position amount to an endorsement of the functionalist or technocratic approaches to European governance that have prevailed in the past. From the perspective of Nietzsche's 'good Europeans', these approaches arguably contain their own internal metaphysics that will need to be reflected upon more critically.⁷⁴ Drawing upon Nietzsche's genealogical ethos is more likely to lead to the recognition of the limits of such a project, and to the simultaneous pursuing of alternative avenues for cultivating a more profound conception of freedom than the one that the European institutions are currently able to provide. Indeed, Nietzsche's genealogical ethos would demand from the institutional project of Europe that it realises its own situatedness within Europe's metaphysical heritage, and insist that this project does not actively preclude these other avenues by determining the meaning of the European idea.

To conclude this section, then, Nietzsche's notion of the 'good Europeans' may be seen as providing contemporary scholars with a critical counter-history that unmasks the present debate as a forgetting, and that demonstrates the possibility of being otherwise than we are. The ability to expose the limitations and historical prejudices that characterise much of the contemporary debate on the 'crisis' of the European idea, and to point instead to a conception of the 'good European' that seeks to accommodate these limitations, constitutes the second merit of drawing upon Nietzsche's genealogical approach. To be sure, though, the point is not that

72. Letter by Nietzsche to Georg Brandes from Turin on 23 May 1888. Cited in Nimrod Aloni, *Beyond Nihilism: Nietzsche's Healing and Edifying Philosophy* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1991), vii.

73. A.J. Hoover, *Friedrich Nietzsche: His Life and Thought* (London: Praeger, 1994), 21.

74. See Elbe, *European Nihilism*.

we should all become Nietzsche’s ‘good Europeans’, although some may wish to explore this avenue. Rather, the more important point is that his idea of the ‘good European’ provides a vibrant counterpoint capable of problematising much that is taken for granted in the present debate. Nietzsche’s ‘good European’, in other words, is not so much to be read as a new idol or ideal to be pursued, but rather as a way of illuminating the profound undecidability that underlies questions like those of what constitutes ‘spiritual vitality’. Before concluding altogether, however, it is worth considering in greater detail the nature and prospects of this critique that a genealogical approach reveals. It is necessary, in other words, to address the question of what the underlying point of such a critique is, and what its possibilities are for our contemporary thinking about the European idea.

Genealogy, Critique, ‘Freedom’

It was suggested in the previous section that the genealogical approach partially aims at provoking an experience of freedom in relation to the previous constraints of European culture. This was certainly true for Nietzsche’s ‘free spirits’ and ‘good Europeans’. As a more recent advocate of the genealogical approach, moreover, Foucault similarly noted how the object of the genealogical ethos was ‘to give new impetus, as far and wide as possible, to the undefined work of freedom’⁷⁵ and how it sought ‘to learn to what extent the effort to think one’s own history can free thought from what it silently thinks, and so enable it to think differently’.⁷⁶ John Rajchman is, thus, also correct in drawing attention to an important convergence between Nietzsche’s and Foucault’s genealogical works, noting that:

Nietzsche is the philosopher who separates the problem of freedom from the problem of acquiring the truth about ourselves, who would free us from the tyrannies of such truths through an analysis of their histories. He separates our freedom from the knowledge of our nature. Foucault’s genealogy is a continuation of that philosophy.⁷⁷

As will be explained in greater detail below, this genealogical conception of autonomy differs significantly from that of Immanuel Kant and from the liberal, humanistic one commonly found in Anglo-American political and economic debates on international issues. The general nature of this difference was already emphasised by Nietzsche in a letter from 1874, where he noted that ‘I intend to find out to what degree our friends, who are so proud of their freedom of thought, can actually tolerate free thoughts’.⁷⁸ The genealogical conception of autonomy, in

75. Michel Foucault, ‘What is Enlightenment’ in *Ethics, Subjectivity and Truth*, 316.

76. Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, vol. II, *The Use of Pleasure*, trans. Robert Hurley (London: Penguin, 1985), 9.

77. John Rajchman, *Michel Foucault: The Freedom of Philosophy* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985), 121.

78. Nietzsche in a letter to Malwida von Meysenbug, 25 October 1874. Cited in *Friedrich Nietzsche: His Life*, 18.

other words, understands itself to be a more critical one that seeks to demonstrate the residual limitations and prejudices of traditional conceptions of political freedom, especially as they circulate in the contemporary conduct and public debates of international politics. According to the genealogist, these conceptions are not as 'free' as their proponents might think.

Yet, this insistence that the genealogical critique operates in the pursuit of an experience of freedom has also drawn a significant amount of criticism over the past years. Most prominently, but far from exclusively, Jürgen Habermas has suggested that genealogists like Nietzsche and Foucault are engaged in a 'performative contradiction' in the sense that they cannot provide the ground for a universal norm of autonomy to which they appeal.⁷⁹ Habermas in particular has gone on to ask:

[i]f it is just a matter of mobilizing counterpower, of strategic battles and wily confrontations, why should we muster any resistance at all against this all-pervasive power circulating in the bloodstream of modern society, instead of just adapting ourselves to it? Then the genealogy of knowledge as a weapon would be superfluous as well. It makes sense that a value-free analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of the opponent is of use to one who wants to take up the fight—but why fight at all?⁸⁰

Habermas, in short, argues that genealogists cannot account for why we should be free. He agrees, furthermore, with Nancy Fraser's claim that it is only by introducing more explicitly normative conceptions that genealogists could give us the grounds for delineating what is objectionable about the modern power/knowledge regime and why it should be opposed.⁸¹

Perhaps the most fruitful response to this critique, and one that remains in line with the objectives of this article, is a response that is itself genealogical in nature. From a genealogical perspective, one might wish to raise the question of whether this form of critique is the only valid one. This is the path recently explored by David Owen.⁸² What Owen does, in effect, is to trace a very different line of critique that still broadly follows in the post-Kantian tradition of critical philosophy, but that does not understand, or seek, autonomy through the legislation of universal norms. Rather, it seeks to provoke this realisation of autonomy by way

79. Owen, 'Genealogy as Exemplary', 490. For an insightful account of the 'performative contradiction', see Martin Jay, *Force Fields: Between Intellectual History and Cultural Critique* (London: Routledge, 1993).

80. Jürgen Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity: Twelve Lectures*, trans. Frederick G. Lawrence (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1987), 283-84.

81. Nancy Fraser, 'Foucault on Modern Power: Empirical Insights and Normative Confusions', *Praxis International* 1 (1981): 283.

82. David Owen, 'Genealogy as Exemplary Critique: Reflections on Foucault and the Imagination of the Political', *Economy and Society* 24, no. 4 (1995).

of example, hence pointing towards an *exemplary* form of critique.⁸³ This post-Kantian trajectory draws upon Nietzsche rather than Hegel, upon Weber rather than Marx, and upon Foucault rather than Habermas.

As a more recent genealogist, and one who had sought to address some of Habermas' criticisms, Foucault articulated this trajectory in his engagement with Kant's text *What is Enlightenment*, where he famously argued that

if the Kantian question was that of knowing what limits knowledge must renounce exceeding, it seems to me that the critical question today must be turned back into a positive one: In what is given to us as universal, necessary, obligatory, what place is occupied by whatever is singular, contingent, and the product of arbitrary constraints?⁸⁴

To this extent genealogists do not seek a universal or transcendental ground for legislating their normative position, but rather insist, with Foucault, that criticism is going to be practiced 'as a historical investigation into the events that have led us to constitute ourselves and to recognise ourselves as subject of what we are doing, thinking, saying'.⁸⁵ The genealogies of Nietzsche and Foucault, thus, prefer to demonstrate, exemplify and probe the possibility of autonomy by way of historical analysis rather than by seeking to legislate it universally.

This more recent defence of the genealogical approach by Foucault, moreover, remains consistent with Nietzsche's earlier insistence that '[n]o new idols are erected by me; let the old ones learn what feet of clay mean'.⁸⁶ Nor did Nietzsche want the 'good Europeans' to resort to retrieving older ideals. 'We *men of conscience*', he insisted in this regard,

who do not want to return to that which is outlived and decayed, to anything 'unworthy of belief', be it called God, virtue, truth, justice, charity; we do not permit ourselves any bridges-of-lies to ancient ideals; we are hostile to every kind of faith and Christianness existing today; hostile to all romanticism and fatherland-worship.⁸⁷

For Nietzsche, it was rather the ability to critique and dissent that was one of the most important 'step of all steps for the free spirit' and the 'good Europeans'.⁸⁸ Nietzsche's 'good Europeans' would, therefore, also not readily partake in the

83. It is still post-Kantian in the sense that it retains, from Kant, the 'philosophical ethos that could be described as a permanent critique of our historical era'. See Foucault, 'What is Enlightenment', 312.

84. *Ibid.*, 315.

85. *Ibid.*

86. Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo*, 217-18.

87. Nietzsche, *Daybreak*, §4, 4.

88. See Josef Nolte, *Wir guten Europäer: Historisch-politische Versuche über uns selbst* (Tübingen: Narr, 1991), 141. The genealogical search for descent, Foucault later echoed in a similar vein, 'is not the erecting of foundations: on the contrary, it disturbs what was previously considered immobile; it fragments what was thought unified; it shows the heterogeneity of what was imagined consistent with itself'. Foucault, 'Nietzsche, Genealogy', 374-75.

current attempt to delineate a common and more meaningful idea of Europe along the lines desired by contemporary policy-makers. Rather, they would be likely to resist and critique such a course of action, pursuing, instead, a conception of freedom that cannot be easily legislated and brought into presence.

Against the critics of the genealogical approach, then, the genealogist also contests the view that genealogy is value-free, pointing instead to a qualified conception of autonomy. Nor does the genealogist accept the view that the only way of being critical, and ethical, is by delineating universal norms in the ways demanded by Habermas and Fraser. What a genealogical approach can and wants to do instead is to demonstrate and *exemplify* the possibility of achieving a certain degree of autonomy in a particular historical context. As Owen further explains:

[g]enealogy cannot legislate autonomy for us, it recognizes no ground on which such an act of legislation could be secured, but it can (and does) exemplify its commitment to the value of autonomy in the form of its reflection on our present, that is, in terms of what it *shows* as well as in terms of what it *says*.⁸⁹

It is in this sense that the genealogical approach, while not being able to effectively legislate autonomy, may nevertheless seek to demonstrate its possibility as well as its commitment to it. It, too, in other words, wishes to encourage others to 'fight' for the experience of freedom and believes that it can actually do so without recourse to universal norms.

It is now also possible to better understand the wager underlying the genealogical approach. This wager, as Paul Patton points out, is that if one can demonstrate to others the capacity 'for the autonomous exercise of certain of their own...capacities, they will inevitably be led to oppose forms of domination which prevent such activity'.⁹⁰ What the genealogist hopes, in other words, is that while he refrains from giving his insights universal attributes, the demonstration of his own critical distancing from traditional structures of thinking might lead others to recognise their own capacity for critique, and might even motivate them to pursue a similar path. In this regard, the genealogist might, in the end, even take hope from Habermas' own critique. For, does Habermas' criticism of the genealogical endeavour not amount precisely to a genealogical unearthing of the 'cryptonormativity' that he still sees as underlying the genealogical approaches of Nietzsche and Foucault? In this case, however, and as Daniel Conway points out, the critical contribution and explanatory power of the genealogical approach actually ends up being vindicated by one of its harshest critics.⁹¹ Indeed, if this is

89. Owen, 'Genealogy as Exemplary', 492. He is drawing here on Wittgenstein's distinction.

90. Paul Patton, 'Foucault's Subject of Power', *Political Theory Newsletter* 6, no. 1 (1994): 68.

91. Daniel W. Conway, 'Pas de Deux: Habermas and Foucault in Genealogical Communication', in *Foucault contra Habermas*, eds. Samantha Ashenden and David Owen (London: Sage, 1999), 78.

true, then Habermas' critique could even be seen as culminating in its own kind of performative contradiction.⁹²

What is more, on the basis of this different post-Enlightenment trajectory pursued by genealogists, it is now also possible to realise why the charge of the 'performative contradiction' does not preoccupy genealogists as much as it perhaps should from the perspective of Habermas and others. For, if the genealogist retains from the Enlightenment project not a specific doctrine, but much rather a critical *ethos*,⁹³ then it would be precisely in the attempt to legislate the types of norms demanded by Habermas and Fraser that genealogists would, at least from their own perspective, entangle themselves in a 'performative contradiction'.⁹⁴ This, moreover, serves to explain why Foucault, like Nietzsche before him, repeatedly refused to answer the question 'why fight?', and why the very question itself might well end up being much more of a restatement of the fundamental difference between the two readings of the Enlightenment, than a way of unsettling the validity of the genealogical approach. Furthermore, the genealogist might even wish to raise the question of who actually can avoid such 'performative contradictions'. The Habermasian critique, after all, would only be meaningful if it did not apply equally to all perspectives.⁹⁵ The genealogist, however, is likely to doubt whether it is, in fact, possible to escape from this predicament. From the perspective of the genealogist 'to involve oneself unwittingly in "performative contradictions"' is simply what it means to be a subject, always already multiply enmeshed in the regimes of power that one wishes to oppose.⁹⁶

The question that remains, then, is whether presuming this capacity for autonomy does not take genealogists like Nietzsche and Foucault back to a metaphysical position that the genealogical approach started off by seeking to avoid? The answer to this question is, in all likelihood that it both does and does not. It does not, in the sense that it is not simply a return to a Kantian or Hegelian conception of autonomy. As Patton has noted, the genealogical writings of Foucault, for example, do not return to a Kantian and transcendental conception of viewing freedom as the pre-requisite for moral action, but rather to a more historical understanding of freedom as the 'condition of action upon the actions of others (politics) and the action upon the self (ethics)'.⁹⁷ Freedom, for genealogists like Nietzsche and Foucault, is not transcendently given, but can only be

92. Here too the genealogist might raise the question, as several others have done, to what extent Habermas himself is in a better position to answer the question why fight? *Ibid.*, 73 and 78.

93. See Thomas Osborne, 'Critical Spirituality: On Ethics and Politics in the Later Foucault', in *Foucault Contra Habermas*, 51.

94. See also Foucault's discussion of why the proposition 'I lie', which would be closer to that of the genealogist, might counter-intuitively be less problematic than the proposition 'I speak', which is closer to that of Habermas. Michel Foucault and Maurice Blanchot, *Foucault/Blanchot*, trans. Brian Massumi and Jeffrey Mehlman (New York: Zone Books, 1990), 9-13.

95. Conway, 'Pas de Deux', 84.

96. *Ibid.*, 80.

97. Patton, 'Foucault's Subject', 73.

achieved historically and 'exists only in the concrete capacities to act of particular agents'.⁹⁸

At the same time, however, in demonstrating this capacity for autonomous reflection, genealogists can never hope to escape completely from Europe's metaphysical heritage. There is, for the genealogist, no untarnished ground completely outside of the heritage he has been brought up against; nor does the genealogist promise such a perspective. What a genealogy can do, however, is to foster critical awareness and reconfigure this heritage in line with experience. As William Connolly has argued in this regard, '[g]enealogy takes you to the edge of the abyss of difference, even though it cannot bring this surplus within and around the organisation of things to presence'.⁹⁹ There is, therefore, even within the genealogical enterprise a residual metaphysical moment. To this extent Habermas' suspicion is also correct. At the same time, however, and as Michael Haar once noted,

[i]f Nietzsche's last word takes us back towards a metaphysics of immanence or within immanence, it leads us also perhaps not to the direct reestablishing or validating of metaphysics, but to reevaluating and rethinking its concept, once this concept has been freed of its reactive, negative, essentially pejorative charge and of its status as an obstacle to overcome.¹⁰⁰

The same might be said for the genealogical project more generally. The third and perhaps most important benefit, therefore, of drawing upon Nietzsche's genealogical ethos in our contemporary thinking about the European idea, is that, even if it cannot escape Europe's metaphysical heritage altogether, it can nevertheless provoke a valuable experience of autonomy in relation to many previous constraints of European culture.

Conclusion

This article has sought to demonstrate the creative possibilities that result from drawing upon Nietzsche's genealogical ethos in our contemporary thinking about the meaning of the idea of Europe. These possibilities included, in the first instance, an understanding of how historically Europeans have come to equate a culture's 'spiritual vitality' with its ability to articulate common identities and overarching ideas. Secondly, it allowed for an understanding of the historical limitations that accompany the current quest to articulate a more meaningful idea of Europe, rendering much of the contemporary debate problematic. In order to address these limitations and prejudices, the article then turned towards a reading

98. David Campbell, 'Why Fight: Humanitarianism, Principles, and Post-structuralism' *Millennium: Journal of International Studies* 27, no.3 (1998): 511 and Patton, 'Foucault's Subject', 73.

99. William E. Connolly, 'Beyond Good and Evil: The Ethical Sensibility of Michel Foucault', *Political Theory* 21, no. 3 (1993): 371.

100. Michel Haar, *Nietzsche and Metaphysics*, trans. Michael Gendre (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1996), xiii.

of Nietzsche's idea of the 'good European' as a possible way of demonstrating 'spiritual vitality' without actually articulating a common and overarching idea of Europe. In this account, being a 'good European' would manifest itself not so much in the attempt to articulate a 'true' idea of Europe, but rather in encouraging the emergence of those persons who 'can actually tolerate free thoughts'.¹⁰¹ In this account, what is much more important than the contemporary preoccupation with articulating a more meaningful idea of Europe, or even lamenting the absence of such an idea, is to focus on people themselves, and the attempt to provoke within them an experience of autonomy in relation to many of the previous constraints of European culture.

In order to be such a 'good European', however, Nietzsche also maintained that '[o]ne must have liberated oneself from many things that oppress, inhibit, hold down, and make heavy precisely us Europeans today'.¹⁰² Such a Europe embodies an ethos that places its wager on the exemplary, and incessant battle with 'hateful truths', and that, in this way, seeks to further the work of freedom. At long last, Nietzsche noted in this vein, 'our ships may finally venture out again, venture out to face any danger; all the daring of the lover of knowledge is permitted again; the sea, *our* sea, lies open again; perhaps there has never yet been such an "open sea"'.¹⁰³ The challenge of Nietzsche's 'good Europeans' may, of course, initially seem unconventional; but then again, as the writer Jacques Darras has noted more recently, 'Europe would not be Europe if it were to fail to find a new way to cope with an old dilemma'.¹⁰⁴

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101. Nietzsche in a letter to Malwida von Meysenbug, 25. October 1874, in *Friedrich Nietzsche: His Life*, 18.

102. Nietzsche, *Gay Science*, §380, 343.

103. *Ibid.*, 280.

104. Jacques Darras, *Beyond the Tunnel of History* (London: Macmillan, 1990), 60.