The Constituent Divisions

When one proposes, as I do here, to speak of Europe and culture, one must first say what one means by Europe. Otherwise, one is condemned to calling everything and its contrary by this name. Thus, at the time of the Maastricht Treaty’s ratification referendum in 1992, one witnessed an inflation in the number of book titles in France decorated with the noun “Europe” or the adjective “European.” Often a none-too-scrupulous editor added this label to just about anything to get it to sell. And where the title actually did correspond to the content, the book touched on realities one would have been better inspired to call “industrial societies,” “the Occident” (in confrontation with an “Orient,” especially over economic matters), or “Modernity,” or by any other name. But as for reflections on what Europe actually is – nothing.

Now, it is a reflection of just this sort that I propose to undertake here. And since I am a philosopher by trade, I belong to that race of people who are a bit obtuse, and for whom one must really “just spell out” even the clearest things – Being, the Good, the City, Man, and some other supposedly self-evident notions. I will begin, therefore, by asking myself that thick-witted question, the Socratic question – “just what is this we are talking about” – when we speak of Europe.
Content and Space

When one asks this question, one often wonders what sort of things might be considered “European.” One then obtains a more or less long list of items that seem positive or negative according to each person’s taste: the free market, “democracy,” technology, but also imperialism, etc. It would hardly be difficult to see, then, that these phenomena are found in parts of the globe that do not belong to Europe, and even found more often or to a higher degree than in Europe. For example, the United States had its revolution and emancipated its Jews earlier than France. Today, it is perhaps even more “democratic.” Japan, for its part, is more technologically advanced than Europe. As a result, one sees two concepts of Europe appear: one, which may be called “cultural,” includes a certain number of economic and political facts; the other, the geographical concept, designates a certain part of the globe that can be pointed to on a map.

What is “European,” even if it is found over the whole or the greater part of the world, takes its name from its origin at one place on the globe. It would therefore seem a good method to take the “geographical” concept of Europe as a point of departure. And this is just what I will discuss in the present chapter.

Yet it is necessary to point out that the geographical approach, through which Europe appears as a space, is not really a point of departure. For the name “Europe” has designated different things throughout history even to geographers. I will distinguish here three successive meanings:

a) The first sense – the one suggested by its probably Semitic etymology – is that of a direction, that of the setting sun, as signified by the Arab word Maghreb, which may even have the same root. One cannot just show where Europe is, then, and even less define its frontiers. This sense is as old as the Phoenician maritime expansion: for the sailors of Tyre or Sidon, the other shore of the Mediterranean was located toward the west.
b) The second sense, which one finds used by Greek geographers, is that of a space around which one can navigate, and in whose interior or exterior one might find oneself. More precisely, it referred to that space extending from the western shore of the Aegean Sea to the ocean. As long as one sticks with one of these two senses, to be located in the direction of Europe or in Europe is only a way of locating what one is talking about without according it any particular importance, much less any particular value — no more than we would accord any particular importance to the fact of living next to odd or even addresses on our street. In this second sense, then, we see that the adjective “European” designates no permanent quality, nor anything that we might carry away with us, but only a simple localization that is therefore variable. And so Herodotus, in a passage that contains the oldest occurrence in Greek — and in all languages — of the adjective “European” (eurōpēios), speaks of a tribe that, having lived until then on the western bank of the Hellespont, established themselves in Asia minor. He notes that they changed their name, abandoning the one they had when they were “Europeans.”¹

c) The third sense is that of a whole to which one can belong. Being European, then, would no longer mean just being situated in the interior of a space, but being one of the elements constituting a whole. Only since the dream of the reconstitution of an empire of the Occident has “Europe” begun to designate a totality of this sort. This totality is itself of variable extent: what was in the beginning the Western Roman Empire² was enlarged until it encompassed the Iberian peninsula and the British Isles, the Scandinavian world, central Europe, etc., without suppressing the subtle differences between these regions.

Distinguishing these three senses allows one to sort out

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¹ Herodotus, VII.73.
² “l’empire romain d’Occident” [translator’s note]
apparent contradictions. Thus, for example, Aristotle placed Athens in Europe – that is, to the west of the Aegean Sea. But elsewhere when he speaks of national characters, he situates the Greeks, not in Europe, but rather between Europe and Asia: Europe, being too cold, produces hardy but ungovernable peoples; Asia, being too hot, produces indolent ones at the mercy of the first despot; temperate Greece, in contrast, is the country of liberty.3

A Matter of Conscience

In this way, the idea of Europe leaves the domain of geography to enter into that of history. And this leads one to wonder what is implied, in the next place, by this question of “what is” with regard to Europe. This question poses a problem of method: how does one define a reality that falls under the province of history and geography without falling into a certain “essentialism,” without making an unwarranted hypostasis. For, though one may be able to construct a concept from natural realities that don’t change, how can one construct such a concept from realities that are in the domain of history, and that are therefore, by definition, unstable and in motion? One can attempt a philosophy of man, of virtue, of science, etc., because these are consistent and stable realities. But in what way would a philosophy of Europe be more practicable than a philosophy of Eure-et-Loir?4

I will not presuppose here anything like a Platonic idea of Europe floating in an intelligible heaven. But at the other extreme, I do not consider this word simply a label that might comprehend realities totally foreign to one another. Indeed,

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3 Respectively, Aristotle, *Physics*, V.1 (224b 21) and *Politics* VII.7 (1327b 20–33, especially 24 ff.).

4 Eure-et-Loire is the French administrative department in the region of Chartres, just southwest of the department that contains Paris. [translator’s note]
one manages to recover, at the very least, over a somewhat extended period of time, a continuity in the use of this term. To say it in a somewhat simplified philosophical vocabulary: if one is neither Platonic nor nominalist, one can still be Aristotelian – that is, conceptualist. What one calls a concept in philosophy is translated in history as the presence of a *consciousness of belonging*. A European is one who is conscious of belonging to a whole. If one does not have this consciousness, and if one is not therefore European, this does not necessarily imply that one is a barbarian. But one is not a European without wanting to be one. To transpose what Renan said of the nation, Europe is a continual plebiscite. Even what remains in the historical consciousness, everything that is source and root, is reinterpreted from the point of view of the consciousness; and, in a certain measure, history itself is fabricated in reference to it.

This choice of consciousness as the criterion of belonging to Europe permits me to answer an objection that was made to the first edition of the present work. Prehistorians have observed the presence of common traits defining certain cultures extending throughout the European era. There would have been, then, a European unity before Charlemagne, and even before Greece, before Rome, etc. I answer: yes, of course we know that certain identical material traces (pottery, remnants of funeral rites, etc.) turn up from one end of this space to the other. But how can we know with certainty that these people were conscious of belonging to a whole? We share many things with the Japanese regarding technology: our computers and our cars are more or less similar. But are we nonetheless conscious of being a part of the same civilization? Before lending consciousness to a particular human group, we must have access to their linguistic traces, and this is not possible in the case of societies that antedate the written word.

Moreover, this criterion of consciousness permits one to conceive the sense of belonging to Europe in a supple and
evolving way. One could ask oneself, with regard to each region, at what date and in what sense it began to consider itself European. In this way, one would be able to avoid the improper claims, the truly speculative annexations, that would enclose peoples in a space which they neither desire, nor even have an idea of . . . .

As a totality, Europe is certainly situated in a specific place on the planet. But this reference to concrete reality is nonetheless not that self-evident. Indeed, “Europe” designates a space that one has no trouble indicating with a vague sweep of the hand. But difficulties begin as soon as one tries to delimit it. The European space, in contrast to the American one, has no natural frontiers, except in the west, where they are not always perceived as such. Even if there are capes in Brittany, in Galicia, and in Cornwall called “the edge of the world,” one cannot speak so simply of the inhabited space: a country such as Portugal considers itself as more open to the Atlantic than limited by it. The frontiers of Europe, as we shall see, are solely cultural.

In what follows, I shall seek to enclose the European space through a progressive approach, delimiting it with a series of dichotomies. Their network will encircle and bound off a residue that will be Europe. In this fashion, Europe will not be arrived at through union – a union that is nevertheless, for better or worse, in the process of coming about on the political and economic levels. One will attain it rather as a result of a division that separates it from what it is not. This paradox appears, in the most elementary fashion, on a geographical map. I will begin, therefore, by recalling for the record some fundamental givens, without pretending to the least originality.5

5 For this historical and geographic reminder, I exempt myself from bibliographical indications. One can find everything one needs in the historians. I limit myself to indicating only a few topical pertinent works in the notes. The importance of a chronological and geographic delimitation of Europe is underlined by O. Halecki, *The Limits and Divisions of European History* (New York: Sheed & Ward, 1950), xiv–242 pp.
I: The Constituent Divisions

Dichotomies

One can consider Europe, that is, the Europe we can point to today on a world map, as the result, the residue, of a series of dichotomies. These have taken place along two axes: one, running north to south, separates an East from a West, and an axis perpendicular to the first, running east to west, separates a North from a South. They go back several millennia. It is curious to note, though I don’t attribute any particular significance to it, that these dichotomies have taken place at approximately five-century intervals.

a) The first dichotomy occurred along a north-south axis. It divided a West from an East, roughly the Mediterranean basin, on the one hand (“the Occident”), and the rest of the world (the “Orient”) on the other.6

This dichotomy began to appear when Greece won its liberty from the Persian Empire at the time of the Persian War, and was fully operative by the time of the Hellenic conquest of the whole Mediterranean basin. This was brought about, first of all, by Alexander the Great and by the Hellenistic kingdoms that succeeded him. It was continued by the Roman conquest. From the victorious campaign of Pompey against the pirates, completed in 67 BC, until the Islamic conquest of its southern shores in the seventh and eighth centuries, the space of the Mediterranean sea was the peaceable and undivided possession of the Roman world that gave it its name. What the Romans called mare nostrum is still the bahr Rûm for Islam.

This conquest isolated an “inhabited land” (oikoumenē) from the rest of the universe that was considered barbarian. The frontier separating them remained in flux for a long time. The maximum eastward expansion, during the reign of Alexander, who went as far as the Indus River, was principally a military one. The Hellenization of the Orient was slow

6 The importance of the Mediterranean basin as the general framework of Western history no longer needs to be recalled, in particular, since the work of F. Braudel.
and mainly affected the cities. The presence of Rome in the region never could make the frontier of Hellenism coincide completely with that separating the Roman world from the Persian Empire. But even the latter, at least under the Sassanid Dynasty, experienced a Hellenistic cultural influence.

In return, the neighborhood of the “Orient” continued to exercise a certain “orientalizing” influence on the Roman world which, for example, aimed at a totalitarianism in imitation of its Parthian adversary.\(^7\)

It was in this Mediterranean unity, starting from the beginning of our era – which besides took its definition from it – that Christianity established itself and began to call itself *catholic*, that is, universal.

b) A second division followed along an east-west axis. It took place at the interior of the Mediterranean basin, which it separated into two more or less equal halves: this was the effect of the Muslim conquest of the eastern and southern parts of the Mediterranean in the seventh century.\(^8\)

The frontiers between these two domains have hardly moved from that period until today. At the most, the east-west axis has teetered back and forth a bit. One may ignore temporary encroachments: the incursion of the Arabic pillagers to Poitiers,\(^9\) the occupation of Sicily by Islam, or that of Palestine by the Crusaders.

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\(^8\) Cf. the germinal essay of H. Pirenne, “*Mahomet et Charlemagne*” (1922) in *Histoire économique de l’Occident médiéval* (Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 1951), pp. 62–70. Historians have debated, not the capital importance of the scission of the northern from the southern Mediterranean, but the consequences that the Belgian historian drew from it. Cf. the dossier of the discussion in P. E. Hübinger (ed.), *Bedeutung und Rolle des Islam beim Übergang vom Altertum zum Mittelalter* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1968), xii–329 pp.

\(^9\) I would recall here of how little consequence the Battle of Poitiers was. The Muslim expansion toward the west was truly stopped, during the
Durable rectifications remained rare: one might recall the eleventh-century passage of Anatolia (to which the conquerors gave the present name, Turkey) to Islam, offset by the Christian reconquest of the Iberian peninsula completed three centuries later. The Ottoman incursions into Hungary and Austria in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries were without lasting consequences, though they did leave more durable traces in the form of Muslim populations in Bulgaria, Bosnia, and Albania. Greece would have to wait until the nineteenth century to recover the independence it lost in the fifteenth.

Islam, for its part, did not limit itself to the Mediterranean world. It spread quite quickly, first in the seventh century toward the east, taking in Persia and central Asia; then, following the conquest of the Punjab by Mahmud of Ghazna (1020), into eastern Asia. Moving toward the south, it gradually spread into Africa. In this way, it has called into question the division of the world into an Orient and an Occident – a redistribution of space that, as we shall see further on, has had important cultural consequences. To the north and the west, Christendom was not unaffected by the proximity of the Islamic world, which opened it up, either directly to its own influences, or to those from the further reaches of the Orient. And the Byzantine world, though directly in conflict with the Islamic one, developed in a constant relationship to it.

Just as Islam distanced its center of gravity from the Mediterranean, realized when the Abbassid Caliphs moved their capital from Damascus to Baghdad, Christendom re-
centered itself further north, between the Loire and the Rhine. As to Europe, (in the current sense, the third of those that I distinguished above), the northern Mediterranean is precisely the domain where it was born. It did not limit itself to this region but spread, as is known, in two directions. On land, first with the German and then the Russian expansion, it spread into central Asia and Siberia; then on sea, by the great discoveries which brought the European colonization and peopling to the two Americas and to Oceania.

Nor did the Church limit itself to this “European” domain. Before the missions of the modern epoch to America and then Africa, Christianity was from the first also African, with the monophysitic church of Ethiopia, and Oriental, with the Nestorians of central Asia and China – not to mention the Christians of the Orient who lived under Muslim domination as a “protected” people (*dimmi*), or on the margins of that domination (in Armenia and Georgia).

c) One witnesses then a third division\(^{12}\) that took place in the interior of Christendom along the north-south axis. This was the schism between the Latin and Byzantine, a schism that arose on the religious level perhaps as soon as the 10\(^{th}\) Century, in any case in 1054, and reached a point of no return in 1204 when the soldiers of the Fourth Crusade took Constantinople. It established a tension between a Catholic West and an Orthodox East that would continue to increase. This division took place in the interior of a world that remained Roman and Christian, and ran along a preexisting line of cleavage dating from the pagan epoch. Its beginning coincided largely with the division that separated the Western Empire – in which Latin was the language of administration, commerce, and culture – from the Eastern Empire which, though it was administered until quite late in Latin, used

Greek as the principal language of culture. The division then extended toward the north at the moment of the conversion of the Slavs. They varied in their choices, some swinging toward the Latin side of Christianity (the Poles, Czechs, Croats, Slovenes, Slovaks, etc.), as the Hungarians, Scandinavians, and finally the Lithuanians had also done, while others swung to the Greek side (Russians, Serbs, Bulgarians), as did the Romanians. This division would not really be challenged, in the cultural sphere, even by the emergence in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries of churches attached to the Roman seat (and called “uniate” by their adversaries), as for example, in the Ukraine.

This division took place as well in the interior of a Christendom that had come to lodge itself in the Roman world and which was tied to it. It divided the Church that until then had maintained its orthodoxy in confrontation with the Nestorian and Jacobite heresies, as well as its fidelity to the Empire (whence the name “Melchite” that the Church received among the Arameans). The schism split in two what had until then remained undivided. But with a single blow it formed Europe. After the Oriental schism, the word “catholic” began to take on a different meaning. And so the Church that called itself by this adjective came to cover more or less what we call Europe today: two halves, central and western, of a whole which extends to the east of Poland, and that were only divided after the war, as is evident today, in a totally artificial manner.

As to the Orthodox world, and especially Russia, it is not at all self-evident that it belongs to Europe – to either one or the other side. The slogan “Europe from the Atlantic to the

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Urals’ is that of a western European, De Gaulle. In the east, this membership is entirely a matter of an internal debate, secular, but still ongoing, between Slavophile and Occidentalist tendencies.

d) Finally, the last division took place along an east-west axis following the Reformation. I prefer this term, which allows one to distinguish the events that followed 1517 from the many reforms in the history of the Church, including the Catholic reform tied to the Council of Trent which came about in response to the Reformation. In the sixteenth century, the Reformation led to the separation of the Protestant from the Catholic domain. Roughly speaking, the north passed to Lutheran or Calvinist Protestantism (Scandinavia and Scotland), while England chose through Anglicanism not to choose at all. The south (Spain, Portugal, and Italy) remained Catholic. The center remained in dispute. In Germany, as others have remarked, the Reformation resonated especially in areas situated beyond the frontier of the Roman Empire (limes). France remained undecided for a long time. Along the Danube, too, frontiers took some time to establish themselves: a good part of it passed to Protestantism but was reconquered by Catholicism in the seventeenth century, though not without leaving lingering resentment, as in Bohemia.

This division took place in the interior of Occidental Christendom, and as this coincided with Europe, it didn’t put Europe’s existence into question. But Europe found itself divided along with Christendom. In this way, the Reformed world is just as decidedly European as the Catholic world, a fact that I underline here in order to avoid misunderstandings about the adjective “Roman,” which I will shortly define with greater precision.

A Scarred Memory

Europe thus presents us with a scarred face that preserves the traces of the wounds that formed it. The Europeans must pre-
In French, the direction of the setting sun, i.e., the West, as Levant originally indicated the direction of the rising sun. [translator’s note].


serve the memory of their scars, for they play a double role. First, the scars define them in relation to what is not Europe; secondly, they split Europe from within. Preserving the memory of these divisions can keep us from falling into several errors.

Generally, one should avoid juxtaposing too quickly the dichotomies that have been practiced, especially when formed along axes oriented in the same way. The most serious source of confusion is without doubt that which comes from the use of the word “Orient” as opposed to “Occident.” Ex Oriente caligo. Indeed, even if the words corresponded, the ancient distinction between Orient and Occident doesn’t coincide at all with the Roman Orient and Occident, nor yet with the Christian one. It coincides even less with the one that opposes an occidental Europe to the “Orient” of Orientalism – in which Morocco is oriental, but Greece, occidental – an opposition one might denominate by the old terms of “Ponant”\(^\text{15}\) and “Levant.” The distinctions I am making here, it seems to me, help one avoid the myths surrounding the “Orient” in general – for the counter images against which Europe has often been tempted to define itself flow through these myths.\(^\text{16}\)

Before entering into the details, however, we should recall a few important points:

a) The first division (the opposition between the Mediterranean basin and the rest of the world) does not have the same status as those that follow. The later divisions, in

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15 In French, the direction of the setting sun, i.e., the West, as Levant originally indicated the direction of the rising sun. [translator’s note].

Thus, I applaud the effort to reintegrate the memory of the very different cultures we assemble into one “Oriental” bag, and in particular, the effort to make a first step toward this recollection – by becoming conscious that we have forgotten. But I myself will not run the risk here of speaking of what distinguishes the Occident from the Orient. First of all, for the reason I’ve mentioned, the “Orient” does not seem to me to constitute a true entity. And secondly, because I do not have any first-hand access to these cultural traditions.

17 Cf. Plato, Statesman 262d.
I will satisfy myself with a single remark that is not outside of my aim here: preserving the memory of this distinction precludes confounding the Occident with Christendom. Christianity has in fact a universal vocation, and it does not limit itself to the geographical area that it covers at any given moment: the “Christians of Saint Thomas” in Malabar and the Ethiopians can hardly be considered “Occidentals.”

b) The second division (the opposition between the Christian north and the Muslim south) precludes confusing Christendom with Greco-Latin culture. Islamic civilization itself also inherited from this culture to a large extent: its birthplace on the Arabian peninsula was already hellenized in part, and after the conquest of Iraq and Syria, it installed itself in a cultural domain prepared first by the Hellenistic kingdoms, and then by Byzantium, from which it also adopted some elements (for example, in its administration – the mail service, the currency, etc.). Some have even ventured the formula: “No Alexander the Great, no Islamic civilization!” It may even be that some dimensions of the Muslim world are, one might say, more “ancient” than our occidental world. One example: the Turkish bath. The phrase suffices to set off in the mind of an Occidental a train of auditory and olfactory stereotypes tied to what passes for “typically Arabic.” But what is a Turkish bath if not the ancient thermae forgotten in the Occident, but preserved in the Orient?

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19 Cf. G. W. Bowersock, *Hellenism in Late Antiquity*, T. S. Jerome Lectures (Ann Arbor, Michigan, 1990), chap. VI.

20 On the other hand, it seems that Roman law left only a few traces on Muslim law, contrary to what one has believed since Goldziher. Cf. P. Crone, *Roman, Provincial and Islamic Law: The Origins of the Islamic Patronate* (Cambridge University Press, 1987), 178 pp.

c) The third division (the opposition of the Greek Orthodox East to a Latin Catholic West) precludes confounding Christianity with a culture, even one of determinate customs. Actually, the difference on the level of customs leaves intact some common elements that one may consider decisive. A communion on the essential level actually continues between the two churches (if one considers that they really form two separate ones): each Church recognizes the legitimacy of the sacraments of the other. And this mutual recognition brings along with it a recognition of the validity of the succession of bishops starting from the apostles, and of the legitimacy of the ministries that are tied to it (communio in sacris).

d) The fourth division (between the Protestant North and the Catholic South) invites us not to confuse two things: the affirmation according to which the Catholic Church has received promises not to make mistakes about the essence of the message, with the rejection of the presence – other than within it – of authentic elements of this message that it must develop better.

A Graduated Membership

If I propose to recall to memory here the divisions that constitute the European unity, it is in order to raise afresh the question of European identity – and to subvert it.

A culture defines itself in relation to the people and to the phenomena it considers as its “others.” One can proceed in the same way for Europe. But in this case, we find ourselves facing several “others” that one cannot reduce to an undifferentiated fall-guy or foil. Europe’s “otherness” in relation to each of its different “others” does not appear to be on the same level.

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22 The recognition by the Orthodox Churches of the Catholic sacraments is not always evident on the level of principle. In any event, the practice is not.
Europe, to the extent that it is Occidental, is the “other” of the Orient. But it shares this otherness with the Muslim world in having the Greco-Latin heritage in common.

As Christendom, Europe is the “other” of the Muslim world. Yet it shares this otherness with the Orthodox world with which it has Christianity in common.

To the extent that it is Latin Christendom, Europe is the “other” of the Byzantine world, a Greek culture. Now Europe shares this last otherness with no one: the separation of the Catholic and Protestant worlds took place within the confines of Latin Christendom – even if the Protestant world defines itself in opposition to a Church called “Roman.”

I would therefore like to introduce a gradation into the idea of Europe: Europe is a variable notion. One is more or less European. Thus, if the Protestant world seems to me just as European as the Catholic, the membership of the Oriental world, traditionally Greek and Orthodox, seems to me to pose a problem.

The East of Europe

Here the problem is how to determine to what extent the regions that make up this world conform themselves to the Byzantine cultural model. Their fidelity to the oriental version of Christianity does not automatically mean that they remain within the wake of Byzantine civilization.

And it is here that one must make a distinction: Byzantium never considered itself “European.” It always thought of itself as “Roman,” and even as continuing the Empire with a second Rome. This claim was, by the way, entirely legitimate, as Constantine decided to transfer the capital of the Empire there in 330. Furthermore, Byzantium always considered itself as belonging to Christendom. The transfer of the seat of the Empire was also to symbolize a distancing from paganism. Here also, one finds no reason to deny that it belongs. On the other hand, in the course of its...
history, Byzantium never understood the entity “Europe” to be something it belonged to. For the Byzantines too, the word designated Latin Christendom. Let’s consider some examples: Georgios (Gennadios) Scholarios, when he refers to Latin authors, calls them *eurŏpaioi*. It is thus that he opposes the “Europeans” – among whom, we might note, he places the Tunisian Saint Augustine – and the “Asiatics,” including the Egyptian Saint Cyril of Alexandria. Michael Apostolis, a Greek of the fifteenth century, still compared Greece and Europe – to the advantage of the former.

That said, what about the Orthodox nations that, after the fall of Constantinople (1453), have known more than five centuries of turbulent history? It is clear that one cannot purely and simply identify them with Byzantium, and this is the case despite the fact that the Byzantine paternity is sometimes maintained with sharp insistence. One must, then, begin by evaluating the relative importance of the Byzantine influence in traditionally Orthodox countries. Take Russia for example. We can abstract from the legend according to which Moscow is a third Rome, inheriting from both the Rome of Latium and the one on the Bosphorus. This story was spread at the end of the fifteenth century to legitimize the power of the Tsars. But even without it, the path that supposedly led from Byzantium to modern times is quite sinuous. On more than one point, the Byzantine filiation of Russia is specious, or at least mounted on the head of a pin, while other influences, whether from Scandinavia or from the Mongols, have for a long time been excluded from the official history – both Tsarist and Leninist. I will satisfy myself with a single example: when Ivan III took Novgorod (1478) and began to proclaim that Moscow must be

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23 Treatise on the Soul, I, §6, ed. Petit et al., vol. 1, p. 468, or the preface to his translation of *De ente et essentia*, ibid., VI, 177 ff. (I owe this, and the following note, to Marie-Hélène Congourdeau.)

the third Rome, and therefore the direct heir of Constantinople, he named a new bishop, Gennadius. Gennadius realized that his Bible was not complete, and had the missing books translated into Old Church Slavonic — translated, however, not from the Greek Septuagint, but from the Latin Vulgate.25

Does it go without saying, then, that these nations belong to Europe? Moreover, does it go without saying that they themselves think so? When did their desire to belong first appear — and was this only to claim the name? One would have to introduce infinite qualifications to try to decide the question — and repeatedly according to the region and the period, which I am not competent to do. In any event, the “Europeanness” of these regions does not go without saying: at the beginning of the century, the Jews of Bulgaria still dreamed of Austria-Hungary as “Europe.”26 And even today, an Athenian who embarks for Paris or Rome says that he is going stin Evropi. For me this is not a question of excluding the traditionally Orthodox countries from Europe by a decided act of denial. But neither should it be a question of annexing them, despite themselves, to a unity that they do not feel themselves members of. Not belonging to Europe does not in any event throw them into the outer darkness of some sort of barbarism. I do not at all identify Europe with the civilized world. To be outside of it is not to be inferior to it.

Finally, the observation of the possible exteriority of these countries in relation to Europe should arise solely from cultural history and should not, in consequence — it goes without saying — have anything to do with contemporary problems of an economic, political, or strategic nature, etc., on which I claim no competence to say anything whatever: whether it is

25 I owe this detail to the friendship of Mr. Yves Hamant (University of Paris X-Nanterre).

necessary or not to extend the frontiers of the so-called “European” Community to the countries of the ex-East – and even to Turkey; or whether it is necessary or not to help out the peoples of the former USSR – whose misfortune, let us recall, did not arise out of the “Slavic soul,” but from an ideology of European origin.

**A European Identity?**

The preceding considerations, which might seem to come under the province of history and geography alone, have a larger compass. Actually, they bring to a meditation on Europe nothing less than the object itself. I began by reexamining a banal distinction between two concepts of Europe: Europe as place, and Europe as content. One can now see how they are articulated on top of one another. As place, Europe is the space that I have tried to close in on through a series of dichotomies that are clearly the province of geography – an intellectual and spiritual one. As content, Europe is the whole set of historically identifiable facts that have occurred in the interior of this place. These events may have been of limited duration or may have extended over long periods. They have all contributed more or less to the physiognomy of what we qualify as “European.” We sometimes use this adjective to designate populations or cultural developments that were situated or still are situated outside of the frontiers of Europe. But we do so only to relate it back to realities that find their origin in the European space. Europe as “place” therefore precedes Europe as “content.”

An example will help me to clarify this distinction. One speaks of “European sciences” (Husserl) or of “European technology,” or yet again of “Occidental Metaphysics” (Heidegger) – and here again one means “European.” The cultural realities that one designates in this way do not limit themselves to the European space, neither in their origin nor
in their ultimate expansion. Science in general has appeared elsewhere than in Europe – for example, in China. And what Europe itself assimilated in mathematics and philosophy was first of all Greek, and secondly Arabic. Mathematical physics, on the other hand, appeared first in Europe with the revolution attached to the name of Galileo. And similarly, technology and industrial mechanization followed in its wake. Similarly, democracy first appeared in Greece. But it was only in the interior of the European space that it progressively eliminated the restrictions that had limited it to a small citizen elite, excluding slaves and women. One can say the same thing of the Enlightenment, in any event, in its modern form. Nothing here forbids recognizing the evidence that these phenomena are typically European, and that under their guise Europe manifested itself, and continues to manifest itself, whether as liberating or burdensome, to the rest of the world.

These phenomena were in any case born in the interior of a space that already existed and which they therefore did not create. Moreover, one can wonder whether their emergence is not tied to what defined Europe in separating it from these “others” by a more than accidental relationship. And so, we must first know what Europe is, and in this case, where Europe is, before assessing its history.

We can restate, then, the classic question of identity. One commonly wonders: who are we? And one might answer: Greeks, or Romans, or Jews, or Christians. Or, in a sense, a little of each. One has therefore been able to give all these answers, and none are false. I propose here only to introduce a little order. What principle of classification should one follow? The most suitable, on first view, is without doubt to ask the question, what do we possess that is our “own”? Certainly not humanity as it is defined in general: the so-called “barbarian” Orient and the Hellenized Occident both have that in common. Nor can we find this uniqueness in Hellenism: both the Muslim world and Byzantium are also its
heirs. Nor in Judaism, which was present also outside the borders of the Mediterranean from very early on. Nor in Christianity, which the Christian Orient confesses as well.

It is however a fact, so historically important that I recall it here only for the record: Christendom did not conceive of itself, and has not been perceived by other civilizations, as Greek or as Jewish, but rather as Roman. The Greeks themselves, from the Byzantine period on, considered themselves Romans, and even now refer to the language they speak as “Romaic.” The Muslim world called the Byzantines, who were Greek or Syriac in language, “Rumis,” and the Ottoman Empire called what we ourselves call “European” Turkey the “Rumelia.”

As to Europe in the narrow sense, it has a trait that is perhaps unique to it, which Europe alone claims, and that no one disputes its claim to: her Romanity – or more precisely, her Latinity. For “Romanity” has been claimed by Byzantium in so far as it continued the Eastern Roman Empire, and as a “second Rome,” and then later by Moscow which pretended also to claim the title of the “third Rome.” It was even claimed by the Ottoman Empire when the Sultan of Istanbul laid claim to the succession of the defeated emperors of Constantinople under the title of “Sultan of Rome.” But no one other than Europe has wanted Latinity.

Plan

The essay that follows defends the thesis that Europe is essentially Roman by showing that the otherness through which it defined itself can be summed up starting from its “Latinity.” I will try to bring to light how Europe distinguishes itself from what it is not through the “Latin” or “Roman” character of the sources it draws on.

I will show, first of all, how one can characterize something as the Roman attitude in general (chapter II).
Chapter III will show how the relation of Europe — as Christendom — to the Old Testament is a “Roman” relation, and how it distinguishes itself on this level from the Muslim world.

Chapter IV will show how the relation of Europe — as a Latin world — to its Greek sources is also “Roman,” and how it distinguishes itself as such, not only from Islam, but from the Byzantine world as well.

Chapter V will show how Europe maintains a singular relationship to its own identity: its own is what it has appropriated from what was once foreign to it.

Chapter VI will consider the nature and the causes of the European paradox: what does it mean to have one’s source outside of oneself? How does this come about?

In chapter VII, I will propose a few rules for a salubrious relationship between Europe and its proper identity.

Chapter VIII will try to understand in what sense the Catholic Church merits the qualification “Roman,” and how it distinguishes itself on this level, not only from Islam, not only from Byzantium, but also from the Reformed world as well.

Finally, to conclude, I will ask to what extent and under what conditions the “Roman” model can remain actual, and what temptations it will have to confront.