This paper presents work from my forthcoming book, *Concepts of Europe in Classical Sociology*, in preparation for Routledge 2005/06. The paper is divided into three parts.

- The second part is my article “Ernst Troeltsch’s Concept of Europe”, also published in the *European Journal of Social Theory* 7(4): 479-97.
- The third part is a section of draft text from the last chapter of my book in which I examine several contemporary statements about European identity in light of the work of the earlier twentieth-century European social thinkers. The main author under consideration in this section is the contemporary German sociologist, Ulrich Beck. Note that this text is in *unpolished form*!
Introduction to Georg Simmel’s Essay
‘Europe and America in World History’

Austin Harrington
UNIVERSITY OF LEEDS, UK

Abstract
The text comprises a translation of Georg Simmel’s article, ‘Europa und Amerika: eine weltgeschichtliche Betrachtung’, first published in Das Berliner Tagblatt in July 1915, with a short introduction by the translator. The article is the counterpart to Simmel’s better-known essay ‘The Idea of Europe’, first published in March 1915, reprinted in 1917 in lightly revised form in Simmel’s collection of texts on Germany and the First World War, Der Krieg und die geistigen Entscheidungen. In both essays, Simmel develops a vision of the future of Europe after the destruction of the war as a fragile cultural totality that both encompasses national identities and at the same time transcends them.

Key words
Europe ■ Europe and America ■ European identity ■ the First World War ■ idea of Europe ■ Georg Simmel ■ tragedy of culture

Background to the Essay
On 7 March and 4 July 1915 Georg Simmel published two articles in the Berlin daily Das Berliner Tagblatt, the first entitled ‘Die Idee Europa’, the second entitled ‘Europa und Amerika: eine weltgeschichtliche Betrachtung’. The first article reappeared in slightly revised form in Simmel’s collection of essays, Der Krieg und die geistigen Entscheidungen of 1917 ['The War and our Spiritual Decisions'] (Simmel, 1999). It appears in English as ‘The Idea of Europe’ in the volume of selections entitled Georg Simmel: Sociologist and European, edited by P.A. Lawrence (Simmel, 1976). The second essay appears in English for the first time in this issue of the European Journal of Social Theory, translated as ‘Europe and America in World History’ (Simmel, 2000a). This Introduction provides some brief considerations of intellectual context to the two pieces, beginning with Simmel’s stance on Germany’s involvement in the First World War.

Simmel died on 26 September 1918, barely over a month before the Armistice. In the autumn months of 1914 he had initially greeted the war in a spirit of nationalist fervour, viewing the call to arms as the occasion for a
Proof only

communal uniting of the German people and an assertion of the vitality of Germanic Kultur against the decadent materialistic and individualistic societies of England and France. The war represented a moment of ‘resoluteness’ for the German people. It entailed a fusion of the past and the future into the intensity of a present moment, involving a decisive experience of historicity. The exigencies of the fighting constituted an ‘absolute situation’ of self-reckoning in the face of an unconditional demand, exceptionally bringing to a standstill the ever lengthening means–end chains that arise in a modern industrial society dominated by ‘objective culture’. The war heralded a purging in the Augean stables of the urbanized money cultures of the West, rooting out all that was ephemeral, superfluous, excessive and inessential in the experience of life.

By March 1915, however, Simmel’s writing demonstrates a noticeable shift in emphasis. Although Germany still stands at the forefront of his vision, Germany is at stake for him only because Europe is at stake. Simmel now proclaims that Germany will find its true destiny only in Europe and that it is the European tragedy as a whole that is his motive for writing. In a letter to Friedrich Curtius of 16 March 1915, he declared:

I say this with an anxiety I have never before experienced. I believe that more than any of my contemporaries in the academy, I have worked for ‘Europe’, and I regard myself as a European – and none the less a good German. That Europe is almost in ruins and that our only hope now is that our children might one day rebuild it – at a stroke, a part of my life’s work is reduced to nothing. (editorial quotation in Simmel, 2000: 403)

Simmel’s thematization of Europe in the last years of his life is reflected in the sequence of the four essays that compose Der Krieg und die geistigen Entscheidungen. The first to appear in the volume is ‘Deutschlands innere Wandlung’ [Germany’s Inner Transformation], a public lecture given originally in Strasburg in November 1914. The second is ‘Die Dialektik des deutschen Geistes’ [Dialectic of the German Spirit], published originally in September 1916. The third is ‘Die Krisis der Kultur’ [The Crisis of Culture], a lecture given originally in Vienna in January 1916. The last is ‘The Idea of Europe’, first published on 7 March 1915. According to the description of the first edition of the book by the publisher Duncker and Humblot, which Simmel authorized, the volume showed ‘with the force of a visionary insight’,

[the] transformations in the [author’s] judgement of the war and the world situation from the complete inner confidence of the great time of the first winter in the first essay through to the reserved thoughts on the positive audit of war in the last essay ‘The Idea of Europe’. (editorial quotation in Simmel, 1999: 429)

In other words, the composition of the book suggested that Germany’s ‘inner transformation’ found its meaning in the idea of Europe as the only possible framework of salvation for the ‘crisis of culture’ and the ‘dialectic of the German spirit’. In Simmel’s vision, Europe represented a challenge to individual nations to rise above themselves without at the same time wholly repudiating themselves as national substances. The wider European whole was to mediate between
nationalist narrow-mindedness and abstract ‘internationalism’. By ‘internationalism’ Simmel appears to have meant some form of liberal cosmopolitanism in the tradition of eighteenth-century rationalism. In an analogous manner to Edmund Burke’s view of the French Revolution or to Hegel’s critique of Kant’s political philosophy, Simmel argued that such abstract universalism fails to gain purchase on the concrete ethical life of the individual nations to which it is addressed. ‘In its grotesquely heightened form’, he wrote, internationalism ‘is mere globetrotting . . . a hotchpotch, a characterless, indiscriminate mêlée of interests and ideas, at most something abstracted from many nations by disregarding their particular individual values’. Internationalism ‘is an altogether secondary phenomenon, arising from a simple process of either addition or subtraction’. ‘Europeanism’ [Europäertum], on the other hand, is an idea, an altogether primary phenomenon not attainable by abstraction or accumulation – however late its appearance as a historical force. It does not exist in between individual nations, it exists beyond them, and is thus perfectly compatible with any individual national life. This ideal ‘Europe’ is the locus of spiritual values which the contemporary cultured man reveres and which can be his if his nationality is an inalienable possession without being a blinkering limitation. (Simmel, 1976: 268–9)

The idea of Europe, which subsumes the subtlest essence of what is intellectually mature without cutting it off from its national roots, as internationalism does, cannot be pinned down by logic or in terms of specific content. Like other ‘ideas’, it is not capable of tangible proof, but is accessible only to intuition, albeit intuition which can only be the reward of lengthy pursuit of the cultural values of the past and the present. (Simmel, 1999: 55–6)

Internationalism had its closest embodiment for Simmel in Woodrow Wilson’s emerging plan for a League of Nations under the beneficent guardianship of the USA. In a similar manner to Ernst Troeltsch, who also promulgated ideas of Europe and ‘Europeanism’ in the early years of the Weimar Republic, Simmel looked to alternative agencies of transnational association capable of breaking with nationalist myopia without cancelling the residues of national self-understanding that give concrete meaning to universal norms and that reconcile the general with the particular (see Troeltsch, 2002; Harrington, 2004).

The catastrophe of the war for Simmel was not so much that it destroyed Europe’s position of supremacy in world politics and world culture. Rather, it was that it unravelled the centuries-long work of ideal self-cultivation that had made Europe the densely interwoven cultural construction that it was. Simmel appears to have thought of Europe by analogy with the selfhood of the person who forms him- or herself in a labour of self-overcoming and self-limitation, constantly trying to draw together the fibres of his or her personality into an organic whole. As the self is a point of intersection and interaction in complex webs of affiliation, so Europe was to be seen as an ideal unity forged from constant exchange and reciprocity, a locus of interconnection between ‘life’, on the one hand, and its multiple ‘forms’ and ‘objectivations’, on the other. The war destroyed this shared
Simmel names Bismarck, Darwin, Wagner, Tolstoy, Nietzsche and Bergson as personalities who ‘have been to an extreme degree men of national character’ but who have become ‘creators of “Europe” by developing specifically national qualities to their extreme limits’ (Simmel, 1999: 56). Simmel names these elite male figures not because he views them as exhaustive icons but because their legacies stand for diverse political and intellectual challenges to national self-understandings in a cross-European context. (In the 1915 version of the essay he had named only the German figures of Goethe, Beethoven, Schopenhauer and Nietzsche. In the 1917 edition he subsequently altered this list.)

Simmel’s choice of the word ‘idea’ in the title of the essay has a definite significance in this last connection. In Simmel’s view, there was no concept of Europe that might correspond to some definite bundle of empirical properties. Europe was an ‘idea’ in the sense that it had no existence in phenomenal reality other than as the semblance of something requiring a labour of imaginary mental construction. Otthein Rammstedt has suggested that Simmel’s formulation invites comparison with Hans Blumenberg’s conception of ‘work on myth’. Europe in this sense is a work of mythical self-construction. The construction of European culture is analogous to personal self-realization as a labour of becoming the self that one already is, ‘ideally’, but not yet really (see Blumenberg, 1985; Simmel, 2000b; Rammstedt, 2005).

One of the clearest influences on Simmel in these writings is Nietzsche’s famous references to the ‘good Europeans’ as creatures of ‘homelessness’. In The Gay Science and Beyond Good and Evil Nietzsche had railed against any ‘eternalization of the European system of many petty states’, against the ‘national scabies of the heart and blood poisoning with which European peoples nowadays delimit and barricade themselves against each other as if with quarantines’ (Nietzsche, 2001b: 242). The following passages from Nietzsche are especially apposite to Simmel:

We who are homeless are too diverse and racially mixed in our descent, as ‘modern men’, and consequently we are not inclined to participate in the mendacious racial self-admiration and obscenity that parades in Germany today. (Nietzsche, 2001b: 242)

Whatever term is used these days to try to mark what is distinctive about the European, whether it is ‘civilization’ or ‘humanization’ or ‘progress’ . . . behind all the moral and political foregrounds that are indicated by formulas like these, an immense physiological process is taking place and constantly gaining ground – the process of increasing similarity between Europeans, their growing detachment from the conditions under which climate- or class-bound races originate, their increasing independence from that determinate milieu where for centuries the same demands would be inscribed on the soul and the body – and so the slow approach of an essentially supra-national and nomadic type of person who, physiologically speaking, is typified by a maximal degree of the art and force of adaptation. This process of the European in a state of becoming can be slowed down in tempo through large-scale relapses . . . The still-raging storm and stress of ‘national feeling’ belong here, as does the anarchism that is just approaching. (Nietzsche, 2001a: 133–4)
We find an explicit echo of Nietzsche’s anti-Germanism in Simmel’s essay on the ‘dialectic of the German spirit’. Simmel speaks of Germany as finding its true calling only in confrontation with what it is not, in the Latin civilizations of the Mediterranean – such as in Goethe’s Italy; in Hölderlin’s Greece, in Nietzsche’s France, as well in Hegel’s epic odyssey of the mind, *The Phenomenology of Spirit*. Simmel reiterates that Europeanism is ‘no mere external pendant to the German character’ but part of Germany’s ‘innermost vital essence’, and that just as it is the essence of life to reach beyond life, as the spirit is most fully itself when it touches that which is more than spirit . . . the very essence of the German mind [is] to reach out beyond what is German. (Simmel, 1976: 270, 1999: 57–8)

In the second essay from July 1915, ‘Europe and America in World History’, Simmel extends these reflections to a consideration of Europe’s future in a world marked by the ever-growing power of the USA. It should be noted that Simmel narrowly escaped a summons by the Rector of Strasburg University after publication of this essay at the instigation of the Imperial Army for ‘un-German behaviour’. It can be surmised that in the absence of the threat of censorship, his anti-nationalist statements in this essay and other late writings might have been even more sharply formulated.

The immediate occasion for the essay was the news of deliveries of munitions by the USA to England in the early months of 1915. Simmel reports his experience of a conversation with a Frenchman who had declared that as Germany and France tore themselves to pieces, England sat ready in waiting at the table. Simmel tells us that it is not England but America who sits in waiting. He reasons that America would have sent arms to any of the warring powers if it could have done so; America had no exclusive relationship to England. President Wilson had himself said that America’s neutrality meant that it would have sent arms either to any European country or to none of them. But it was clearly in America’s strategic interest to pursue the former rather than the latter policy. It was in America’s interest as a rising world power to exacerbate Europe’s flow of blood. Wilson had himself said that America had to act for America. Simmel argued that in this sense it was America’s mission to act not against any European power but against all the European powers. ‘Europe stands on the point of committing suicide’, he wrote, ‘and America here sees a chance to place itself at the head of world events.’

It waits in the wings, like a lurking heir at the death-bed of the rich father . . . As Europe dispatches to America a not insignificant portion of its strenuously acquired fortune, it blows itself up with its purchases and hands over to America the accession to the throne of world domination. The munitions deliveries . . . are the first great practical manoeuvre with which America hopes to turn the hands on the clock of world history toward the West. America deals the European peoples the weapons with which they are to destroy themselves to its advantage, and gets itself paid for them in immeasurable riches. At a stroke, America contrives Europe’s enervation in two ways: a masterpiece of world-historical speculation! (below, p. 000)

No reader can fail to be struck by the emphatic ‘anti-Americanism’ of Simmel’s tone in this essay. The image of America as a ‘lurking heir at the death-bed of the
rich father’ is a striking one, with almost Oedipal connotations. We are reminded perhaps of the figure of Edmund in the house of the insane King Lear, a usurper of the crown of civilization, a bastard son ready to accede to the throne of world supremacy. In an echo of *The Philosophy of Money*, Simmel suggests a kind of world-historical transaction in which Europe hands over to America the value of Culture – Europe’s ‘strenuously acquired fortune’ – which America converts into the value of Money and sends back to Europe in the form of Weapons of Mass Destruction.

It should, however, be emphasized that America is as much a symbol for Simmel as the name of a definite nation-state, and that, as such, America features in his writing in the role of something than merely a crude political enemy. It can be argued that just as Simmel is ‘elitist’ about culture only insofar as he regards culture as a challenge to the self that is necessarily a work of strenuous difficulty, so he is ‘anti-American’ only insofar as America figures in his writing as the archetypal cipher of any modern mass industrial society – as the cipher of a modern future which might, in principle, find its site of realization on any continent, including Europe. It can be argued that America for Simmel is the foil onto which Europe projects its own self-criticism. America is the figment of Europe’s anxieties about its own experiences of industrialization, individualism, materialism, bureaucracy and democracy. In this sense, Simmel writes in a tradition of European intellectualism reaching back to Montesquieu, de Tocqueville and Mill, in whose writings we find an image of America as the increasingly massified majoritarian society that Europe herself could be and is fast becoming.

This reading gains added credence when we consider that at the end of the essay, Simmel seeks to ward off any impression of European chauvinism and complacency by warning that ‘for far too long we have assumed the course of world history to unfold on Europe’s shores alone, the crests of its waves leaving Asia millennia in the past and now coming to rest for ever on our continent’ (below, p. 000). With astonishing prescience, Simmel senses the dawn of a new American century. But he senses this American century neither as an ineluctable fate in which Europe must acquiesce at all costs nor as a hostile demon to be banished by Europeans as entirely alien to their own future. In a very revealing letter to Graf Hermann Keyserling of 25 March 1918, Simmel draws all these thoughts together in the following words:

Not only the reality but also the idea of Europe has disappeared. For Europe is after all not a timeless idea like humanity or beauty but an historical idea . . . One could accept this with the hope that Europe will grow again in many decades and perhaps in a different shape – if there were no America. For I am convinced that in the last instance this war will be waged to the advantage of America . . . I am convinced that the finger of world history is now pointing to the West, just as it once turned from Asia to Europe. I am convinced there will come a time when Europe will be to America as Athens to the later Romans: a travel destination for the young in search of culture, a place of full of interesting ruins and great memories, a source of supplies for artists, scholars and chattering intellectuals [Klugewitzer]. It is the delusion of our enemies
not to see that by prolonging the war, they impose on America the role of *tertius gaudens*, not to see that any peace treaty of any kind – favourable or unfavourable for the individual parties – would lessen this tremendous danger, and that every grenade that America delivers to England will sooner or later hit England herself in the heart.

I am not even of the opinion that this fate is entirely inevitable. If Europe manages to recover after the war, if the thought spreads that this war is a *common* predicament for all parties and that the healing of its wounds must be a *common* task in which all might assist each other – then I think Europe could still be a match for America, at least for the foreseeable future. But as things stand today, with such hate and with still further self-annihilation planned for the peace, I see no solution.

One could of course, to a certain extent, think transnationally [*übernational*] by saying to ourselves the following. If one day there arises an American world culture, whose forms we can as little anticipate as the ancient Egyptians could have imagined those of the modern state – well, here there is in fact no ground for complaint. Why should Europe have a permanent lease on the inheritance of Culture? (editorial quotation in Simmel, 1999: 430–1)

Europe and America in World History

Georg Simmel

*Translated by Austin Harrington*

When one tries to make sense of the world-historical transformations produced by this war, America’s behaviour takes on a deeper meaning than the munitions deliveries might at first suggest. It is hard for us to imagine our relationship to America today in a way that might reflect more than momentary excitations. For in addition to our Germanness, we also have to think of ourselves as a European state, sharing a certain unity with all other European states. We manage this only with great difficulty when we persist in regarding the battle against almost all of Europe as our highest priority and most passionate resolve. But we must make this undertaking. For all German-American interests return to the fact that Germany lies not only in Germany but also in Europe. As paradoxical as it may sound at present, I am convinced that Europe composes a unity in relation to other parts of the world – only that where once this European factor possessed a kind of solidarity, today it appears so-to-speak only under a minus sign. Europe is dismembering itself, hatefully at struggle with itself.

Some months ago, in one of the neutral countries, I met with a Frenchman active in some important missions to discuss the question of our civilian prisoners in France. The Frenchman declared his readiness to work for improvements in the conditions of some of the confined Germans. I took it for granted that the conversation would not touch on politics. But just as he was taking his leave, the Frenchman said to me: ‘Do you want to know my opinion? Germany and France are devouring themselves to pieces while England sits ready in waiting at the table.’ I do not criticize this remarkable observation from an intellectually high-standing and thoroughly patriotic Frenchman. But what it suggests about
inner-European relations threatens to take on a truth for all of Europe’s relationship to America. Europe stands on the point of committing suicide, and America here sees a chance to place itself at the head of world events. It waits in the wings, like a lurking heir at the death-bed of the rich father. The munitions deliveries put this attitude into effect. As Europe dispatches to America a not insignificant portion of its strenuously acquired fortune, it blows itself up with its purchases and hands over to America the accession to the throne of world domination. The munitions deliveries are not to be seen in this light as merely lucrative private transactions for the individual suppliers, apparently tolerated by a non-interfering state. Rather, they are the first great practical manoeuvre with which America hopes to turn the hands on the clock of world history toward the West. America deals the European peoples the weapons with which they are to destroy themselves to its advantage, and gets itself paid for them in immeasurable riches. At a stroke, America contrives Europe’s enervation in two ways; a masterpiece of world-historical speculation!

I believe it is quite mistaken to attribute America’s actions to its partisanship for England. In some individual cases this may be correct; a craze for all things English [Engländernarretei] certainly seems to prevail over there. A fine old Englishman once confessed to me that he could not bear Americans because, he said, ‘they are too English.’ Some American families’ passions for tracing their family trees to passengers of The Mayflower symbolize this idealization. But America’s last motives for its actions are pitted against Germany only because they are pitted against Europe – and they are pitted against this Europe of which England, too, is, in the end, a part! America’s partisanship for England is little more than an epiphenomenon of the current situation. Undoubtedly it would deliver arms with the same zeal to the continental powers if it thought it possible and necessary. For then it would help Europe to self-destruction all the more assuredly. President Wilson has himself said that the principles of neutrality mean that arms deliveries can proceed to all parties indifferently, and that consequently he would be breaking neutrality if he declined to send arms to England and France. Of course, if he forbade arms deliveries altogether, this too would affect all parties in just the same indifferent way and would fulfil exactly the same principles of strictest impartiality. However, the latter alternative would considerably dam up Europe’s bloodshed on both sides of its self-inflicted wounds. For it is obvious that one party’s deployment will induce another party to make a matching campaign. Thus America has seized on a mode of operation absolutely consonant with its formal neutrality which also allows it to realize the humanitarian ideals [Humanitätsideale] it has been preaching incessantly. I have no doubt that numerous leading Americans hold dearly to these ideals and would not betray them for short-term business gain. But consciously or not, one motive rules in their hearts, which the President has expressed quite correctly: America must act neither for nor against any of the war parties; America must act for America. In world-historical terms, in other words, America must intensify this war not against any one party but against all of them, against Europe as a whole.
But can Europe be so foolish as to commit this Harikiri? Has the particularism of its parts so blinded the war’s perpetrators that we overlook Europe’s enormous existential danger, letting our orders for arms satisfy America’s business to an infinite degree? We may hope that Germany will emerge healthier and stronger from this war and recover its losses in plenty – excepting its irreplaceable people. But whatever the outcome, Europe herself will be immeasurably weakened. Let us only recall the loss of prestige now suffered by Europeans in Africa and in the entire Orient, which perhaps will never again be made good. From the outset, confusions of thought have been compounded by a very widespread lack of clarity about the quite different levels of significance on which this war is to be played out. With France we have a local feud. As much as Germany must hold on to Alsace to the last man, and will do so, it is a matter of near indifference in world-historical terms as to whether these 14,000 square kilometres of Alsace-Lorraine (in territory and population equal to about one-fortieth of Germany) are to be deemed German or French – almost as indifferent as the question of whether the Trentino belongs to Austria or to Italy. One of the war’s paradoxes is that it has claimed most victims on the front between us and those people [the French] whose conflict with us has the least wide-ranging meaning. Russia’s and especially England’s reasons for war certainly approach the ‘threshold’ of world-historical significance more closely. But pace many of our best and deepest thinkers, I do not believe any of the speculations pointing to an inevitability or inner necessity in this regard. Nothing persuades me that the world has no place for both England and Germany. At most we can ask that England give up the most short-sighted form of its egoism, but not its egoism itself – no one can expect this of it. Together we could preserve peace in Europe if we had a will to do so – and we could do so not for the sake of some pacifist ideal about whose value we will likely dispute but rather for the sake of holding Europe’s position in the world – which must also include England’s position – against the rising powers of America and perhaps also of east Asia.

Between these two poles a strong Europe might effect an ‘equilibrium’. But after the current self-mutilation, we may well ask whether this is still possible. Will Europe be able to prevent one of these powers from coming to dominate over the other and making itself for a period of world history the engine of all the earth’s economic and cultural forces? Some decades ago, with his incomparably broad historical sense, Jacob Burckhardt wrote that the European nations have placed far too much trust in the ‘security of their relations’. For far too long we have assumed the course of world history to unfold on Europe’s shores alone, the crests of its waves leaving Asia millennia in the past and now coming to rest for ever on our continent. After this enduring stability, in the course of which each nation needed to attend so to speak only to its immediate personal interests, we have lost a sense for truly world-historical decisions. The disaster of this inner-European war is that its acute afflictions and sufferings raise Europe’s inwardness to unparalleled heights at just the moment that this inwardness threatens us with an unprecedented world-historical danger. In the end Europe dwells in one house, America in another. The myopia, the lunacy and the crime
of our opponents who have ignited this war is that, like the inhabitants of a house
who detest each other and want to expel each other, they set fire to the entire
house and bring crashing to the ground their very own home.

References
University Press.
Press.
Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp.
—— (2000b) ‘“Werde, was du bist”’, in *Aufsätze und Abhandlungen 1909–1918, Band
Troeltsch, E. (2002) *Schriften zur Politik und Kulturphilosophie: Kritische Gesamtausgabe,
Band 15*. Gütersloh: Gütersloherverlaghaus.

**Austin Harrington** is Lecturer in Sociology at the University of Leeds, UK. During
completion of this translation he was an Alexander von Humboldt Fellow at the
Humboldt University of Berlin (2003–4) and previously a Jean Monnet Fellow at the
European University Institute in Florence (2002–3). He is the author of *Art and
Social Theory: Sociological Arguments in Aesthetics* (Polity Press, 2004),
*Modern Social Theory: An Introduction* (Oxford University Press, 2004), and
*Concepts of Europe in Classical Sociology* (Routledge, 2005). Address: Department
of Sociology and Social Policy, University of Leeds, Leeds LS2 9JT, UK. [email:
a.harrington@leeds.ac.uk]
Ernst Troeltsch’s Concept of Europe

Austin Harrington
UNIVERSITY OF LEEDS, UK

Abstract
Recent writing in social theory has seen a renewed preoccupation with questions of religion, secularization and civilizational difference. This article reappraises the work of one early twentieth-century thinker in relation to these issues: the German historical theologian and close colleague of Max Weber, Ernst Troeltsch (1865–1923). The article concentrates particularly on Troeltsch’s late writings on Europe and ‘Europeanism’. The thesis is defended that Troeltsch offers an important gloss on Weber’s famous assertion of the ‘universal significance and validity’ of occidental rationalism. Troeltsch offers a thicker, more concretized reading of Weber’s statement that serves as a precursor to contemporary thinking about ‘multiple modernities’ and also as a fund of trenchant counter-responses to the claims of recent post-colonial critics about Eurocentrism in western social science. Troeltsch’s writings give us one example among many of a current of cosmopolitan reflexivity in European social thought between the wars that avoided both nationalism and chauvinism, on the one hand, and nihilism and obscurantism, on the other.

Key words
- Eurocentrism
- Europeanism
- historicism
- occidentalism
- secularization
- Ernst Troeltsch
- Max Weber

Recent writing in social theory has seen a renewed preoccupation with questions of secularization and religious inheritance in modern value-systems. Anxieties about religious fundamentalism, the fate of secularism and civil society and the historical legacies of the West have once again brought questions of ‘axial commitment’ to the fore. This is as much the case for contemporary intellectuals such as Charles Taylor (2002) and even Habermas (2001b), as for scholarly re-appraisals of classical figures in social thought. The present article reappraises one classical European figure in relation to these issues: the German historical theologian and close colleague of Max Weber at Heidelberg in the first decade of the century, Ernst Troeltsch (1865–1923).

Troeltsch has been a neglected figure in sociology. While he remains well known today among theologians as a canonical figure in the German Protestant historicist tradition of liberal theology, his more specifically sociological writings
have lacked the attention they arguably deserve – at least in Anglophone circles. This is to be regretted in view of the many insights to be gained from Troeltsch's major sociological treatise of 1912 *The Social Teachings of the Christian Churches*, which drew closely (but not derivatively) on Weber's *Protestant Ethic*, as well as from his numerous essays on historicism, democracy, rights, secularization and notably on the concept of Europe and 'Europeanism'.¹ This article concentrates specifically on these important writings of Troeltsch on 'Europeanism' (*Europäismus*). The article begins by situating Troeltsch in various currents of early twentieth-century thought that resolutely rejected both European chauvinism and nationalism, on the one hand, and value-nihilism and obscurantism, on the other. The discussion then moves to Troeltsch's conception of historicism as a form of European 'de-centring'. The thesis is defended that 'Troeltsch here offers an important gloss on Max Weber's famous assertion of the 'universal significance and validity' of occidental rationalism in the opening words of Weber's *Vorbe-merkung* to the *Collected Essays on the Sociology of Religion*. Troeltsch offers a thicker, more qualified and concretized reading of Weber's thesis which serves as a precursor to contemporary thinking in social theory about 'multiple modernities' and also as a fund of trenchant counter-responses to the claims of recent post-colonial critics about Eurocentrism in western social science. The article concludes with some further remarks on Troeltsch's relevance to more recent conceptions of the meaning of universal validity-claims in the work of Habermas, Wolfgang Schuhcker and Hans Joas.

**European Intellectuals between the Wars: Troeltsch and Weimar Politics**

Undoubtedly many elements of nineteenth-century European social thought betray an obliviousness to the ethical significance of civilizational differences. Social Darwinist and racial chauvinist ideologies disclose only a more generalized arrogance in nineteenth-century thought that is reflected in different ways and degrees in French and British traditions of positivism and utilitarianism, in the monological developmentalism of figures such as Comte and Spencer, in the philosophy of Hegel, in later figures such as Lévy-Bruhl and Pareto, and to an extent also, *mutatis mutandis*, in American modernization theory of the 1950s. However, it is not clear that the post-colonial critique of Eurocentrism is pertinent to all or possibly even to a majority of later nineteenth-century social thinkers.² Certainly by the turn of the century, large numbers of European intellectuals had begun emphatically to repudiate such attitudes. While the term 'Eurocentrism' did not exist in English or in any other language, it is possible to find an abundance of reflections on European myopia in these years. This is above all the case for the enormously vibrant decade of the 1920s. Among academic sociological figures it is sufficient to mention the many inheritors of Max Weber's legacy of comparative interpretive analysis at Heidelberg, including the many associates of the Institut für Sozial- and Staatswissenschaft directed by Alfred
Weber, chiefly Karl Mannheim and Norbert Elias, as well as the philosopher Karl Jaspers, and the young Hannah Arendt (cf. Blomert, 1999). Elsewhere we may think of figures such as Cassirer, Schutz, Heidegger, Voegelin and the late Freud of Moses and Monothism (cf. Said, 2003). In the more general public frame, it is appropriate to mention such personalities as Romain Rolland, André Malraux, Julien Benda, Bertrand Russell, Karl Kraus, Robert Musil, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Erich Maria Remarque and James Joyce. While some figures, such as Thomas Mann and Friedrich Meinecke, passed through more nationalist phases in their writing, it is fair to say that all at various stages of their careers rose above backward-looking and essentializing attitudes to European history. Even in Georg Simmel’s war-period essay ‘Die Idee Europa’ of 1915, it is possible to detect the germ of a forward-looking post-nationalist European self-understanding (Simmel, 2000).

It can be argued that not since Stuart Hughes’s magisterial study of the ‘re-orientation of European social thought’ – in figures such as Croce, Bergson, Weber and other representatives of what Hughes called the ‘generation of the 1890s’ – has there been a fully comparative study of European intellectualism in this period. While it is true that many thematicizations of the ‘European spirit’ or of the ‘European soul’ sheered over into cultural pessimism, into what Thomas Mann famously called the ‘conservative revolution’, or alternatively into mystifying discourses of European redemption through a turn to the ‘Orient’, many discussions did not follow this route. The latter tendency certainly had a presence in French salon talk, as Edward Said famously showed – notably in figures such as Drieu La Rochelle, to a certain extent in Paul Valéry, and also in the nihilism of Céline. In Germany, Mann’s Betrachtungen eines Unpolitischen of 1919 defended German Kultur against cosmopolitan Zivilisation. But this aspect of Mann’s writing is already much less evident in The Magic Mountain of 1924, and certainly by the time of Mann’s address to the Comité des lettres et des arts in Nice in 1935, ‘Achtung Europa!’, it is wholly absent. Not all of the many references to European values and ideas that we find in the inter-war period can be regarded in terms of simple resignation, in the vein of T.S. Eliot’s or Meinecke’s plangent statements after 1945. Although there are tones of resignation in Valéry’s Crise de l’esprit (of 1919) and Paul Hazard’s Crise de la conscience européenne (of 1935), other French texts such as Léon Brunschvig’s Sorbonne lectures L’Esprit européen (posthumously published in 1947) and the early lectures of Marc Bloch and Lucien Febvre on Europe in the Middle Ages take a much more dispassionate stance (see Le Goff, 2003: 12). It is possible to find some very hard-headed and hard-hitting interventions in other famous texts such as Kraus’s Die letzten Tagen der Menschheit (1920), Rolland’s Au-dessus de la mêlée (1915), Benda’s Trahison des clercs (1927), Musil’s essay Hilflose Europa (1922), Malraux’s La Tentation de l’occident (1926) and Husserl’s Die Krisis der europäischen Wissenschaften (1936). In these texts we find partisanship for the idea of a cosmopolitan European intellectual sphere. We find a commitment to reason, democracy and enlightenment that is disabused of all illusions about the achievements of the West.
It is true that all of the writers named so far belonged to elite intellectual strata. It must be admitted that few of their works spoke in any direct way for sentiments among the broad mass of the population. Certainly the book that reached the widest section of the public in this respect in Germany was a very different work, namely Oswald Spengler's *Decline of the West*, the first edition of which appeared in April 1918. Spengler's easy-going moral relativism could appeal to a vulgarized form of Nietzschean thinking on power, will and decadence, while conveniently ignoring Nietzsche's more challenging statements about 'homelessness', 'fatherlandishness' and 'good Europeans'. His aestheticized vision of organic cycles of waxing and waning in world civilizations superficially declared Europe's downfall, while in reality tacitly reaffirming European – and especially German – notions in the most spuriously 'tragic' manner. But it is important not to overstate Spengler's impact on the period. Despite the many simmering tides of anti-intellectual anti-Semitic resentment that were to become a flood in the 1930s, significant sections of the public in different European nations sought to grapple with the question of Europe's place in the world, its notions of reason and democracy and its legacy of imperialism. In Berlin in the first five years after the First World War, one of the most outspoken representatives of these was Ernst Troeltsch.

Troeltsch had moved to Berlin from Heidelberg in 1915 to take up the Chair of Philosophy left vacant after the death of Wilhelm Dilthey in 1911. Between January 1919 and June 1920 Troeltsch also held a position in the new government as Undersecretary for Religious Relations in the state of Brandenburg, standing for the Deutsche Demokratische Partei, founded by Theodor Wolff and Alfred Weber, which stood slightly to the right of the Social Democratic Party but well to the left of the many conservative nationalist factions. With Walter Rathenau, he established a non-partisan league of intellectuals, the Demokratische Volksbund, devoted to promoting democracy in German political institutions, which remained active until Rathenau's assassination in June 1922. Within a month of the appearance of *Decline of the West*, Troeltsch criticized Spengler's work in unequivocal terms. Between 1918 and 1923 he was to publish a welter of essays and addresses in defence of the Weimar constitution, on democracy and German nationalism and separation of church and state, as well as thirty articles in the Berlin weekly, *Der Kunstwart*, known as the 'Spectator Letters'.

During the war, Troeltsch had defended Germany in a nationalistic spirit (in common with virtually all German intellectuals at that time). But before the war, as far back as 1900, he had written several essays on politics and the state with a more cosmopolitan edge, and by 1918 this orientation returned decisively to the forefront of his writing. His writings in this period insist on the importance of a system of international law. They give support to the principle of Wilson's League of Nations, though they remain sceptical of Wilson's intentions. In a similar manner to Keynes in *The Economic Consequences of the Peace*, Troeltsch wrote that such a League ran the risk of becoming 'merely a diplomatic organ of hegemonic designs' (*hegemonischer Bestrebungen*) (1923: 100), warning notably
that any ambition of America to play the role of guarantor for a new global political and economic order on the model of Rome was bound to fail (1923: 98–100). Troeltsch supported the Versailles Peace Treaty but remained sharply alert to its inadequacies; and while excoriating Spengler’s ‘romanticized cynicism’, he mistrusted equally the utilitarian utopianism of figures such as H.G. Wells and the Bolshevists. Echoing Max Weber’s distinction between ‘ethics of conviction’ and ‘ethics of responsibility’, Troeltsch insisted on politics as a work of mediation between ultimate ends and immediate exigencies. His late writings envision Europe as a possible intermediary agency between nationalist, religious and revolutionary fanaticism, on the one hand, and an abstract socialist or capitalist international order, on the other.

In his essay ‘Natural Law and Humanity in World Politics’ of 1922, which rapidly became a reference point for Friedrich Meinecke and Thomas Mann and later also for Leo Strauss, Troeltsch attacked the popular German distinction between Kultur and Zivilisation. Troeltsch here examined the notion of a dichotomy between ‘western European’ traditions of individualistic legal rights and an allegedly more ‘authentic’ German tradition that emphasized the ethical integrity and expressive agency of the state. The German romantic idea had degenerated into legitimation for Prussian caesarism, and it was this ideological confection that was the innovation, not the supposedly eriolated ‘west European’ principle, which had its roots in the far older medieval Catholic system of natural law. Wilhelm von Humboldt’s idea of the flourishing of individuality in community would find its home neither in Germany alone nor in the England of J.S. Mill but in Europe as a whole, in a synthesis of the two traditions. Troeltsch wrote:

the theory of the rights of man – rights which are not the gift of the state, but the ideal postulates of the state, and indeed of society itself, in all its forms – is a theory which contains so much of the truth, and satisfies so many of the requirements of a true European ethos, that we cannot afford to neglect it; on the contrary, we must incorporate it into our own ideas. (1934: 220)

Troeltsch insisted that beyond the sovereignty of the state, some supervenient moral principle had to be defined. After the breakdown of the medieval Catholic system and the emergence of autonomous nation-states, a new framework had to be developed that could mediate between the two poles of Realpolitik and moral-spiritual universalism. Neither national churches nor national patriotism had the power to sustain European civil society in the present. The danger was consequently one of an imminent collapse of civil society into naked economic individualism and Machiavellian state struggle. Troeltsch again emphasized:

at the heart of all the current ideas about a League of Nations, the organisation of the world, and the limitation of egoisms and forces of destruction, there is an indestructible moral core, which we cannot in its essence reject, even if we are painfully aware, at the moment, of the difficulties which it presents and the abuse to which it is liable. We may see the difficulties and the abuse clearly . . . but what we cannot do, and must not do, is to deny the ideal itself in its own essence, in its ethical significance, in its connection with the philosophy of history. (1934: 220)
In these connections Troeltsch strikingly departed from Max Weber's picture of irresolvable conflict between 'national ideas'. While he accepted many elements of Weber's analysis, his view was that the two antinomial sides of human life in society, the side of interest and the side of love — in Kantian terms, man as a creature of nature and man as a free being — could not be left unmediated. This task of mediation had to be, in Troeltsch's words, a work of 'compromise', 'tolerance' and cultural and political 'synthesis'. By these terms Troeltsch did not mean passive adaptation to circumstances, indifference to distinctions, or syncretism, or thoroughgoing relativism. He meant reasonably directed public communication in pursuit of collectively sharable ethical ends. The German state had to be purged of all confessional affiliation, but it also had to be responsive to, and responsible for, cultivating, inter-confessional communication in the public sphere about the moral ends of the polity. In this respect Troeltsch did not subscribe to the view promulgated shortly after his death by Carl Schmitt, which doubted all possibility of spiritual plurality in the sources of parliamentary representation and essentially turned its back on democracy as a liberal-secular illusion. Instead, Troeltsch insisted on the possibility of an ethically encompassing polity that was meaningfully situated in definite historical traditions yet not dominated by any one religious particularism. At the international level, he saw the larger European whole as the appropriate intermediate framework in which such compromises between interests, orders, individuals and collectives could realistically be worked out.

I turn now to the key to Troeltsch's way of thinking about Europe in these texts, namely to his distinctive conception of historicism as a form of European de-centring.

**Historicism and Europe**

Troeltsch defended a conception of historicism that repudiated both Hegelian metaphysical philosophy and the more romantic 'pantheistic' kinds of historicism associated with early nineteenth-century German historians such as Ranke. The former was to be avoided insofar as it imposed on history a rationalistic teleological schema; the latter insofar as it dissolved historical becoming into a multitude of discrete national groups, tribes and ethnicities. Troeltsch saw historicism as the task of releasing the 'individuality' of all cultural phenomena by means of generalizing critical constructions that possessed normative ethical significance for the present but that remained open to constant revision. Troeltsch's conception is in this respect close to Wilhelm Dilthey's project of the 'critique of historical reason' but it also looks forward to Karl Mannheim's early conception of Kulturosoziologie. In a similar manner to Mannheim — who saluted the older man's legacy (Mannheim, [1924] 1956) — Troeltsch spoke not of a subjective-psychologist relativity of cultural contents to individual persons but of a sociological relativity of cultural contents to social standpoints. Truth was relative to socio-historical change and at the same time irreducible to any one standpoint.
in history. Truth was the totality of all historically experienced standpoints, insofar as these standpoints are apprehended critically from our always fallible, always transient position of the present. The conception held much in common with American pragmatist thought of the period, as several commentators have noted (cf. Joas, 1992).

In his lengthiest and most important statement on historicism, _Der Historismus und seine Probleme_ of 1922, Troeltsch explicitly applies this conception to the critique of Eurocentrism. In the section headed 'Europäismus' in a longer chapter devoted to 'The Construction of European Cultural History', Troeltsch wrote scathingly of 'Europäerhochmut', of numerous 'Übertreibungen des europäischen Selbstgefühls' and of Europeans' 'überall verbreitete naïve Selbstverabsolutierung'. We find in these phrases at least four distinct objects of criticism: (1) concentration on European instances of a phenomenon also possessing instances in other places of the world; (2) belief in the existence of a phenomenon in all places of the world that in fact exists only in Europe; (3) belief in Europe as the most developed civilization, where 'most developed' implies 'best'; and (4) belief in European values as valid for all societies, where 'valid for all' implies 'true for all'. Here is surely ample evidence of a highly developed critique of Eurocentrism by a long-deceased European author – several decades before the term began to enter our current academic discourse.

Troeltsch's central object of attack in this chapter is the trajectory of the German discourse of 'universal history' (_Universalgeschichte_) in Herder, Lessing, Kant, Schiller, Hegel, Ranke and others. Troeltsch notes that while _Universalgeschichte_ did not originally mean 'world history' for Herder, it soon came to acquire this meaning. He asserts that all stage-conceptions of history and all notions of entelechy in history are little more than projections of the European self-image – and he adds pointedly that behind all of them 'lurks the figure of the conqueror, the colonizer and the missionary' (_Der Eroberer, der Kolonisator und der Missionär steckt in allem europäischen Denken_) (1922: 707). Troeltsch warns that all instances of philosophizing about humanity in the abstract cannot hope to be more than instances of philosophizing about European being. Humanity exists as a whole but cannot be known 'as a whole', if to 'know as a whole' implies to subsume under one unitary system of reason:

For us there is only a world-history of Europeans [Europäertum]. The old conception of world history must take on new and more modest forms. We must be resolved to reject all overextensions of the European self-image and all forceful monism of a way of thinking that makes everything converge on one point . . .

For us there is only the universal history of European culture, which certainly needs to look comparatively at other cultures practically and theoretically in order to understand itself and its relation to the others but which cannot thereby coalesce with the others in some species of general history of humanity and human development. (1922: 708, 710)

It should be noted that Troeltsch did not here censure the very concept of self-projection. He found European self-projection to be malign when it pretended
to total knowledge of the human species and when it forgot its own conditions of origination. But self-projection as such – the idea that one can only know others in some relationship to oneself, and in some address of oneself to the Other – was not itself to be seen as a bar to understanding; it was the very precondition of understanding. In Troeltsch's view, all our knowing arises from a standpoint, a centre, which is always limited, but the fact that our knowing is limited and located does not mean that all we have in the end is merely a 'perspective'. Our way of understanding others is circular, but need not be viciously circular. In this sense Troeltsch's argument has the classic form of a hermeneutic circle: the 'I' or the 'We' is in a position to comprehend the otherness of the Other only insofar as the 'I' or the 'We' first supposes a relation of commonality to the Other. However fallible this supposition may turn out to be, the supposition has at least at first to be made. The argument runs like a leitmotif in anti-Cartesian thought from the early thinking of figures such as Vico, W. von Humboldt and Schleiermacher to the contemporary thought of figures such as Gadamer, Ricoeur and Donald Davidson. It is arguably a trenchant response to some of the more extreme contortions of current post-structuralist and post-colonial writing about epistemological 'effacement' and 'assimilation' of the Other.

In the same chapter, Troeltsch also writes in a more substantive manner about different 'civilizational complexes' (Kulturnkreise). He refers in Weberian terms to a 'Mediterranean-European-Atlantic bloc' characterized by planned attitudes to action over time that lead to economic take-off in the cities of the later Middle Ages. These he distinguishes from more cyclical attitudes to time in the ancient civilizations of the Sumerians, Acadians, Assyrians and Babylonians (1922: 716). Although the Oriental civilizations influence and interact with western Mediterranean antiquity in Greece, and although Arab civilization preserves and transforms the legacy of the Greeks, only western Europe constructs an overarching bridge between monotheistic religious modernity and classical antiquity. The Islamic world blends Jewish and Christian religiosity with Greek culture but it develops in a different direction from northern-western Europe. The latter definitively breaks with the Oriental roots of Mediterranean antiquity. It preserves from the Orient only the prophetic contents of ancient Judaism. It takes its central idea of the autonomous personality from Greek culture. Troeltsch comments that in this respect

the goals of the Islamic world have never been those of an autonomous, free and infinitely self-creating humanity, such as in Europe . . . However numerous and close its ties to Europeanism, Islam has a universal history of its own and does not belong in the universal history of Europeans. (p. 727)

European political forms arise largely on the basis of the legal-administrative structures of the Roman Empire and its Christianization, and are consolidated in the freedoms of the medieval cities (pp. 716–18). The unifying agency in this formation is the Catholic Church, which defines the structures of cultural and political power in Europe from the Carolingian Middle Ages onwards. Troeltsch comments that in this one respect, Hegel's attribution of modern European
civilization to the legacies of the Germanic and Greco-Roman rather than Oriental peoples is correct – even though Hegel refers only to modern civilization tout court and chauvinistically excludes the East, except insofar as it represents a principle of 'nothingness' which is negated in the 'being' and 'becoming' of the Greco-Romans and the Germans (p. 726). In two final paragraphs, Troeltsch also raises the question of Europe's destiny between America and Russia, and the issue of Europe's indeterminate boundaries with Asia. Although he comments that only those Slavic peoples who moved furthest westward from Asia after the first Germanic migrations had any impact on 'Europe's more decisively Latin culture', and although he says that the division between Latin Rome and Greek Byzantium is itself constitutive for Europe, with the Orthodox Church having a 'remoter connection' to classical Greece than that of western European culture, he avers that Russia's close connections to the west in religion, politics and economy place her among Europe's 'strongest forces of the future' (p. 728). He goes so far as to say that only the 'conjunction of the Greek Orthodox and Latin Catholic religions makes talk of Europeanism permissible' (p. 729, n.388). Similarly, he underlines that even as Americans continue to look to Europe as a source of heritage, the era of colonial America as a sanctuary for European fugitives is definitively over. He writes that 'America has been stepping ever more stridently into the foreground of world culture, and now indeed into its very centre after our all-destructive war' (pp. 729–30).

In a series of lectures originally prepared for presentation in England, Troeltsch (1923) revisited an earlier, more narrowly theological work published twenty years previously in 1902. This was his The Absoluteness of Christianity and the History of Religions (1972). Here Troeltsch had argued that Christianity's 'absoluteness' had to be understood in a steadfastly historicizing manner, in rigorous distinction to Hegel's speculative 'Absolute Spirit'. Insofar as it was possible to speak of experiences of the absolute at all, it was possible to speak only of the absolute *in* the relative: only of relations *to* the absolute. Troeltsch had stressed that 'to wish to possess the absolute in an absolute way at a particular point in history is a delusion' (1972: 122). It was possible to think of or about the absolute, but not in any 'absolute way'. This did not mean that Christianity's normative claims could be treated in a purely objectifying manner; it was not possible to detach Christianity's normative ethical content entirely from the practice of studying Christianity social-scientifically. But Christianity's 'absoluteness' still remained a *claim*, not a fact, and in no way cancelled the claims of other world religions to absoluteness. Moreover, it is in no way followed from Christianity's formative role in the shaping of European history that Christianity enjoyed an exclusive normative privilege in the shaping of Europe's future. In 1922 Troeltsch reiterated that the two concepts of 'highest validity' (*Höchstgel tung*) and historical 'individuality' (*Individualität*) admitted of no easy conciliation. The two concepts depended on one another – the most valid was impossible to conceive in abstraction from historical concretion – but they stood in tension to one another and allowed no harmonious reconciliation. Troeltsch wrote that 'the idea of the historical individuality of Europeanism and of its close association
with Christianity should be emphasized, but the always rather rationalistic idea of validity and highest validity should be given much less credence' (1923: 76).

In his last months, Troeltsch vehemently rejected the notion that historicism itself lay at the root of Europe's crisis. He argued that the challenge was to overcome relativism within historicism, not historicism itself. Scepticism about truth and objectivity in the academy had lent false licence to new public mystifications and aestheticizations of history. As public historical consciousness fell more and more into the hands of dilettantes, the academy stood idly by, vainly seeking refuge in a notion of science's indifference to politics and little acting to counter public disaffection with scientific values. The symptoms were France's anti-Semitic Catholic nationalism, Italy's aggressive futurist movement, Russia's endemic pan-Slavism, Germany's infatuation with vitalism. These currents betrayed false hopes of spiritual redemption. On the one side stood self-assertion, nationalism and chauvinism. On the other stood self-abnegation, nihilism and aestheticized Orientalism. Troeltsch's response was to call for the combination of strict historical study with moral and political public dialogue. The task was to generate new efforts of mediation between science, on the one hand, and politics, philosophy, theology and arts, on the other. History was to be a measure of political enlightenment, a weapon against science's alienation from the public sphere.

Troeltsch, Weber and the Status of the West

At this juncture it is appropriate to consider how Troeltsch's concept of Europe compares with Weber's vision both of the 'vocation of science' and the status of the West. This comparison will shed light on Troeltsch's relevance to debates in post-Weberian social theory today about Europe's place in modernity and the possibility of 'multiple modernities'.

Troeltsch's own statements of his differences with Weber occur in several places and have been noted by several scholars. It should be observed above all that Troeltsch objected to Weber's strict insistence on non-negotiability between science and all normative claims of theology, politics and philosophical history. Where Weber saw finally only an internecine war between science and religious value-systems, Troeltsch still believed the two modes of thinking to be compatible with, and criticizable by, one another. Troeltsch notably did not declare himself to be 'religiously unmusical', in Weber's famous self-description. He did not warm to Weber's steely-hard view of the autonomy of politics and of the lonely moral choices of the individual, his thesis of the 'new polytheism' and new 'anarchy of values'. Where Weber emphasized fragmentation, antagonism between perspectives and realities, irreconcilability of value-spheres and great power-politics, Troeltsch still insisted on the possibility modes of integration between value-systems.

In some respects it would not be wrong to be sceptical of Troeltsch's aspiration to ethical and epistemological inclusiveness. Although his writings reject any
naive syncretism, they do not make entirely perspicuous how the desired 'synthesis' is to be achieved — especially insofar as they repudiate any overarching logic of totality such as Hegel's. But it can be suggested that Troeltsch's writings do afford some advantages over Weber's. It can be suggested that insofar as Troeltsch consciously sought to keep a foothold in both sociological analysis and normative theological and philosophical argumentation, he allows us to deal in some ways more adequately than Weber with the distinctively philosophical question of the status of the claim of occidental culture to 'universal validity'. One way in which this can be demonstrated is to consider how Troeltsch's writings stand in relation to several important points of ambiguity in Weber's famous statement of the 'universal significance and validity' of occidental rationalism in the Preface to Weber's Collected Essays on the Sociology of Religion.

In his Preface, Weber asserts that the cultural phenomena that arose on western soil have significance and validity for all civilizations. He immediately adds in parenthesis, however, that this significance and validity may only amount to what 'we like to think', where 'we' stands for 'we westerners' or 'we Europeans'. Then a second ambiguity seems to occur in Weber's use of the term Gültigkeit from the verb gelten, which has two semantic values in German: (1) a sense of valid-by-convention ('in force', 'in currency'), and (2) a sense of valid-by-demonstration ('worthy of acceptance', 'worthy of authority'). One can suggest that Weber may have wanted to insert 'significance' (Bedeutung) here in an effort to offset the potentially chauvinistic force of Gültigkeit in its second strong sense, but at the cost of a possible hedging of his position. Finally, a third ambiguity also seems underlie Weber's use of the word 'universal' (universell). 'Universal' in this context might imply any of the following three readings:

1 What happened in the West must be undergone by other societies insofar as they are to reach the level of modern civilization — a chauvinistic reading.
2 What happened in the West will eventually be undergone by other societies insofar as they continue to evolve through processes of rationalization — a non-chauvinistic but still rather Eurocentric reading.
3 What happened in the West has affected other societies and will probably continue to affect them but does not represent a developmental course they either will, need, or ought to adopt themselves. 'Universal' on this reading has the sense of 'relevant to all', but not 'true for all'. It reflects the weaker conventional sense of gültig, rather than the stronger demonstrative sense.

The first of these readings is certainly not an accurate reflection of Weber's intention. The second reading corresponds roughly to Talcott Parsons's account in *The Structure of Social Action*. The third is almost certainly the most normatively defensible reading. However, it is not elaborated or made more explicit in any other passage of Weber's writing.

It can be argued Troeltsch is one of the very first writers to thicken and qualify Weber's thesis in the spirit of the third of these three readings. It can be suggested that Troeltsch elaborates Weber's thesis in the direction of a more concrete, more singularized understanding of the universal. In his dissection of the concept of
'universal history', Troeltsch proposes that the kinds of developments Weber describes represent a specifically European course of cultural experience but that it is precisely in this European cultural singularity that the universal validity of these developments concretely resides. Without denying their historical contingency, Troeltsch defines the universality of these events in their very singularity, not in any abstract construct applicable to all social systems. The universality of these events holds not merely 'for us'; it holds objectively, but it holds concretely, not abstractly. Troeltsch does not affirm Weber's rather stringent Neo-Kantian distinction between what is and what appears, between how things are in themselves and how we merely 'like to think' they are. In Troeltsch's view, the two sides of this antithesis are to be mediated hermeneutically, not detached from one another in a nominalistic fashion. By linking Weber's concept of occidental rationalism to a more concrete idea of 'Europeanism', Troeltsch shows how the states of affairs Europeans have brought forth are genuinely relevant to all other societies, insofar they concern and affect them and bear witness - not least - to a legacy of destruction and subjugation, but are not necessarily normatively true for them in the sense of representing a scheme through which they must or ought to pass.

In contemporary debates in social theory, one notable context in which we find echoes of this theme of a more 'singularized' universalism is the interpretation given to Weber's work by Wolfgang Schluchter (1979). Here it is important to note that Schluchter's account of Weber differs importantly from that of Habermas, even though both theorists see Weber as a thinker of global evolutionary processes. In his *The Development of Occidental Rationalism* Schluchter reads Weber as saying not only (1) that rationalization processes strike modern westerners as being significant for other peoples but also (2) that these processes really are significant for other peoples, but, nevertheless, (3) that they are significant only insofar as they arose contingently, in a particular historical context, not insofar as they represent an evolutionary paradigm that necessarily will or should determine other peoples. In Schluchter's words, while modern occidental culture remains 'our perspective' which 'we use . . . to illuminate a segment of world history' and which

not only arose contingently but remains particular, it is at the same time of such a kind that all civilized people [Kulturmenschen] could take an interest in it . . . Even the civilized people who do not choose this alternative for themselves are forced to recognize in it a possible interpretation of civilized humanity [Kulturmenschen], an interpretation against which they need not relativize their own choice, but to which they must relate it, insofar as they want to live consciously. (Schluchter, 1979: 35–7) (emphasis in original)

Habermas quotes Schluchter's rendering in support of his own reading of Weber in *The Theory of Communicative Action* (Habermas, 1984: 180). In contrast to Schluchter, however, Habermas finds a problem with Weber's 'as-we-like-to-think' parenthesis. Habermas contends that this parenthesis denotes an inconsistent reversion into relativistic perspectivism in Weber, at odds with what
Habermas sees as Weber’s underlying universalism. Closely following Parsons, Habermas maintains that Weber can only have meant to speak of certain fundamental societal structures that all cultures are bound to acquire insofar as they continue to evolve toward modernity. Habermas allows for what he calls variations in the ‘cultural contents’ of these structures, but he insists that when Weber spoke of ‘universal significance and validity’, what Weber essentially meant, or should have meant, was ‘certain formal properties of the modern understanding of the world . . . a few necessary structural properties of the modern life forms as such’ (Habermas, 1984: 180). It can be argued that Troeltsch’s work helps us to see what is invidious about Habermas’s distinction here between a truly universal level of rationalization in ‘societal structures’ on the one hand and a merely particularistic level of variation in ‘cultural contents’ on the other. While some level of societal analysis should be distinguished from a level of cultural analysis and not collapsed into the latter – as with some versions of postmodernist ‘intertextuality’ – Habermas and Parsons effectively reduce different civilizational enactments of modernity to a single evolutionary paradigm. They do not sufficiently appreciate that the very features they implicitly derive as ‘variations’ might themselves articulate societal structures in ways that lay claim to an authentically ‘singular’ universality. To use Margaret Archer’s terms, they commit a species of ‘downwards conflation’, dragging different civilizational forms downwards into a scheme of invariant ‘deep structure’ (Archer, 1988). To this extent, Habermas’s work moves close to a form of unintentional Eurocentrism, on the one hand, and to an effect of sociological de-contextualization, on the other. It tries to ward off the former danger, but it does only by intensifying the problem of the latter (Delanty, 1997). It strenuously wishes to ‘include the other’, but tends to do so only at the price of an abstraction.

This sense of the desirability of a more ‘singularized’ understanding of the meaning of universal validity-claims has also been explicated recently by Hans Joas. In his writings on the ‘genesis of values’ in relation to religion and secularization, Joas develops a number of proposals that combine German hermeneutic traditions of thought with American pragmatist traditions, including, especially the work of William James. Criticizing Neo-Kantianism’s strict disjunction between ‘genesis’ and ‘validity’, which artificially separates logical contents from contexts of historical process and reduces the latter to mere subjective-psychological accident, Joas argues for an inquiry into the possibility of defending universal validity-claims that at the same time accepts and productively develops insight into the historical contingency of the genesis of values (Joas, 1997). In a recent text, Joas (2004) applies this approach to the study of our normative justification for ‘human rights’. Joas explicitly discusses Troeltsch’s critique of German particularism in the light of ‘west European’ cosmopolitanism in the essay ‘Natural Law and Humanity in World Politics’. Joas especially notes Troeltsch’s concern to hold on at the same time to some residues of truth in the German denigration of rationalistic abstraction and the theme of ‘concretion’, ‘individuality’ and ‘expressivity’ in political form. Joas sees Troeltsch as here salvaging the universality claim of human rights discourse by adverting to its roots.
in contexts of religious value-formation without reducing it to these roots. Joas places Troeltsch's essay alongside Georg Jellinek's thesis of the origin of human rights not in the secular Declaration of the Rights of Man of the French Revolution but in the American Bill of Rights that emerged from the campaigning of the Protestant settlers for religious freedom. Jellinek did not here simply dissolve the validity-claim of modern legal theory into the historical particularism of eighteenth-century cultural Protestantism. In a similar manner to Troeltsch, Jellinek maintained that state sovereignty in relation to citizens' rights answered in principle to context-transcendent arguments, not merely to the sanctity of a particular cultural tradition. But Jellinek emphasized nevertheless that republican and neo-Kantian doctrines fell short of their aims in the absence of a greater awareness of the specific religious historical context of emergence of human rights. In this sense, Joas points to the role of a way of thinking in Troeltsch, Weber and Jellinek that claims universal validity on behalf of western political principles while at the same time acknowledging the historical specificity of these principles. He stresses that without abandoning our readiness to advance sustainable arguments on their behalf with any party who wishes to dispute with us, our first intellectual duty is to acknowledge the historical roots of our claim.

Conclusion

It can be proposed that while Troeltsch supplies no piece of sustained non-western civilizational analysis comparable to Weber's studies of ancient China and India, he interprets western modernity's moral relationship to other civilizations considerably more richly than many twentieth-century social scientists. Troeltsch's rejection of any strict disjunction between observation and valuation allows him to avoid any vicious oscillation between an assertion of universalism and a withdrawal into perspectivism. In showing how value-orientations compose concrete realities of experience rather than mere perspectives to be doubted and objectified, Troeltsch treats the relation between value and facticity as a potentially virtuous, rather than vicious, circle. His position implies neither Eurocentrism nor irremediable civilizational conflict (à la Samuel Huntington). It represents a 'thicker' form of universalism than that of Habermas and other contemporary forms of neo-Kantian cosmopolitanism. It accepts many of the kinds of arguments associated today with the thought of Charles Taylor, but it does not take the route of an easy-going western consensualism represented today by a figure such as Rorty. It is not a position we can easily dismiss as a last throwback to pre-1914 nineteenth-century liberalism. Observing the descent of his country into anarchy in the aftermath of the Great War, Troeltsch remained fully aware of the splintering of modernity into antagonistic mass movements locked in mortal combat in the name of class, nation, race and religion. But he adhered nevertheless to the possibility of reasonably directed communication in the public sphere, with universalizing intent. His was a widespread ethos between the wars that we too easily overlook when we look back on the period with determinist
assumptions or when we award uncritical credence to the Schmittian notion of irreconcilable absolute ends, back-projecting our own current pessimism about pluralism, citizenship and responsibility in civil society and the global stage.

Troeltsch's writings also suggest clues for ways of conceptualizing European society today that aim to avoid dangers of nationalism and cultural essentialism, as well as problems of scepticism and abstract constitutionalism. When we think today of such uncompromisingly constitutionalist positions on European politics and society as that of Habermas, it is not hard to see why the project of a common European polity has so far failed to invoke broad-based democratic identification (cf. Habermas, 2001a). It is arguable that before any such project can get off the ground, rather thicker, more 'substantial' exercises need to be undertaken in cultural, political and sociological self-understanding that try to describe some distinctively European historical experiences. Troeltsch's reflections suggest some ways in which such efforts might begin. While it is certain that all such efforts run a risk of essentialism, it is not certain that they must degenerate into essentialism necessarily. As several commentators have stressed, there would seem to be no reason in principle why it should not be possible to develop positive historical analyses of European civilizational forms that amount to more than a mere roll-call of differential exclusions of the alien. The importance of Troeltsch and other early twentieth-century European social thinkers here lies in the fact that Europe does not appear in their work as an exclusive monolithic synonym for modernity. The numerous German writers associated with Max Weber's approach to comparative historical sociology demonstrate that the Eurocentric positivism of nineteenth-century Franco-British and mid-twentieth-century American evolutionary thinking by no means describes the whole of western social science. These writers evoke ways of thinking that look forward current debates in social theory about 'multiple modernities', most notably in the link between Karl Jaspers's famous thesis of the Axial Age and the recent work of Shmuel Eisenstadt (Jaspers, 1953; Eisenstadt, 1986, 2002). The early twentieth-century writers are arguably only a few figures whose statements on European universalism need to be recognized as interventions as self-critical as those of more recent figures such as Patocka (1996, 2002), Derrida (1992), Brague (1992), Cacciari (1994, 1997), Kristeva (2000), Sloterdijk (2002), Badiou (1997) or Žižek (2000). They demonstrate the existence of a fairly continuous thread of reflexivity in European intellectual life between the wars, rendering untenable any strong dichotomy between a Eurocentric modernity in the first half of the twentieth century and a non-Eurocentric postcolonial 'postmodernity' in the latter.

Acknowledgement

I am grateful for comments from Gerard Delanty, Peter Wagner, Hans Joas, Hans-Peter Müller and some other colleagues. Any errors are my own.
Notes

1 The ongoing appearance of a new *Kritische Gesamtausgabe* has made Troeltsch's previously very scattered texts considerably more accessible. Notable recent scholarship in German includes studies by Graf (1993, 2000), Graf and Nees (2002), Renz (1987, 2001), Rendtorff (1991), Hübinger (2002). The best survey in English to date is Chapman (2001). Three brief articles have been written on Troeltsch and Europe by Cho (1995, 1996, 1998), but no extended study has yet been made of Troeltsch's Europeanism in relation to current debates in social theory about 'multiple modernities'.

2 Chakrabarty (2000) closely links European chauvinism to what he himself terms 'historicism'. However, he wholly overlooks the very different -- non-Hegelian, non-progressive -- conceptions of historicism that flourished in later nineteenth-century Germany and that are discussed in this article. For three critical responses to the Euro-centric charge, see McLennan (2000, 2003), Colliot-Thélène (2003) and Arnason (2003).

3 I attempt this in a small way in Harrington (2005). Two notable studies among others are, however, Lichtblau (1996) and Wiknow (1997). See also Hughes (1958).


5 Troeltsch's criticisms of Spengler appeared for the first time in May 1918 in a text that later became Chapter 3 of *Der Historismus und seine Probleme* (1922) and again in September 1919 (Troeltsch, 1994); see also Troeltsch (1925). The Spectator Letters are collected in Troeltsch (1994). See also Troeltsch (2002), especially the essays 'Demokratie' (1919), 'Der Particularismus der Deutschen' (1919), 'Demokratische Kulturpolitik' (1920), 'Deutscher Geist und Judenhass' (1920), 'Wahlpflicht der Intellektuellen' (1920) and especially (discussed below) 'Naturrecht und Humanität in der Weltpolitik' (1922).

6 Notably in his address to the German Evangelical-Social Congress in 1900, 'Die christliche Ethik und die heutige Gesellschaft' and 'Politische Ethik und Christentum'. See Hübinger (2002: 3); also Platte (1995). Another lecture, 'Nationalismus und Humanismus in unserem Bildungswesen' (Troeltsch, 1917), replied to Ernst Cassirer's *Freiheit und Form: Studien zur deutschen Geistesgeschichte* (of 1916) which followed Goethe in defining German culture in constitutive dialogue with the Latin cultures of the south and west. Troeltsch also cited Simmel's conception of the 'dialectic of the German spirit' which saw German culture as fulfilling itself only in negation of itself, in relation to that which it is not.

7 Mann's review of this essay appeared in the *Frankfurter Zeitung* in December 1923. Meinecke's discussion appeared in his *Die Idee der Staatsraison* of 1924. Leo Strauss referred to Troeltsch in his admonitions on German relativism and particularism in *Natural Rights and History* from 1949. An English translation of the essay appeared early in 1934 as an appendix to the English edition of Otto von Gierke's *Natural Law and the Theory of Society*. Troeltsch also gave an earlier address on natural law and its relation to German politics at the First Congress of German Sociologists in 1910 in the presence of Tönnies, Simmel, Weber and Sombart.

8 This statement is surely a timely reminder to those partisans of the contemporary Left who would seek to collapse all notion of a normative regulative idea of moral universalism into the current naked reality of American imperialism. Chiefly: Anderson (2002, 2003).
9 The key text in this connection is Schmitt's _Geistige Grundlagen des heutigen Parla-

10 As several commentators point out, the German title of the late lecture series _Der
Historismus und seine Überwindung_ ('Historicism and its Overcoming') is misleading
and was not Troeltsch's own. It was added posthumously by his editor. See also 'Die
Krise des Historismus' and 'Die Zufälligkeit der Geschichtswahrheiten' in Troeltsch
(2002).


12 In Parsons' translation:

A product of modern European civilization studying the problem of universal
history is bound to ask himself, and rightly so, to what combination of circum-
stances the fact should be attributed that in Western civilization, and in Western
civilization only, cultural phenomena have appeared which (as we like to think) lie
on a line of development having universal significance and validity [von univer-
seller Bedeutung und Gültigkeit]. (Weber, 1930: 13)

13 Jellinek's text first appeared in 1895 under the title _Die Erklärung der Menschen- und
Bürgerrechte: Ein Beitrag zur modernen Verfassungsgeschichte._

14 Compare the approaches proposed by Le Goff (2003), Friese and Wagner (2002,
2004), Delanty (2003) and the contributors to Passerini (1998), Pagden (2002), and

References

Archer, M. (1988) _Culture and Agency: The Place of Culture in Social Theory._ Cambridge:
Cambridge University Press.
Arnason, J. (2003) _Civilizations in Dispute: Theoretical Questions and Historical Traditions._
Leuven: Brill.
de France.
und die Heidelberger Sozialwissenschaften der Zwischenkriegszeit._ Munich: Hanser.
Chakrabarty, D. (2000) _Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Differ-
——— (2001) _Ernst Troeltsch and Liberal Theology: Religion and Cultural Synthesis in
Wilhelmine Germany._ Oxford: Oxford University Press.
Relationship to Nationalism, Eurocentrism and Universalism', _The European Legacy_


—— (1922) Der Historismus und seine Probleme (Gesammelte Schriften, Vol. 3). Tübingen: Mohr.


- **Austin Harrington** is Lecturer in Sociology at the University of Leeds, UK. During preparation of this article he held a Jean Monnet Fellowship at the European University Institute in Florence in 2002–3 and an Alexander von Humboldt Fellowship at the Humboldt University of Berlin in 2003–4. He recently published *Art and Social Theory: Sociological Arguments in Aesthetics* (Polity Press, 2004). He is editor of *Modern Social Theory: An Introduction* (Oxford University Press, 2004) and co-editor of the *Routledge Encyclopedia of Social Theory* (2005). *Address*: Department of Sociology and Social Policy, University of Leeds, Leeds LS2 9JT, UK. [email: a.harrington@leeds.ac.uk]
Beyond the Crisis of Old Europe? A Critique of Ulrich Beck’s *Kosmopolitisches Europa*

This third part of the paper is a section of draft text from the last chapter of my book in which I examine several contemporary statements about European identity in light of the work of the earlier twentieth-century European social thinkers. The main author under consideration is the contemporary German sociologist, Ulrich Beck.

*NB: unpolished draft text in need of stylistic and syntactic tidying-up!*

----------

In several recent contributions Ulrich Beck argues that ongoing processes of global interaction among European states over the last 30 years have led to a new “cosmopolitanism” in European self-understanding.¹ Beck speaks in particular of a new ‘methodological cosmopolitanism’ in European social studies that definitively transcends the old ‘methodological nationalism’ of classical European sociology. On the one side, he says, stand normative demands for remembrance and responsibility in relation to those other peoples and cultures that frame European civilization and at the same time inhabit this civilization as Europe’s occluded Other. On the other side stand de facto processes of ‘Europeanization’ as transnational flows of capital, labour, goods, regulations, information and ideas erode nation-state boundaries and bring about greater market “disembedding” as well as greater socio-cultural exchange, greater public political communication and greater legal codification. Beck asserts that whereas the classical thinkers tended to treat nation-states as basic units of analysis, the new aspect of fluidity and intersection across national cultures, regions and cities in Europe creates a demand for what a new “post-societal social theory of Europeanization”.

This new paradigm of social theory, Beck proclaims, following other scions of the new sociology of global “flows”, “networks” and “mobilities”, ceases to treat the nation-state as the basic analogical form for our concept of a ‘society’. Following John Urry (2001, 2004) and others, Beck speaks of a “move from a static sociology of structures to a sociology of movement” (23), mobilizing the metaphor of the “container-view” or “container-mentality” which must be replaced through a shift to the paradigm of “networks, flows, processes and mobilities”. Researchers betray an “astonishing naivety” he claims, in observing the dramatic political changes in Europe’s national boundaries since 1989 while continuing to treat “questions of pan-European societal dynamics” as matters of “internal inequalities and conflicts within and between
nation-states” (2). The new Europe, he says, displays distinctly “horizontal” features of transnational interdependency and variable boundary movements that go beyond the standardly researched domains of institutional architecture. As Europe switches from being predominantly a land of emigration to a land of immigration, a new combinatory culture arises that reveals “new variable kinds of relations between the inside and the outside” (). As national societies and economies become knitted together with one another in more and more dense patterns, “new shadow realities” come to abound that revolve around new “both-and” combinations and replace older redundant “either-or” dichotomies with respect to language, identity, education and group membership. This “de facto” cosmopolitanism, Beck argues, needs to be rigorously distinguished from the normative cosmopolitanism of eighteenth-century European philosophers. It differs strikingly from nineteenth-century cultural Bürgertum and is not confined to elites. It has occurred in a manner that “no cosmopolitan philosopher could have imagined or held possible: without a public sphere, without an intention, decision or political programme, in a thoroughly unformed way, though the back door of unintended consequences, undesired, unnoticed, more or less compelled” ()..

Beck proposes that the new cosmopolitanism consists in the way Europeans increasingly experience a need to stand outside themselves and look at themselves from afar, as members of a “province” rather than denizens of the “centre”. The cosmopolitan view, he says, “forces us to look at Europe from an outsider’s perspective, de-centred, and so in this way bring about a provincialization of Europe” (17). This provincialization, he adds, needs to be understood as “exogenous, not endogenous”, as being forced upon Europe from the outside, against the grain of its own categories. Insofar as Europeans have “no privileged access to the theorization of their own continent”, he argues, any “social theory of Europeanization must therefore open itself to global dialogue from the start”. We must look on Europeanization as “a specific case of regional globality” marked by “variable inner-outer relations” and a “contradictory border politics” (19). Europeanization must be understood “in the paradox of illimitable limited globality” (20), in an acknowledgement that “there is no royal road to modernization – no royal European road, nor American road – , only de-centred projects of multiple modernities that raise questions for each other” (20).

Beck maintains that empirically modernity has not turned out to be the integrated phenomenon that classical sociological theorists expected it to be. Everywhere, he says, the advance of industrialization brought about not unification and integration but re-segmentation, fracturing, global interdependences, unpredictable recursive effects of peripheries upon erstwhile centres, Rumsfeldian “unknown unknowns”. Linked to this, he says, has been an “uncoupling of
legitimacy from domination” in the sense of a shortfall in the claims of nation-states to monopoly over the legitimate use of violence. New forms of “trans-legal authority” [translegale Herrschaft] have emerged that are “neither legal nor illegal, neither legitimate nor illegitimate” yet are being “practised on an ever more global scale”. It is “precisely because of the way these developments elude our ideas of global order”, Beck argues, that “the concepts and theories that so-to-speak embody modernity’s claim to order are blind for these circulatory processes of real cosmopolitanization” (18).

Beck contends that older European theories of society rested on a monological conception of global order that expected the world to conform to its own conceptual dictates. The cardinal ideologues of primary modernity were such master thinkers as Descartes, Kant, Hegel, Smith, Hume, and Herder. All of these figures, he claims, “projected a vision of the unity of the world conceptually, long before they could possibly experience the world as such a whole”. Today, in contrast, “we experience the unity of the world in its fracturing and endangering long before we know how we should think it”. Today, he says, “we experience unity in its breakdown and as breakdown”. “Classical world-historical analyses assumed a knowable and even known world-unity, a conceptual Hegelianism, which sought to pre-dictate reality [vorweg lief]” (33). In contrast, the new methodological cosmopolitanism “sheds all transcendental certainties” and is “driven by a curiosity for boundary-crossing practices, unintended consequences, compulsions, interdependences and dangers. We have a wish to register, collect, catalogue, understand and explain those phenomena that everywhere rise up in the [shadows and] interstices of the historically falsified evolutionary modernization theories of Durkheim, Marx and Weber to Parsons and Luhmann” (17).

These propositions lead Beck to make a further claim about the contemporary redundancy of older European discourses of “crisis”. Transnationalization and hybridization, he declares, are to be seen today as so routine as to make talk of ‘crises of identity’ redundant, mere “chimeras”, he says, “generated by a … false ontology of separate mutually exclusive cultures”. Gone today, he says, is the “old European metaphysic whose basso continuo was the search for substance, constancy and an essential core” (9). It is time to bid adieu to any “much lamented ‘vacuum of meaning’, or fear of ‘decadence’, or anxieties about the retreat of a ‘metaphysical image of ‘man’ and ‘the’ European West”. “Only a non-anthropological, anti-ontological, radically open, procedurally determined, and therefore politically pragmatic image of peoples and cultures earns the label ‘European’” (48):

“What is experienced in Europe as a “crisis” of the European project is not a European crisis. “Crisis” and “Europe” are indeed almost tautological concepts – perhaps the real crisis of Europe is the crisis of the concept of “crisis”. What appears from the nation
and state-centred horizon as a ‘problem’ and ‘collapse’ can be read from a cosmopolitan perspective as liberation from the imperialism of modernization. In this context, to speak of ‘crisis’ can come close to self-pitying cultivation of historical traumata.” (17).

“Everywhere the question arises, latently or openly, how unity and coherence becomes possible in a world of multiple modernities? What accordingly appears in Europe as a ‘European crisis” turns out to be as a world-historical switch of perspective.” (19)

Beck adds that in the context of remembrance of the Holocaust, the plea for a shedding of the old European “crisis consciousness” involves a new and more sober attitude to European history that is less obsessed with its own heroism. The act of remembering needs to put behind itself all comforting discourses of “tragedy”, as well as all flirtations with nihilism and postmodernism. The hubris of European history can be followed neither by grandiose pessimism nor by a gay cynicism. Beck declares that where Weber “identified Calvinist ‘innerworldly asceticism’ as an essential moment of the ‘capitalist spirit’ and saw in this ethos the power to intervene in the received world order and to transform it”, “similarly we can say that the ‘European spirit’ arises from an inner-historical asceticism, from a remembering gaze into the abysses of European civilization.” (9).

In much of this account, readers will recognize the familiar language of Beck’s earlier thesis of “reflexive modernization”. Beck indeed speaks explicitly of a new “trans- and multinational identity” in Europe that correlates with an age of “reflexive” “second modernity”, superseding an older “mono-national identity” in Europe’s experience of “primary modernity” (8). Perhaps it is not too uncharitable to say that Beck’s recent work proffers little more than a dressing up of the reflexive modernization thesis in a more modish vocabulary appropriate for EU enlargement after May 2004 and the ratification of the Constitution. In the following pages I shall raise a few points of contention with this thesis. I defend four basic fronts of opposition to Beck’s thesis under the following heads: (1) the notion of “methodological cosmopolitanism” as a “paradigm shift”; (2) the linkage of cosmopolitanism to “second modernity”; (3) the linkage of Eurocentrism to “primary modernity”; and (4) the assertion of the redundancy of ideas of “crisis”

**Methodological cosmopolitanism as a “paradigm shift”?**

A first dubious element of Beck’s thesis turns on precisely what he means by “methodological cosmopolitanism”. Certainly it is clear that there are limitations with the way of thinking described as “methodological nationalism”. Certainly it is clear that we cannot think of EU-building in the way that – for example – Reinhardt Bendix spoke of “nation-building”. However, what is less clear is (1) exactly how serious these limitations are, and (2) in what sense, if at all,
they entail some wholly new switch toward the mode of theorizing that Beck dubs “methodological cosmopolitanism”. The concept of “methodological cosmopolitanism” in Beck’s writing is very loosely and indeterminately defined, - so vaguely, in fact, that it is capable of being stretched to hold whatever Beck would like to fit into it. Furthermore, the fact that Beck frequently slides from comments on “methodological nationalism” to comments on “classical sociology” to comments on “old European” to comments on “societal social theory” does little to secure the consistency of his argument. When Beck counsels against the return of a rogue new “general European theory of society” that is in danger of “repeating the mistakes of methodological nationalism at the European level” (16), he does not tell us what such a theory might look like, apart from a passing reference to Luhmann – an ironic reference since Luhmann himself spoke of a transition beyond “old European thinking”, making similarly couched claims about the end of “master signifiers”, “master subjects”, “master observation points” and the like. What would replace old European societal social theory in Beck’s imaginary, it seems, would be something like his own brand of feuilletonistic theorizing where jejune catchwords and rhetorical oxymorons play proxy for concepts. Much of the argument relies on an over-extended appeal to the notion of a “paradigm switch”, full of Wittgensteinian pathos for illusions generated by language that require linguistic therapy.2

Arguably the most serious problem with Beck’s call for a “paradigm shift” is that it is effectively a form of petitio principii, a circular question-begging argument that obliges us to accept its conclusion before we can begin to argue with its premise. On one level Beck argues that historical special changes have brought about a transformation in European people’s categorial self-understanding. On another level he argues that only once we affirm this revision in our categorial self-understanding will we see the true nature of the changes that have taken place. In a somewhat Hegelian flourish, the argument itself is meant to have the character of reflexivity, attempting to account for its own conditions of possibility in terms of the phenomena to which it refers. In practice, however, the argument constantly threatens to lapse back into vicious circularity. Prior acceptance of the notion of “methodological cosmopolitanism” in Beck’s writing would appear to be a precondition of our very ability to observe the empirical changes that supposedly lend it support. It is in this way that Beck can alternate repeatedly from an empirical claim that national societies do not exist any longer to a conceptual claim that they do not exist period. A further problem with the thesis is that just as the argument vacillates between observation and theory, so it is also ambiguous between observation and normative prescription – often to the point of implying that what ought to be the case already is the case. As with much of
Beck’s work since *The Risk Society*, there is a constitutive ambivalence in his writing between reflexive modernization as historical narrative and reflexive modernization as a value or norm that Europeans should be practising as a matter of principle. At one moment, it appears in his writing as something that steadily increases in historical actuality, in the transition from “primary” to “secondary” modernity; at another moment it appears as something we should all be actively cultivating, as a matter of normative prescription. This vacillation is already a problem for Habermas’s conception of the advance of communicative rationality, and in Beck’s more empirical re-casting of Habermasian ideas it is particularly troubling.3

**Cosmopolitanism and “second modernity”?**

Throughout this book I have argued against any stark dichotomy between a period of Euroecentric colonial modernity on the one hand and a period of unequivocally post-Eurocentric “reflexive modernity” on the other hand. I have argued against Beck’s and other commentators’ assertions that transformations in European self-understanding are to be seen as essentially occurring “exogenously, rather than endogenously”. I have argued that for significant numbers of twentieth-century European intellectuals the process of de-centering occurred from within, through acts of self-transcendence and self-provincialization – and I have also argued that this response cannot be debunked simply as a defensively Europeanist reaction formation.4 In the present context I defend two main claims against Beck. First, with respect to so-called “second modernity”, I argue that there are more issues of continuity, solidity and structural constancy and more issues of value antagonism and metaphysical substance in contemporary European self-understanding than he would appear to imagine. Second, with regard to so-called “primary modernity”, I argue that there are, or were, more dimensions of “reflexivity” and internal critical self-transformation among early twentieth-century European intellectuals than he would appear to accept.5

Certainly on one level, Beck is right to draw a distinction between contemporary lived social experiences of cosmopolitanization that have a relatively broad-based popular dimension to them and the older “philosophical” cosmopolitanism of elite intellectuals. Diderot’s, Voltaire’s or Catherine the Great’s “republic of letters” was not sociologically cosmopolitan in any significant sense, if by ‘sociological’ we understand some magnitude of popular dissemination. But still it is misleading to conclude from a comparison with the restricted class basis of the older “elite” “philosophical” cosmopolitanism that the new kind is, by contrast, overwhelmingly “real” in the sense of effective in popular culture. If it is true to say the new cosmopolitanism is not
confined to elites and that it has a widespread effect in popular culture, it is going too far to say that it “effective even against the express will of the wealthy Western countries” and that “it disturbs and destroys the monopoly on which their riches are based” (22). This latter part of the claim tries to draw far too much intellectual capital from the well-known defects of the homogenization/McDonaldization view of globalization and speciously sets up the latter as a straw man.

Similarly, it is one thing to say that in a globalized “cosmopolitanized” world the centre “ceases to be a future and model for the periphery”. It is quite another to speak of an “inversion of the hierarchy of centre and periphery with its attendant global inequalities” (21). Somewhat like Hardt and Negri, though without their Marxist commitments, Beck indulges in a Dionysian metaphysic of counter-hegemonic undercurrents that grossly underestimates the robustness of the Western power axis. He also speaks wildly of “no fixed reality of structures, interactions and institutions administered through a territorial state”, misleadingly implying that “horizontal” processes of Europeanization are necessarily ones “from below”, necessarily grounded in democratic, popular or grass roots-based movements. In an equally dubious passage, he asserts that in “the Europe that is now in flux, the promise of expansion which the old state- and empire-based thinking declaimed [verschrien] as untrammeled imperialism offers to the excluded Europeans and as yet non-EU members a perspective of entry into the inside, moving from a position of threatened and economically underdeveloped land to protected land on the road to greater welfare and democracy” (26). What one must surely object to in this passage is not that East European countries might not stand to gain from EU membership, but rather Beck’s blithe dismissal of the relevance of any notion of domination in this context as being somehow conceptually “outmoded”.

If we define cosmopolitanism in some vague way as global cultural hybridity, one can surely agree with Beck that it “does not occur under the sign of a new global bourgeoisie and is not the expression simply of high-class tastes” (22). However, the question is whether the semantic sense of the term can be watered down in this way. “Real cosmopolitanization” in Beck’s writing often seems to function as little more than a comfortably evasive alternative to the dread word “universalism”. By all appearances Beck seems to want to refer to some kind of universal global cultural conversation, where the “cosmopolitan” would seem to mean little more than some kind of state of universal equivalence of cultural particularities. Entirely absent in this conflation of the “universal”, the “cosmopolitan” and the “global” is any engagement with the philosophical debates about the logical valencies and differences of these complex terms and with
earlier attempts at their resolution, from Hegel and the German idealist philosophers to Weber or Durkheim, as well as Habermas.7

Like many commentators, Beck asserts that “for a social theory of Europeanization, too, there can be no privileged European point of observation”, that we must “necessarily take up an experimental-dialogical perspective that foregrounds global variability, communication and interdependence”, and that in this sense Europeanization should be “conceptualized as a regional-historical case of boundary-management within an arena of global interdependence” (22). Here we must ask about precisely what Beck means by “a transnational cosmopolitan observer perspective”. The perspective in question is apparently to be both a “new” kind of perspective – a “transnational cosmopolitan” perspective – and yet not a perspective at all. It is to be a standpoint that is not standing anywhere, not down here, from where we are, but somewhere up there, in the ether. It reaches beyond the horizons of the European participants to whom it is addressed, yet it is not necessarily the perspective of any particular group of non-Europeans either: it is some kind of methodological utopianism. As I have argued at many places in this book, we delude ourselves if we believe we can somehow jump out of our skins to some pristine “view from nowhere” (cf Nagel 19). The work of figures such as Troeltsch, Husserl, Mannheim, Scheler, Gadamer or Charles Taylor gives us ample demonstration of the conceptual confusions generated by attempts somehow to come closer to the Other by extirpating the standpoint of the Self that is doing the observing. Unlike beck, all of these more classical thinkers draw out the complexities of what it means to be standortsgebunden and what it means exactly to attempt to move beyond one’s “standpoint” or “horizon”. Derailed by liberal moral ardour, Beck wants to have both situated dialogical participation and disembodied cosmopolitan transcendence at the same time.8

**Eurocentrism and “primary modernity”?**

In the account of Weimar intellectuals presented in Chapter 5 of this book, I sought to undermine the deterministic retrospective view that would regard the inter-war period of European modernity as being entirely bereft of cultural resources for attitudes of reflexive self-distanciation. The claim I defend against Beck in the present context is that these earlier instances of cultural reflexivity in European history should make us think twice about the novelty and historical accuracy of the Beck’s dichotomous periodization between “primary” and “secondary” modernity. Although the intellectuals in question did not always represent popular or widely held views of the time and thus in this (restricted, etiolated) sense were not always sociologically “representative”, they may well have articulated ideas that, far from being
“monological” or “Eurocentric”, were equally, if not more, sensitive to civilizational differences than the current discourses of figures such as Beck and Eisenstadt or postcolonial critics such as Chakrabarty.

Beck writes impressionistically of a “world-historical shift of perspective” that begins when “the image of a unified world … is irremediably broken” and a “reversal of tense poles” is effected from a past-oriented, past-celebrating attitude of primary modernity to a decisively future-oriented attitude of secondary modernity. Reading such words one would think that twentieth-century European culture had never experienced any such movements as the Cubists, the Futurists and the Dadaists, or that Einstein’s relativity thesis never found its way out of the academy or that back in 1863 Baudelaire had not already spoken of the modern as “the contingent, the fugitive, the transitory” in his famous essay on “The Painter of Modern Life”. Beck’s reference to the new Europe in terms of “a concept of process, an experiment in inclusive distinction” manifestly recalls Nietzsche’s rhetoric of a “great experimental process of the European in a state of becoming” that became the vogue for the Young European movement of the 1920s. As is well-known, Nietzsche’s maxim of thinking against oneself, of viewing oneself from afar, of strategic self-miniaturization was a guiding ethos for numerous European intellectuals and cultural movements of the period – from Musil to Gide and Hermann Broch, among many others. None of these authors would have found anything iconoclastic in Beck’s modish apothegm of “unity in its breakdown and unity as breakdown”. In numerous thinkers of this period and milieu we find entirely comparable geometrical-spatial metaphors of “de-centring” and “Copernican turns”, long before the post-Kuhnian vocabulary of “paradigms shifts” of which Beck is so fond.9

I have argued that these writers we find considerably developed accounts of the fragmented character of modern world understandings that do not at the same time reproduce Beck’s inflated talk of the desuetude of structure, integration, unity, and societal totality. It is for this reason that Beck perpetrates a caricature of classical sociological categories when he asserts that the classical concept of society is “limited, territorial, national, and implies homogeneity”, whereas the contemporary concepts of “civil society” and historical “remembrance” are both “limit-transcending, de-territorial and imply heterogeneity” (42). Although Durkheim did in some sense start with what Beck calls a “methodological-nationalist” understanding of the concept of society, we find a fairly clearly worked out logic of increasing cosmopolitan self-understanding in Durkheim’s account of integration between the European national economies in the closing pages of The Division of Labour in Society. When Beck points to the significance of Simmel’s reflections on members of a modern integrated world becoming strangers to each other
in the essay on “The Stranger” (17), this reference only raises the question of Simmel’s supposed exceptionality as a classical European theorist in the era of “primary modernity”. If Simmel could observe this at that time, was this just because he was a Jewish pariah intellectual or could it possibly indicate a more generalized sensibility of the period? We saw that Simmel in his discussion of nineteenth-century cultural icons from Tolstoy to Bismarck makes comparable remarks to Beck about European history being “released from national stereotypes and heroizations’ (11). We also saw that authors such as Troeltsch, Scheler and Simmel looked askance at liberal and socialist forms of internationalism without simultaneously relapsing into nationalism. While they doubted any kind of happy coexistence of nationhood and cosmopolitanism in the sense of abstract internationalism, and while they sought ardently to salvage the relative validity of nationhood as an agency of belonging, they by no means acquiesced in the nation as an acceptable framework of cultural self-understanding. They too spoke of European civil society as, in Beck’s phrase, “mediating between the national and the supranational” and “between national governments and transnational governance”; and they too commented on Europeanization as “a process that runs within the global and beyond the national” (32). They too identified flux and transience as salient features of the condition of modernity – but they did not go to such lengths as Beck to celebrate these elements or lose sight of structural societal constants.

Equally problematic are Beck’s statements about the early modern European philosophers. Certainly we can find elements of resistance to empirical content and dictatorial idealism in Descartes’ rationalism, in Kant’s transcendental idealism, in Hegel’s triumphalist historicism. But one cannot simply lump these all together in some vague category of “legislative” and “Eurocentric”. In much the same way as Zygmunt Bauman’s reductive dichotomy between Enlightenment “legislators” and postmodern “interpreters”, this claim hardly squares with Hume’s inductive empiricist scepticism or Herder’s historical empathy and cultural relativism who also feature in Beck’s roll-call. Eighteenth and nineteenth-century European thought was not unequivocally ‘legislative’ or dictatorially universalist, any more than it is the case that contemporary thinking is entirely invested in notions of “ambivalence”, “indeterminacy” and “contingency”. While the “legislative” character of eighteenth-century Enlightenment European thought certainly owes something to the legacy of Kant and the more militant ends of the French Enlightenment, but it makes a mockery of such thinkers and movements as Vico’s revolt against Cartesianism, Voltaire’s and Diderot’s attacks on European cultural preconceptions, W.v. Humboldt’s pleas for historical empathy and linguistic understanding, F.A. Schlegel’s revolt against Western poetics or Schopenhauer’s anti-rationalism. And while there is at least some
truth in the assertion that idealist thought determined the world as in some sense a correlate of the transcendental ego, nothing in this was not already observed by earlier writers in the milieu of historicist thought, from Dilthey and to Mannheim, Husserl and Heidegger and many others. We should recall Troeltsch’s trenchant comment in *Der Historismus und seine Probleme*: ‘xxxxxxxxxx’.

**Beyond the crisis of “old Europe”?**

Sociologists and historians will be familiar with the idea of an at once conceptual and etymological link between concepts of “crisis” and concepts of “critique” from Reinhardt Koselleck’s ground-breaking of 196XXX *Kritik und Krise*. As Koselleck demonstrated in that work, crisis is the condition in which critique and criteria find their concrete materialization in objective events. For Koselleck the event in question was the French Revolution and the mounting deterioration of the ancien régime under Louis XVI. One would think it would follow from this that if we suggest that the concept of crisis is to be overcome or sublated, we commit ourselves to an assertion of the irrelevance of critique, in the sense of the lack of an object of purchase for our criteria. For Beck, however, this would not appear to be the case.

The import of Beck’s claim about the “old European” “crisis consciousness” would seem to amount an assertion of the redundancy of an entire legacy of European philosophical thought. The claim would presumably extend to such figures of thought as Lukács’s “transcendental homelessness” or Hölderlin’s and Heidegger’s thematic of “homecoming”. Perhaps he also has in mind Sartre’s, Kojeve’s or Bloch’s humanist Marxism, or Löwith’s and Niebuhr’s theological problems of “meaning in history” and historical “redemption”. It would seem that on Beck’s view all these kinds of motifs are to be unmasked as irretrievably Europcentric and consequently to be “deconstructed” in the “new European cosmopolitanization”. Here one recognizes in Beck’s writing a certain appeal to strands of thinking in Derrida’s and Foucault’s revolt against philosophical humanism, Lyotard’s proclamation of the ‘end of grand narratives’, as well as a version of Habermas’s appeal for a paradigm switch toward “post-metaphysical thinking” and “de-transcendentalized reason”. In reality, however, the arguments of the philosophers Beck invokes in this regard are considerably more complex than his citation would suggest. To concentrate on just one of these here, we should recall that for Derrida notably, the upshot of Heidegger’s *Destruktion* of metaphysics was that Heidegger remained entangled in the universe of concept he believed himself to have overcome. The very notion of an ‘overcoming’ of Western metaphysics for Derrida was itself a notion drenched in metaphysical content, reaching
back to Hegelian Aufhebung. Derrida would never have asserted that such ideas are bunk just because they are “anthropological” or “theological” or European in provenance, and Derrida himself made no such claim to escape such conceptuality in his own work.10

One might submit that the danger of claims such as Beck’s is that they open the door to a rather easy-going pragmatism in which normative struggles and conflicts over values and ideals are dissolved into a watery notion of cosmopolitan flows and exchanges, interaction and reciprocity. It is one thing to point to a certain covert or overt pathos of “tragedy” that clouds much of earlier twentieth-century European crisis discourse; it is another matter to suggest that the concept of crisis is to be in some way aufgehoben – “sublated” or “transcended” in some sub-Hegelian sense. We saw in the previous chapter of this book, considerably more than this is at stake in such works as Husserl’s Crisis of the European Sciences and Paul Valéry’s Crise de l’esprit. The grandiose pessimism of works such as Spengler’s Decline of the West or Rudolf Pannwitz’s Die Krisis der europäischen Kultur cannot not be seen the defining instances this discourse. One must therefore ask whether this kind of language commits Beck to some kind of free-drifting pragmatist liberalism in the fashion of Richard Rorty and other scions of easy-going liberalism. Perhaps this language could all be a surreptitious way of reintroducing pragmatized neo-liberal thinking into the conceptual armoury of critical social theory by the back door – another trahison des clercs. Referring to European and north American experiences of off-shoring of jobs to cheaper Asian labour sources, Beck suggests that ridding ourselves of the old crisis mentality will help us notice just as many instances of “on-shoring” of opportunities. What appears off-shored for Europeans and North Americans, he says, ingenuously, may well appear “on-shored” for Indians and Indonesians. Surely if crises are things that have anything to do with scarcity of resources, inequalities, challenges to value orientations, power dynamics and relations of exploitation between centres and peripheries, they do not disappear here by some “switch of perception” or “paradigm shift”, as if at the waving of some magic Kuhnian wand. Although the semantic link is not intended, the discourse of moving beyond the crisis of “old Europe” brings Beck uncomfortably close to the language of Mr Donald Rumsfeld. For someone claiming to stand on the shoulders of the giants of Frankfurt, this gross dilution and deflation of the categories of critical theory must appear particularly striking.

I come now to a last key problem with Beck’s argument which concerns his linkage of the issue of crisis consciousness to debates about remembrance of the Holocaust. Here Beck is certainly right on one level in this regard not to follow the kind of pessimistic-fatalistic narrative promulgated by Karl Löwith that could account for developments in European cultural history only in terms of irreversible and inexorable descent into nihilism. And he is also right to discern
Beyond both nationalism and postmodernism, he says, “Europeanization means struggle [Ringen] for institutional answers to the barbarism of European modernity” and for an “institutionalization of Europe’s own path of self-criticism” (36). Yet there is an opposite danger here to which Beck’s argument may be susceptible in this attempt to link the “end of the pathos of crisis” to some idea of the “institutionalization of self-critique”. Apart from the obvious already mentioned logical tension between these two ideas, there is an additional danger that in the absence of a consciousness of crisis oriented to criteria of collective self-worth, such “institutional” or “institutionalized” reflexivity may deteriorate into routinized normalized practice of some kind. This danger seems particularly at hand in when beck writes that “transformed into institutionalized remembrance, the break with civilization becomes a tradition and has a tradition-building effect” (40). Here we should recognize the pitfalls of a way of practising social theory that wants to play proxy for moral philosophy and regards ethical-metaphysical problems as having social-scientific solutions. There is the possibility that such practices of remembrance may simply be reappropriated in an attitude of sociological functional equivalence for the maintenance of normality and for the return from a state of the pathological to a state of the normal. This problem is a familiar one in the history of social thought that is not specific to Beck but finds a revealing manifestation in his work. What G.E. Moore once described as the “naturalistic fallacy” – the attempt to derive an “ought” from an “is” – was a particular problem in nineteenth-century evolutionary thought from Comte to Spencer which tended to seek to deduce morally salient lessons form observations about changes and progressions in states of social affairs. As is well-known, it was a particular problem for Durkheim’s project of grounding sociology as a metaphysically unimpeachable objective science and at the same time as an enterprise capable of supplying resources for the moral reform of society. The moral import of sociology for Durkheim consisted in its capacity for steering of society from states of the pathological to states of the normal. This complex problem of the relation of social science to moral argument was also one to which both Parsons and Habermas devoted considerable attention in their various reconstructions of the Durkheimian framework; and it also appears in the work in the ‘third generation’ critical theory of Axel Honneth. No consideration of it, however, is given it in the work of Beck.

In the course of his discussion of remembrance and the Holocaust, Beck comments on a short text by Derrida, *Cosmopolitanism and Forgiveness*. Derrida’s text was largely given over to a critique of the Jewish fundamentalist view of the Holocaust defended by the philosopher Vladimir Jankelevich in the 1980s as essentially unforgivable. Derrida argued that
understanding the Holocaust meant understanding how to “forgive the unforgivable”. Beck sees Derrida’s deconstructive treatment of this paradox as lending further support to the urgency of reflexive Europeanization as a form of transitional healing through truth and reconciliation. However, what he all too easily passes over in this move is the ethical-metaphysical complexity of the problem of crime and forgiveness, all too keenly wanting to press Derrida’s deconstruction of Jankelevich into the services of a social-scientific programme. The paradox of forgiving the unforgivable is in no way covered adequately by the sociological slogan of ‘reflexive modernization’. One does not simply resolve this metaphysical paradox simply by calling it “reflexivity”. Beck’s language here is at best conceptually obfuscatory. At worst it implies the return of a form of teleological progressivism, where “institutionalized self-critique” becomes a masquerade for self-congratulation. Indeed this danger is not warded off by Beck’s flimsy talk of a “quantum leap” from the “paradigm of society” to this “paradigm of remembrance” (38).

As if aware of these weaknesses, Beck sometimes gives the impression of wanting to back out of some of his own claims. He attacks the salience of the nation-state as an organizing sociological category, but then at other places claims that his asseverations do not impugn the particularistic and provincial in national history. In one place he asserts baldly that “Europeanization has no normative basis”, even that “Europe needs no normative basis” (34), and further that “the venture of Europeanization can be undertaken neither in the service of a universal God, nor a universal humanity, nor a universal truth”; that “there is no universalist viewpoint, no universalist spirit, no old or new world spirit” (19). But then he affirms that the Nazi crimes presuppose universal value standards that themselves have their origin in Europe, emphasizing that what postmodernism fails to see is the need to “answer the horror of Europe’s history with more Europe” (36). “We combat the European horror with European values and concepts”, he says; “the cosmopolitan is a self-critical experimental Europe which is rooted in its history and at the same time breaks with its history and finds the power to break with its history from its history” (36). Europe both breaks with itself and does not break with itself, he seems to be saying. Similarly he says that the peculiarity of European historical experience lies in its inability to give itself a substantive identity. Yet this statement is in performative contradiction with the statement that European identity “does not exist in self-distinction from others, because … recognition of others belongs to the core of our identity” (29) - to describe something as belonging to the “core of our identity” is surely to describe it as substantial and essential to ourselves. On many occasions like these, Beck seems to want to have his cake and eat, smuggling back in what at first was supposed to be banished from the account ex hypothesi.
As I have emphasized at several places in this chapter, the politically correct rhetorical trope that holds that Europe’s identity consists in not having an identity only raises the question of why, in principle, the inability to give oneself a substantive identity should not be peculiarity for all societies, rather than just Europe. When Beck describes the new “cosmopolitan self-image” as one of a “horizontally open Europe which draws its self-consciousness from diversity and difference” (26), the question arises as to why such an ethos should be something to which Europeans alone are answerable. The platitudinous language of “diversity and difference” appears among all the writers discussed in this chapter, and in Beck’s text it recurs ad nauseam. We may note that when Adorno described his philosophy in terms of an interrogation of the “non-identity of concept and object”, he made precisely such a “universalizing” statement about intrinsically inconstant historical constants – yet today Adorno’s philosophy is frequently derided as stubbornly Eurocentric. As with many of the contemporary authors reviewed in this chapter, we must here ask ourselves as to how far European cultural experiences can be defined in this purely negativist fashion. Are all efforts at some form of substantive characterization to be placed under a sign of suspicion as always, inherently, “essentialist”? 

-----------
Notes - NB: unfinished and very unpolished!


2 The debate about the “end of society” as an abstract noun has attracted a growing literature to which I will not add here, other than to raise questions about whether the classical European sociologists did indeed think of society with the nation-state analogy in mind and whether we a priori bound do so today. The thesis of “mobilities and motilities, liquidity, flows, scapes and complexity” in the work of Urry, Bauman, Lash and to some extent in Latour [and others] gives a picture of advanced sociological impressionism, a feuilletonistic approach which to some extent calls to mind the work of Simmel but is in fact a travesty of Simmel’s own tightly argued analysis of *Wechselwirkung* in the context of the earlier fin de siècle.

Such claims would appear to be a pronounced tendency among the new modish discourse of globalisation among British sociologists which seems to want rescue the language of cultural studies in a masquerade of structural analytical sociology. Particular culpable in this regard are surely Bauman’s recent effusions on ‘liquid modernity’, as well as Urry and Lash’s writing on flows and mobilities, Castells, as well as Urry’s thin notion of the end of the concept of society, and to some extent the work of Robertson. The notion of the “end of society” has an impressive track history, also numbering Mrs Thatcher among its champions. See discussions of simmel below, plus my work on Simmel and musil, and quote chap 2 of MWQ, Musil on fin de siecle and pomo. Nearly a entry ago Musil was writing about an old ‘new obscurity’.

3 FN on Habermas

4 Contra S Hall; Rose Mourning book; McLennan.

5 On this first score there is already an extensive critical literature. Much more could be said here than is relevant to my current purpose. See eg ……..

6 His unlikely proximity to Hardt and Negri’s claims about ‘empire’ and its inversion by the ‘multitude’ becomes clear in his surely premature assertion that that “the new Europe … comes nearer in its ethnic and institutional complexity to the premodern image of [the medieval Holy Roman] empire than the nation-state image of Europe’s primary modernity” (37).

7 The impression Beck gives of cosmopolitanisms as being some kind of state of universal equivalence even calls to mind the Frankfurt School’s definition of reification. For Adorno the universal equivalent was the state that is brought about by the ability of money to render all qualitatively different sensuous experiences globally commutable, to reduce every unique particular to a common universal denominator: that of the rule of capital.

8 For an eloquent contemporary polemic, compare Eagleton 2003 – and “The Otherness Business” in LRB.

9 As in chapter 5, weber’s and Broch’s *Zerfall der Werte*, Musil’s “experimenteller Mensch”, Cf Bouveresse on Musil. Winock on Gide etc.

10 See derrida’s essay on Heidegger in *Margins of Philosophy*. The parallel claims in Habermas, Foucault and Lyotard also have greater complexity than is accorded them here, though they too are open to criticism. For a sample of accounts, cf Dews, Schnädelbach, Frank.

11 The spring of vattimo and Agamben spring to mind in this last connection.

12 Jankelevitch

13 “The concept of ‘history’, he even declares, ‘is like the concept of ‘society’: a container-concept that repeats the dichotomy of the national and the international. In Europe this endeavour fell apart with the end of the old polarity of the West-East conflict” (37).

Some of the verbiage, the new liberal moral piety, of the new discourse of “memory”, particularly in French context of Pierre Nora’s *Lieux de mémoire*, is brought out acidly by Perry Anderson in LRB. See also Habermas, *Die Normalität einer Berliner St Republik* [Anderson on Pierre Nora on liberalis as the ‘spirit of our time’ ‘with Hegeleian satisfactrion’]