

[Simon Glendinning](#)

## I—European philosophical history and faith in God a posteriori

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

**Original citation:** Glendinning, Simon (2017) *I—European philosophical history and faith in God a posteriori*. Aristotelian Society Supplementary Volume, 91 (1). pp. 63-82. ISSN 0309-7013  
DOI: [10.1093/arisup/akw018](https://doi.org/10.1093/arisup/akw018)

© 2017 [The Aristotelian Society](#)

This version available at: <http://eprints.lse.ac.uk/84334/>  
Available in LSE Research Online: September 2017

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

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

# European Philosophical History and Faith in God *A Posteriori*

Simon Glendinning

## Abstract

Studies of Europe and European identity today are dominated by the methods of the social sciences. Europe is understood as a geographical region of a global totality, and treated in political-economic terms; and European identity is largely investigated through social surveys. This paper explores the possibility of a philosophical contribution to understanding Europe, an understanding based on the idea that Europe is itself a distinctively philosophical phenomenon, and that its modern geopolitical condition has an irreducibly geophilosophical significance.

## I

What, if anything, can philosophy contribute to an understanding Europe today? In the wake of philosophy's recent history we might be inclined to attempt some kind of historical-conceptual analysis of the *idea* – the *eidos*, if we let philosophy's history spill back – of Europe. However, one would not have to reach too far back to find that this “*idea/eidos* of Europe” topic – or *tópos*, if we once more spill back – keeps spilling back onto the topic/*tópos* of the *idea/eidos* of philosophy; with what the Greeks called *philosophia* opening and commanding our *idea/eidos* of both the commencement and commandment, the source and principle – the *arché* – of the European *tópos* itself. As the young Jacques Derrida put it in his 1953/54 *diplôme* dissertation, summarising Husserl's investigation of ‘spiritual Europe’ in the 1930's, the thought here is not simply that ‘Europe is the cradle of philosophy’ but that ‘Europe is itself born from the idea of philosophy’ (Derrida 2003, p. 155).

Philosophy, even today, when it hopes to come to terms with Europe, finds a subject matter that is already caught up with philosophy. Or, at least, when philosophy turns to Europe today, it still tends always to find there a place (*tópos*) that only appears as such in and through the elaboration and development of a distinctive culture of ideas (*eidoi*) that the Greeks called *philosophia*. Europe, for philosophy, has always been a philosophical phenomenon; its particular cultural identity (what not so long ago we would have called its ‘spiritual’ identity), conceived as inseparable from the idea of a universal project that concerns the *zōon logon echon* that *we* are. Europe both belongs to the empirical history of that living thing and, from its Greek *arché* as that holds sway through Imperial Roman and Medieval Christian domains (and the fateful translation/transposition of its name from *zōon logon echon* to *animal rationale* that took place there), is the site of the opening of that history to the thought of a universal history of Man. At issue, as Emmanuel Levinas notes, is the movement of an empirical history that belongs – or has called itself to belong – to a history of the becoming actual of Man as Man, a movement, then, towards the proper end (*telos*) of Man. As the *topos* of a movement which would both attest to and as such raises the stakes in the very movement towards the *telos* it carries, Europe promises a condition of ‘peace, freedom and well-being’ for all humanity ‘on the basis of a light that a universal knowledge projected onto the world’ (Levinas 1999, p. 132). This, for philosophy, is the *eidos* of Europe. This is Europe's promise.

## II

What can we say today about this Europe, its history, its promise? It has, today, become a *problem*. Levinas specifies it as a problem *for itself*, a matter of conscience: ‘the conscience of Europe [today] is a bad conscience’ (Levinas 1999, p. 132):

That history of peace, freedom and well-being promised on the basis of a light that a universal knowledge projected onto the world – even unto the religious messages that sought justification for themselves in the truths of knowledge – that history is not recognizable in its millennia of fratricidal struggles, political or bloody, of imperialism, scorn and exploitation of the human being, down to our century of world wars, the genocides of the Holocaust and terrorism; unemployment and continual desperate poverty of the Third World; ruthless doctrines and cruelty of fascism and national socialism, right down to the supreme paradox of the defence of Man and his rights being perverted into Stalinism. Hence the challenge to the centrality of Europe and its culture. A worn-out Europe! (Levinas 1999, p. 132)

This paper picks up this problem, our problem today – philosophical through and through and yet not merely philosophical – with Europe’s promise. I was challenged by a friend to try to summarize the gist of the claims I want to make here in a tweet (@lonanglo), so here it is:

1. The classic discourse of world history is a discourse of Europe’s modernity
2. That discourse is falling apart

#Philosophy #Europe

Five characters to spare. Naturally, I had to leave quite a lot out. Perhaps especially one word in the first sentence: the word ‘philosophical’. At issue is the fate of the classic *philosophical* discourse of world history, of history as universal history. This paper is largely concerned with the first sentence of my tweet. In doing so, however, I hope to give a clearer sense of its philosophical-and-yet-more-than-merely-philosophical significance for a Europe today whose condition is captured by the second sentence.

## III

Approaching the Europe-problem outlined by Levinas, I want to begin with an experience of my own. It is, however, an experience that I am willing to risk suggesting is not my own alone. The experience does not relate to an episode or event in the world as I found it or that I have witnessed in the course of my life. Rather, it relates to something about the world in which our lives (European lives no doubt, but in a profoundly Europeanized world, not only European lives) are lived out these days. It’s about ‘nowadays’, the phase of time that we refer to when we speak of our time. The experience I want to attest to is what I want to call the perplexing opacity of our time. Its sense, if any, seems withheld. ‘Coming to terms with our time’ means for me a project of making sense, finding the words that will clarify the opacity of our time: to make sense of it as a time that does not make much sense.

I regard this as a *phase* in view of a time, say two hundred years ago, when Europeans would *not* have been so perplexed about the sense of their world or time. Just by growing up then most Europeans would have lived with a very distinctive way of understanding the world and the significance of their lives. There was, one might say, a default understanding, a cultural

default which few resisted or found incredible (unbelievable), and through which and in terms of which their own lives made sense to them. Speaking of our condition, in *our* time, that is to say ‘during relatively recent times’, as one in which we are ‘very perplexed’ in the face of the obscurity of even the question of the sense or meaning of our own lives, David Wiggins contrasts our time with that time two hundred years ago, and summarises what he sees as a remarkable ‘shift’ in perceptions on this matter, a difference between times that is, he thinks, ‘impossible to exaggerate’ (Wiggins 1987, p 89). Whereas we seem all at sea, they – those Europeans of the day before yesterday – seemed to have a very clear, specific and certain grasp on the question of the meaning of their lives. And their condition is one that we today might, for that reason, quite understandably *envy*:

It is impossible to reach out to the perplexity for which the question of meaning is felt to stand [today] without first recording the sense that, during relatively recent times, there has been some shift in the way the question of life’s meaning is seen, and in the kind of answer it is felt to require... Two hundred years ago...the specificity and the certainty of purpose [is enviable]...The foundation of what we envy was the now (I think) almost unattainable conviction that there exists a God whose purpose ordains certain specific duties for all men.

If we envy the certainty of the [old] answer, then most likely this is only one of several differences that we see between our own situation and the situation of those who lived before the point at which Darwin’s theory of evolution so confined the scope of the religious imagination... [S]uch differences...are formidable. [A]ccessibility to both the eighteenth and twentieth centuries of a core notion of God...cannot bridge [the gap between these times]. For recourse to [the idea of a common notion of God] exemplifies a tendency [on our part] towards an *a priori* conception of God, which, even if the eighteenth century had it, most of the men of that age would have hastened to amplify with a more hazardous or *a posteriori* conception. Faith in God conceived *a posteriori* was precisely the cost of the particularity and definiteness of the certainty that we envy... For us there is less specificity and much less focus. (Wiggins 1987, pp. 89-90)

I will come back to the continuation of this text shortly, where Wiggins will try to bring our own time – with its distinctive lack of ‘focus’ – into clearer focus. But I want first to draw attention to what Wiggins thought was available and accessible to Europeans of the eighteenth century that we in our time have lost, or, as he will later put it, *resist*: namely, ‘faith in God conceived *a posteriori*’.

When students today explore *a posteriori* conceptions of God they will likely be exploring traditional ‘arguments for the existence of God’; and the particular arguments they will examine under the *a posteriori* head will typically involve an appeal to certain features or facts about the world (for example, the complexity of physiological life) that might seem impossible to conceive without invoking a *divine designer*. The arguments are based on the idea that an adequate account of many natural things being what they *are* (for example, the human eye) has to make reference to what they are *for*. So a developing eye in a human embryo will only be developing as it should if it develops in a way that affords the developing human being the possibility of sight. The explanation of what it is thus draws in a developmental or teleological story concerning its purpose or end. But now consider there being any such thing as a human eye at all. How could such a complex structure required for sight come to be from sightlessness? At this point one might feel the need to admit a

teleology in nature quite generally: the coming into being of many natural things is not, as Immanuel Kant stressed ‘an aimless, random process’ but exhibits an unfolding development which, when it goes as it should, develops ‘*towards*’ and ‘in conformity with’ ‘their *end*’ (Kant 1991, p. 42). And just as a human maker of things (a watchmaker, for example) puts things together in a planned and not aimless way, and does so in virtue of having a quite specific end in view (a reliable time-keeping-and-telling device), so natural objectivities which fulfil a purpose would, as Kant goes on to affirm, ‘seem to indicate the design of a wise creator’ who has a benevolent ‘hand’ in their development (Kant 1991, p. 45).

Today, students looking at *a posteriori* conceptions of God are also very likely to have teleological claims of this kind called into question by an entirely natural science: we can claim today to have robustly *natural* explanations, in the wake of Darwin, of the evolution of organs, and indeed of life itself, that means we no longer need to invoke a *supernatural* divine designer at all.

I have attested to an experience of opacity, a perplexity and lack of focus about the question of life’s meaning for us in our time. But the text-book changeover just reviewed, from a time before and after Darwin, would seem to run in the opposite direction: it seems to have given us greater clarity, not less. Indeed, it would seem to provide for an understanding of the world and ourselves as natural creatures which is not only empirically well-established, but which fits perfectly our still ongoing sense of our own condition as ‘modern’: it is an understanding which frees us from traditional prejudices, frees us from a worldview founded on myth, superstition and (at least in this area) religion. Why on earth should it go along with the ‘perplexity’ Wiggins attests to?

We – we more recent moderns – are inclined to look at the *a posteriori* conception of God as a (not very serious) *rival explanation* for natural complexity and evolution. Indeed, this is one way (perhaps the standard way) of trying to comprehend what Wiggins regards as the difference-so-massive between us and them that he thinks ‘impossible to exaggerate’. They still had that (supernatural) type explanation; we now have this far superior (natural) one. Not much to envy there.

It would be no exaggeration to say that this is thinnest, weakest, shallowest, most explanatorily superficial assessment imaginable of the difference that I am trying to get into view here. It is akin to (indeed basically the same as) interpreting Nietzsche’s word ‘God is dead’ as an oddly phrased but basically atheistic affirmation that ‘God does not exist’. I do not want to deny the adequacy or legitimate authority of natural scientific explanations. Nor will I try to minimise the wider secular-cultural significance of the Darwinian upheaval in the sciences of nature. Marx would have been speaking for many when he said in a letter to a friend in 1861 that *The Origin of Species* (1859) dealt ‘the death-blow...for the first time to teleology in the natural sciences’ (cited in Cohen, 1985, p. 345). For sure it mostly did. But this was not just a scientific achievement, replacing a non-empirical and unverifiable theory with an empirically testable and refutable alternative. Darwinian science struck a blow to *the European self-understanding* that made his scientific achievement into something like a world-historical event: a decentring blow to ‘Man’ understood as the created thing made in God’s image. But what I want to emphasise here is that the *a posteriori* conception of God was not only a theological doctrine of nature and ourselves as natural creatures, in particular it was not merely a doctrine about ‘life’ in a *physiological* sense, a doctrine that Darwinian science provides such a fertile alternative to. On the contrary, it was *also* (and this is why Marx’s relation to the Darwinian blow will be so ambiguous) a doctrine about ‘life’, and

especially human life, in an *historical* sense. As the French poet and essayist Paul Valéry put it in a letter to a friend in 1906, ‘no history can pass [Darwin] over. Just think: if he is right, the whole of history is changed. I mean all thinking about history’ (Valéry 1962, p. 516).

The idea that *human life* has a natural history predates Darwin, but the conceptual horizon for understanding what we are talking about when what we are talking about ‘human life’ raises a more fundamental question of who we think we are. In the tradition and heritage that belongs to European humanity we call ourselves ‘Man’. And even if Man is, physiologically speaking, an animal among other animals, Man was also understood as distinguished from or as having radically distinguished itself from all merely (purely) animal existence. Man is the being that he is precisely by virtue of living something other than a merely animal existence, indeed as having *exited the state of nature*; creating civilisations, cultural ways and works of the most astonishing variety, irreducible to instinctual animal life. An apparently completely unique characteristic of this being is that it does not *only* develop or evolve physiologically, but even in a time when it hasn’t developed or evolved in a physiological sense *at all* or *barely at all* (in the epoch of ‘modern Man’ since Neolithic times, as we say) it has evidently (and today on an almost global scale) come a long way culturally. This is what we call ‘history’, human history, the history of the (human) world, the history of humanity from a pre-historical and merely natural condition to the civilisations of ancient times, up to our own times, and, no doubt, beyond.

This is where an *a posteriori* conception of God really entered into the lives of Europeans. And here, it seems to me, there is a powerful and fundamental connection to *philosophy*: for the significance to Europeans of the *a posteriori* conception of God emerges in the space of a self-understanding – a conception of ourselves as Man – that is rooted in Greek philosophy as it is drawn into Christian theology. It is not that, with the appropriation of Greek conceptual resources into a distinctively (Latin) Christian understanding of the world (and within an increasingly wide-spread Christian power domain), philosophy was no longer ‘Greek’ in its nature. It is not that Christianity made philosophy religious or confessional. On the contrary, it meant that the Christian world remained within the sway of the Greek *arché*. In other words, the major scissions of the history of Europe itself – Roman, Christian, Modern – all take place within a space opened up by Greek philosophy. The becoming European of a world and its world-wide-ization – *geopolitics* – belongs to what one might call this *geophilosophical* history.

When the ontology of Greek philosophy was appropriated by the theology of Christian creationism, when the ‘great epoch covered by the history of metaphysics’ that began in Greek antiquity made its way into ‘the narrower epoch of Christian creationism’ (Derrida, 1976, p. 13), when, that is to say, (leaning here on Levinas’s summary formula that ‘Europe is the Bible and the Greeks’ (Levinas 2001, p. 137)) a distinctively *European* world began to emerge as the place of a Graeco-Christian tradition of more than one tradition, when the passage of history of what the Greeks called the *zōon logon echon* becomes inseparable from a history of the *ens creatum* made in God’s image – the history of the *animal rationale* – the elements were in place for a decisive interpretation of the history of this creature that we, the Europeans, call “Man”: the history of *theomorphic rational animality*. On that interpretation, human history is not without God: on the contrary, it is the time of the unfolding of God’s plan for Man, a divine designer’s ‘work’ from an original departure from the state of nature to the attainment by all Mankind of Man’s proper end as a (naturally) nationally-rooted, rational-spiritual being. All human cultural (‘spiritual’) history, ‘the history of Mankind’, just as much as human organic physiology, belongs to God’s plan for Man. And *for the animal*

*that we, the Europeans, believe ourselves to be*, the *end* of Man is then grasped as the full actualisation of the reason in Man. History is the emancipation and de-alienation of rational subjectivity in time. Marrying the ‘end’ and ‘end time’ conceptions of Greek *teleology* and Christian *eschatology*, human history is thus conceived in the self-understanding of an emerging European humanity as fundamentally *providential*; a ‘divine providence’ controls and guides it from its origin to its proper end, the proper end, that is, of theomorphic rational animality. The significance of the *a posteriori* conception of God belongs to an *a priori* anthropology and revealed history, the *archeo-teleo-eschatological* ‘universal history’ of Man.

#### IV

One way of articulating the specificity and the focus of the old modern European understanding of life’s meaning would be to say that they inhabited a world in which what Wiggins calls ‘submission to God’s purpose’ was at the centre of their lived-out-lives, central ‘to *what it was like to be alive then*’ in a non-physiological sense (Wiggins 1987, p. 90). Attempting to articulate a radical sense of our thrownness into the whereabouts of a historically specific time and place, Martin Heidegger speaks of every ‘Dasein’ as having ‘factually submitted to a definite “world” – its “world”’ (Heidegger 1962, p. 344). But perhaps this submission to an historical world as *its* world – the whereabouts that makes most sense and is thus the homeland of a life – is not entirely independent of, or at least has not always been entirely independent of, submission to God’s purpose. Nietzsche puts it as follows (Nietzsche 1972, p. 84):

Around the hero everything becomes a tragedy, around the demi-god a satyr-play; and around God everything becomes – what? Perhaps a ‘world’? –

This remark is a self-standing aphorism in Nietzsche’s text, belonging to a collection of short aphoristic remarks in a chapter of *Beyond Good and Evil* entitled ‘Maxims and Interludes’. The remark may be self-standing, but it only just stands up, and the long dash at the end, beyond the questioning ‘perhaps’ (which may be all we have left to work with in our time) stands even more defiantly as a moment of incompleteness, perhaps pressing us on to wonder what is ‘around’ when God... is dead; whether, for example, we are, as Heidegger put it, increasingly surrounded by ‘a world that is no world’ (Heidegger 1966, p. 48). A commentary on the relation between the Europe-problem of this essay and Nietzsche’s thesis cannot be undertaken here. My point for now is simply that another way of articulating the specificity and the focus of the old modern European understanding of life’s meaning would be to say: *they inhabited a world* – full-stop. Faith in God conceived *a posteriori*, having God and God’s plan for Man at the centre of their lives, this, I would suggest, was the crux of ‘what it was like to be alive then’. They inhabited a world, and its history was providential.

In summary, then, the invocation of an *a posteriori* conception of God belongs to an originally Greek *a priori* conception of Man as that conception makes its way into a world that is increasingly Christian. That world is the world that calls itself (to be) *European*.

#### V

As Kant will put it, where Man is ‘powerless to fulfil [his hopes] himself’ he ‘looks to providence’ to ‘create the circumstances’ in which they can be fulfilled (Kant 1991, p. 91). God rules in paradise but can, with just a movement of His guiding hand, or even just His

finger, move *the world as a whole*, and hence in a sense from outside it, at least outside the conditions and powers that belong to the hands under heaven that it will transform. And once you look at history as the history of Man, as the history of the animal that has broken from a purely natural condition, that history seems of necessity to *begin* with a step both in nature (in the world) and yet fundamentally beyond it. What force could possibly interrupt the instinctual life of animal-Man in the state of nature? Doesn't there have to be something of the hand or finger of God...even in the Fall?

Rousseau attempted to provide a universal historical genealogy of human development, and advances an anthropology of pre-historic humanity that itself passes through two basic stages: from an originally 'savage condition' passing into a 'barbarian' stage of 'natural indolence' where humanity will have lived in 'golden centuries', centuries in which Man simply lived according to his nature. But what, in such a fully natural life, could lead it out of itself into a new stage? Rousseau refers then to 'the touch of a finger', 'such a slight movement' which would nevertheless set off a world-changing teleological development 'deciding the vocation of Mankind' (cited in Derrida 1976, p. 256). As Derrida comments on this 'slight movement', it seems to produce 'a revolution out of nothing': it is essentially 'exterior' to the world whose axis it shifts (Derrida 1976, p. 257). Although Rousseau does not name the one 'who willed man to be social', Derrida concludes that while 'it is *perhaps not God*', since it is an originary evil and opening onto alienation, nevertheless, '*it is probably God*', since 'a movement of the finger is enough for God to move the world' (Derrida 1976, p. 257); a conclusion more emphatically affirmed in another text by Rousseau where it is explicitly affirmed that God could 'tip the axis of the world with a finger' – which would be the same thing as for God to say to Man 'cover the world and be sociable' (cited in Derrida 1976, p. 257). 'It *certainly concerns God*, for the genealogy of evil is also a theodicy. The catastrophic origin of societies and languages at the same time permitted the actualization of the potential faculties that slept inside man. Only a [chance] cause could actualize natural powers which did not carry within themselves a sufficient motivation for awakening to their own end' (Derrida 1976, p. 257). Rousseau's story of the development of humanity from prehistory thus 'naturalizes the Biblical incident: he makes a natural accident of the Fall' (Derrida 1976, p. 260). And while Rousseau will see society as it develops in the history of Europe as a movement away from natural goodness, and construes European ethnocentrism as a sort of sickness and alienation of primitive Man, he *also* presents 'the history and progress of tongues' as a natural progress of *reason* (Derrida 1976, p. 271), a history of increasing alienation which is thus at once a progressive de-alienation of rational Man, so that the finger of God that had 'interrupted the state of nature' opens a movement of a return of Man to himself, a return to the origin in a higher form. This very classical European self-understanding of the history of Man as a passage from a primitive origin towards the final emancipation of reason is set into a real history, and yet 'a teleological and eschatological anticipation superintends Rousseau's entire discourse' (Derrida 1976, p. 295).

Kant too in his 'Conjectures on the Beginning of Human History' relates the Genesis narrative of the Fall in naturalistic terms. However, he does so while admitting that it is a story 'which human reason cannot deduce from prior natural causes' (Kant 1991, p. 222). Like Rousseau, Kant does not start with people 'in their wholly primitive natural state' (Kant 1991, p. 222), but in a second stage of development in which they have attained a condition of radical harmony with instinctual life, a life that was 'happy' (Kant 1991, p. 233). The incentive to abandon this happy condition could not belong to this condition; there is no incentive to follow a desire where there was no *natural* impulse to do so, no incentive not to be 'guided by instinct, that *voice of God* that all animals obey' (Kant 1991, p. 223). And yet,



some chance event, some event which in itself ‘may have been’ Kant supposes ‘quite trivial’ has the most world-transforming consequences: ‘it may have been only a fruit’ that tempts ‘reason’ to ‘quibble with the voice of nature’ (Kant 1991, p. 224). Once again the fateful event was *probably not God*, for in this ‘quibble’ Man takes the first steps away from nature, away that is to say from natural obedience to God, along a path that concludes with ‘man’s *release* from the womb of nature’ (Kant 1991, p. 226): an expulsion from the ‘harmless and secure condition’ of innocent obedience to God, in a movement that nevertheless takes Man on his first steps in a history of the development of his rational capacities; from merely inherent potentials towards their actualisation in a form of cosmo-national sociality ‘within which all the original capacities of the human race may develop’ (Kant 1991, p. 51) – a development which is nevertheless *also* ‘intended by nature’ (Kant 1991, p. 41), and hence *it probably is God*. Indeed, without this ‘quite trivial’ event ‘man would live an Arcadian, pastoral existence of perfect concord, self-sufficiency and mutual love’, and ‘all human talents would remain hidden forever in a dormant state’ (Kant 1991, 45).

Hence it *certainly concerns God* and ‘nature should thus be thanked’: the step out of ‘perfect concord’ into a life that ‘causes so many evils’ is not ‘the hand of a malicious spirit’ but ‘the design of a wise creator’; encouraging Man ‘towards new exertions’ that develop his rational powers (Kant 1991, p. 45). Once again, therefore, philosophy has ‘its *chiliastic* expectations’ (Kant 1991, p. 50), a horizon of ‘teleological and eschatological anticipation’ of a second Golden Age in which the alienation of Man in the Fall is overcome in a movement of the progress of reason – a movement that is unfolding in its most *advanced* condition in the history ‘of *our* continent’ (Kant 1991, p. 52, italics mine).

Hegel too, in §24 of *The Encyclopaedia Logic*, interprets ‘the Mosaic myth of the Fall of Man’ as the beginning of world history (Hegel 1991, p. 61). Starting with human life ‘in its instinctive and natural stage’ (which may or may not be a first stage properly speaking), Hegel insists that the movement into a ‘spiritual life’ – a life, that is to say, which ‘essentially involves the tendency to reasoning and meditation’, does not ‘continue a mere stream of tendency’ in human-animal life but ‘sunders itself to self-realisation’ (Hegel 1991, p. 62). This ‘severed life’ is a condition in which Man falls away from ‘concord’ – but does so in order to ‘win its way to concord again’, a ‘final concord’ that it attains ‘in something higher’ (Hegel 1991, p. 62). The ‘occasion which led man to leave his natural unity’ is once again represented as a ‘solicitation from without’, although Hegel will insist that this exteriority also belongs internally to ‘the nature of man’: namely, in his ‘likeness to God’ (Hegel 1991, p. 62). Man then ‘participates’ in his ‘original vocation’; namely, ‘to be the image of God’ (Hegel 1991, p. 63). Nevertheless, the ‘hand’ that Saves Man is the same as the one that initiates his Fall: ‘the hand that inflicts the wound is also the hand which heals it’ (Hegel 1991, p. 61). In his interpretation Hegel takes a swipe, as he always does, at Kant’s attempt to set limits to knowledge ‘to make room for *faith*’ (Kant 2003, Bxxx), insisting that the Mosaic myth does not end with the expulsion, but with God saying that ‘Adam is become one of us’ (Hegel 1991, p. 62), opening a reading of the history of the world, which is essentially the self-realisation and passage to self-consciousness of ‘the Divine that is in him, which we designate as Reason’ (Hegel 1894, p. 36). The movement of this history is one which, for Hegel, ‘travels’, like the Sun, ‘from East to West’; ‘for Europe is absolutely the end of History, Asia the beginning’ (Hegel 1894, p. 109). As a movement in society it is, Hegel stresses, ‘still incomplete’ (Hegel 1894, p. 27), but it would result in a form of self-knowledge that is inseparably a reunion with God. Hegel’s philosophical history of the world thus wants to leave no room for conjecture, it does not ‘make a demand on your faith’ regarding ‘the guiding hand of God’ (Hegel 1894, p. 13-14) but aims ‘to furnish the

proof...that a Providence (that of God) presides over the events of the world' (Hegel 1894, p. 13); Man finally attaining not just faith but 'knowledge of God' (Hegel 1894, p. 15). It is *beyond question God*.

The history of Man is archeo-teleo-eschatological – that is to say, the meaning of Man understood as theomorphic rational animality implies a horizon of an *origin* and *end* of Man that is invariably a movement from the Fall from innocence to redemption in self-conscious self-realisation. The history of the world thus conforms to a covenant theology – the theology of God's promise – that the history after the Fall will finally be drawn together *for all humanity* under the provisions of the covenant of redemption. This is the history of all humanity – and yet as Derrida noted in a lecture he gave at UNESCO in Paris in 1993, it is quite as if God 'had assigned *Europe*' a special place in this history (Derrida 2002, p. 335). What would call itself (to be) European humanity belongs to a culture with 'this special mission' (Derrida 2002, p. 335) of being the Enlightened ones, the advance guard of humanity on the way to its proper end. Europe charged with the task of putting (as Heidegger put it) 'a specific imprint of the history of mankind upon the whole earth' (Heidegger 1956, p. 33). And hence, Derrida concluded, this discourse of world history 'has become the tradition of European modernity' (Derrida 2002, p. 336). God's promise to Man seems to be inseparable from the promise of *modern* Europe. And we reach our first proposition in the summary tweet, now completed:

1. The classic *philosophical* discourse of world history is a discourse of Europe's modernity

## VI

And then there was Marx. For the first time in the history of the world (if there is a history of the world) the history of the world was elaborated and projected without recourse to religion, indeed *against* religion ('the criticism of religion is the prerequisite of all criticism', says Marx (Marx 1970, p. 3)), against the mystical and metaphysical conceptions of all previous history of the world, and against the 'national' character of the universalism that its religious cosmopolitanism always retained. Geophilosophical cosmo-nationalism becomes, for the first time, geopolitical and international.

And yet, for all that, the archeo-teleo-eschatological horizon remained fundamentally intact in Marx. All State forms of politics are, Marx argued, forms of democracy: they are the creation of the people, the *demos*, and democracy thus appears as 'the essence of every political constitution' of 'socialised man' (Marx 1970, p. 31). The history of the world becomes the history of a movement away from 'primitive communism' or 'primitive democracy' into a conflict ridden history of 'man in society'. As Engels put it in his Preface to the 1888 edition of the *Communist Manifesto*, insisting that it was an idea 'that belongs to Marx', history begins with 'the dissolution of primitive tribal society, holding land in common ownership', and the subsequent history of man in society has been 'a history of class struggles' (Marx 1998, p. 48). This is a history of the State becoming increasingly not merely formally but actually democratic, and hence, as Marx puts it, 'according to existence and actuality is *returned* to its real ground' (Marx 1970, p. 31), thus producing 'a really rational State' (Marx 1970, p. 96), a movement which culminates in the dissolution of the State form altogether and the realisation of a communist society in which there is no separate institution of the State at all. As Lenin puts it, 'under Socialism much of "primitive" democracy will inevitably be revived, since, for the first time in the history of civilized society the *mass* of

the population will rise to taking an independent part, not only in voting and elections, but also in the everyday administration of the state. Under Socialism *all* will govern in turn and will soon become accustomed to *no one* governing' (Lenin 2009, p. 124). The departure and return to the origin in a higher form is the end, the 'rational result' (Marx 1970, p. 39), of democracy as the *form* of self-organised humanity coming (back) to itself.

Without doubt this history is *without God*. There is no trace in the scientific spirit of Marxism of a *religious sensibility*. And yet there is more than just a trace of the mystical and metaphysical conception of human history that had guided earlier writings on universal history, writings which were both philosophical (Greek) and religious (Christian). No less than in Rousseau, Kant or Hegel, human history, the progress of reason, for Marx, goes on (for the most part) behind the backs of its human actors. One cannot simply say that 'God's plan for Man' is replaced everywhere by 'Man's plan for Man'. Indeed, the rupture in the history of the world that Marx's text inaugurates would belong to an event that should bring to explicit consciousness and knowledge a truth about the movement of world history as a process of democratization which had hitherto been merely implicit and unconscious. And where previously, when human powers alone proved 'powerless to fulfil [his hopes] himself' he 'looks to providence', so now, now when 'the abolition of *religion* as the *illusory* happiness of the people is the demand for their *real* happiness' (Marx 1970, p. 3), the guiding hand that can assist in the creation of the circumstances in which that can be fulfilled lies with *philosophy*. The 'secret' of the existence of the proletariat, that it 'cannot emancipate itself without...thereby emancipating all other spheres of society' (Marx 1970, p. 10), is revealed to thought in the radical and irreligious critique 'of philosophy up to the present' (Marx 1970, p. 6). Speaking, as he typically did, of a coming revolution in *Germany* which would be a prelude (in 'the near future' (Marx 1970, p. 7)) to revolution everywhere in *Europe*, Marx affirmed that 'theory is capable of gripping the masses as soon as...it becomes radical' (Marx 1970, p. 7), and 'as philosophy finds its material weapon in the proletariat, so the proletariat finds its *spiritual* weapon in philosophy. And *once* the lightning of thought has squarely struck this ingenuous soil of the people, the emancipation of the Germans into men will be accomplished' (Marx 1970, p. 11, final italics mine).

'Once' the '*thought*' and the '*people*' are together. It is a profoundly messianic moment, a new 'covenant of redemption', where God's promise becomes the Radical (German) Communist promise, where 'Germany [can] attain...a revolution which will raise it not only to the *official level* of modern nations, but to the *height of humanity* which will be the near future of those nations' (Marx 1970, p. 7). Marx too has his chiliastic expectations.

And what actually took place, in the actual history of the world, when this projected unity became the project of actual politics, when – in Russia and not Germany – the attempt to attain it became *the* cause of politics? Derrida calls it 'the Marxist blow' [*le coup marxiste*], a blow that will have marked the whole course of the twentieth century:

The Marxist blow is as much the projected unity of a thought and of a labour movement, sometimes in a messianic or eschatological form, as it is the history of the totalitarian world (including Nazism and fascism, which are the inseparable adversaries of Stalinism). (Derrida 1994, p. 98)

There is something of a translation issue in this passage. I would put Derrida's idea like this. The blow is essentially two things at once: it is, *on the one hand*, the projected unity of systematic thought (Marxist scientific philosophy) and the spontaneous activity of industrial

labour ('labour movement' translates '*movement ouvrier*' which is a less organised sense of workers in struggle), a unity-to-come sometimes expressed in a messianic form, and sometimes in an eschatological form; and, *on the other hand*, it is the history of the totalitarian world, including in this Nazism and fascism as the inseparable adversaries of Stalinism. The 'Marxist blow' is *all of this*, and in a sense the two dimensions identified are being proposed as aspects of the same event. What happens when we attempt to realise the Marxist dream of creating an ideally just form of social life for 'Man' (and of course that dream was never only a Marxist dream – it is *the* dream of 'the end of Man' in the discourse of Europe's modernity), what happens when we attempt to realise, *though our own hands*, conditions of actual equality in a classless society, what happens is, paradoxically, disaster; the horror of the history of the totalitarian world. As Levinas puts it, 'the end of socialism in the horror of Stalinism, is the greatest spiritual crisis in modern Europe... The noble hope [of Marxism] consisted in healing everything, in installing, beyond the chance of individual charity, a regime without evil. And the regime of charity becomes Stalinism and [complicitous] Hitlerian horror' (Levinas 2001, pp. 80–81).

Marx was the last Man standing at the end of the line of this European philosophical history as universal history – a history whose own history is marked by the passage of the decentring blows of Copernicus, Darwin and Marx. Wiggins' text on our 'perplexity' speaks from as well as to the trauma of those blows. He was writing in 1976, in the middle of the Cold War, and that context leaves its mark on his text too. Continuing the analysis of 'this difference between them and us' cited earlier, he turns from considering 'what it was like to be alive then', to attempting to speak for and from our time, and to say something about 'what it is like to be alive' today:

Unless we are Marxists, we are more resistant in the second half of the twentieth century than the eighteenth- or nineteenth-centuries knew how to be against attempts to locate the meaning of human life or human history in mystical or metaphysical conceptions – in the emancipation of mankind or progress, or the onward advance of Absolute Spirit. It is not that we have lost interest in emancipation or progress themselves. But, whether temporarily or permanently, we have more or less abandoned the idea that the importance of emancipation or progress (or a correct conception of spiritual advance) is that these are marks by which our minute speck in the universe can distinguish itself as the spiritual focus of the cosmos. Perhaps [save the word! SG] that is what makes the question of the meaning we can find in life so difficult and so desolate for us. (Wiggins 1987, p. 91)

We might 'envy' the certainty of their religious conviction, but Wiggins sees no possibility whatsoever for going back, having now freed ourselves – not least since Marx we might add – from that condition. We cannot, he suggests, 'hope [for] some relatively painless accommodation...between the freedom and the certainty' (Wiggins 1987, p. 89).

## VII

But where does this lead or leave us? Writing in the late 1930's, and on the eve of the second terrible European World War of the twentieth century, Edmund Husserl wrote of 'the radical life-crisis of European humanity' (Husserl 1970, p. 2), and the 'distress' caused above all by our 'now unbearable lack of clarity' about 'our own existence' (Husserl 1970, p. 297). Husserl was clear that this situation was due in large part to what he calls the fall in 'faith in the meaning of history' (Husserl 1970, p. 13); a collapse of the sense that *the facts of the*

*world*, and especially the facts of (our) history ‘have [something] more to teach us than that all the shapes of the...world...form and dissolve themselves like fleeting waves, that it always was and ever will be so’ (Husserl 1970, p. 7). Husserl wanted to make one last try to save the old modern discourse of a world we no longer quite inhabit, or inhabit without inhabiting. As Derrida put it, ‘one more try to save the discourse of a “world” that we no longer speak, or that we still speak, sometimes all the more garrulously, as in an emigrant colony’ (Derrida 2002, p. 70). Husserl never finished his Europe-crisis book. It was not that the War intervened; he simply never finished it. Wanting to find a new way to articulate a discourse of reason ‘coming to terms with itself’ (Husserl 1970, p. 298), a new path towards a self-responsible rational humanity, and ‘speaking according to his best lights’ (Husserl 1970, p. 18), the lights gave out.

And then the War and the Shoah, and the lights went out across Europe once again. For some time after that, *any* sense that the facts of the world made sense, a sense which was, as we have seen, founded on an *a posteriori* conception of God but which survived in the programme of Marx, that sense seemed (‘unless we are Marxists’) absolutely exhausted. At around the same time as Husserl was writing about the ‘Europe-crisis’, Paul Valéry was doing the same, and affirming too that we now no longer know where we are going at all; we have lost our heading. ‘*We are backing into the future*’, says Valéry, and ‘*headed I know not where*’ (Valéry 1962, p. 113). The discourse of Europe’s modernity had become *a discourse of modern Europe’s crisis*:

Will Europe become *what it is in reality* – that is, a little promontory on the continent of Asia?

Or will it remain *what it seems* – that is, the elect portion of the terrestrial globe, the pearl of the sphere, the brain of a vast body? (Valéry 1962, p. 31)

Europe’s greatness had always been a kind of ‘appearance’, not a natural or God-given reality. But Europe had *made itself by calling itself to appear* as an ‘advanced point of *exemplarity*’ for global humanity (Derrida 1992, p. 24). This appearance was dissolving, and in the wake of the Second World War more than ever a philosophical story rather than a philosophical history; Europe’s old modern spirit dispirited, shattered, and as Levinas says, ‘worn-out’. And we find ourselves today in this exhausted and worn-out Europe, and find ourselves in a perplexed condition, with a sense, only, of the opacity of our time.

Simon Glendinning  
Professor of European Philosophy  
European Institute  
London School of Economics and Political Science  
Houghton Street  
London WC2A 2AE  
s.glendinning@lse.ac.uk

## References

Cohen, I Bernard 1985: *Revolution in Science*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

- Derrida, Jacques 1976: *Of Grammatology*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.
- 1992: *The Other Heading*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- 1994: *Specters of Marx*. London: Routledge.
- 2002: *Negotiations*, ed. Elizabeth Rottenburg. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- 2003: *The Problem of Genesis in Husserl's Philosophy*. Chicago: Chicago University Press.
- Heidegger, Martin 1956: *What is Philosophy?* London: Vision Press.
- 1962: *Being and Time*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell.
- 1966: *Discourse on Thinking*. New York: Harper and Row.
- Hegel, G.W.F 1894: *The Philosophy of History*. London: George Bell and Sons.
- 1991: *The Encyclopaedia Logic*. Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company.
- Husserl, Edmund 1970: *The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology*. Evanston: Northwestern University Press.
- Kant, Immanuel 1991: *Political Writings*, ed. Hans Reiss. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- 2003: *Critique of Pure Reason*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Lenin, Vladimir 2009: *State and Revolution*. Washington: Gateway.
- Levinas, Emmanuel 1999: *Alterity and Transcendence*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- 2001: *Is it Righteous to Be?*, ed. Jill Robbins. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Marx, Karl 1970: *Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- 1998: *The Communist Manifesto*, co-written with Friedrich Engels. Oxford: Oxford World's Classics
- Nietzsche, Friedrich 1972: *Beyond Good and Evil*. Harmondsworth: Penguin Classics.
- Valéry, Paul 1962: *History and Politics*, ed. Jackson Matthews. New York: Pantheon Books.
- Wiggins, David 1987: "Truth, Invention, and the Meaning of Life". In *Needs, Values, Truth: Essays in the Philosophy of Value*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.