

EPILOGUE: THE PRESENT IN HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

*T*o some extent we all think historically, for the history of the world in the last two hundred years has made awareness of change an essential part of our outlook. We assess the present by contrasting it with the past; our fears and hopes for the future are largely based on historical trends that seem to forecast conditions to come. Publicists announce “revolutions” in everything

from world politics and technology to manners and fashions. Politicians justify their decisions by confidently predicting what “history will say”; conservatives and radicals claim to know “the lessons of history.” Obviously, much about the way we think about the world depends on our understanding of the past.

THE PRESENT AND THE PAST

Historical understanding begins with a sense of historical perspective. When the Berlin Wall came down and Europe's communist regimes collapsed, everyone recognized in those dramas a major historical watershed. These great changes were all the more striking because they were unintended, not the aim of any policy but the effect rather of a surge of popular feeling among millions of Eastern Europeans wanting the freedom and prosperity enjoyed in Western Europe. Such sudden change, facilitated by modern mass communication and peacefully achieved, made it easy to believe, in both East and West, that a wholly new era had begun and that the world had entered an age of disarmament, liberal governments, and capitalist economies.

Looking for Lessons

Assumptions of such total change need to be tempered with historical perspective, which suggests four reasons for caution. The first is simply that great transformations are difficult, and the strains they create can have unexpected results. The Reformation, the expansion of Europe, the French Revolution, industrialization, and the revolutions of 1848 brought important changes, many of them very different from initial expectations.

Second, historical perspective tempers assumptions about sweeping change, for there is often surprising continuity in social life. Established patterns matter. Differences persist even today between those parts of Europe that belonged to the Roman Empire and those that did not, between those Christian missionaries converted in the Early Middle Ages and those converted later, between those peoples who experienced the Protestant Reformation and those who did not. If the nations of Central and Eastern Europe were to be ranked today according to the relative strengths and weaknesses of their economies and political systems, they would stand in relation to each other much as they did seventy years ago, following World War I and the collapse of the Habsburg Empire.

Many observers, of course, have noticed this; and facile analogies to the past have become as common as simplistic assumptions that everything is different. Such analogies are a third reason for caution. Commentators on current events in Eastern Europe point to parallels with Russia in the nineteenth century and the arguments then between Slavophiles and Westerners, to the surge of nationalism in the nineteenth century that led to the unification of Italy and Germany, and to ethnic and religious conflicts in Europe going back to the Middle Ages. Such examples can be invaluable

when used analytically to explore how contemporary issues evolved and how societies evoke the loyalties that enable them to function. The examples are inherently selective, however, and easily manipulated. Historical awareness, which should lessen surprise at the renewed vigor of nationalism in Eastern Europe, includes recognition of how readily political leaders and intellectuals reconstruct the past, how they recall past glories as if they should have lasted forever and past injuries as if they must still be avenged. Self-serving histories—and all societies create them—can achieve the power of founding myths that refer more to current feeling than to any past reality.

Finally, historical understanding recognizes that human history is always contingent on many elements; identifying trends does not predict outcomes. In this century the impact of individual decisions by intellectuals, demagogues, revolutionaries, popes, and political leaders has continued to be great and unpredictable. Gorbachev came to power as part of a process of adaptive reform that seemed likely to strengthen the Soviet Union. Almost no one imagined that his daring determination would have such effect that the Soviet Union would soon cease to exist. Good historical thinking leaves room for unforeseeable decisions, for unexpected results, for the interplay of multiple forces, trends, and interests, and for sheer accident.

Living with the Past Societies depend on the past, constructing it to establish memories of common and noble purpose, using tradition as a source of stability. There are always elements of the past, however, that fail to fit the dominant consensus, and there are always groups whose memories or interests demand a different interpretation. History is therefore controversial, and that is particularly true at present. The fall of communist governments opens new vistas into how they functioned, who served them, and what they achieved. The end of the Cold War exposes the shallowness of much anticommunist propaganda and the harm done in pursuit of suspected communists. The disintegration of imperial systems and the rise of new nations require new historical understanding to better connect past to present. Increased awareness of global connections—economic, cultural, and political—has stimulated an essentially new field of global history.

As a given outlook becomes prominent, it builds a supportive reading of the past. St. Augustine provided a Christian interpretation of the decline of Rome. Today's commitment to human rights leads to a deeper look into the history of slavery, industrial labor, and serfdom. Ethnic consciousness fosters a different version of the past and investigation into how a specific group came to be defined and treated differently.



The new Jewish museum in Berlin, designed by Daniel Libeskind and dedicated in 2001, has the shape of a broken Star of David.

AP/Wide World Photos

In addition to the historical narrative that is a source of pride, every society must deal with aspects of the past it would be comforting to forget. President George W. Bush at first called the campaign against terrorism a *crusade*, but the response revealed that the term, which in the European tradition evokes heroic cooperation for a glorious cause, is still recalled by Muslims as referring to religious war and centuries of Western aggression.

Nothing in recent European history burdens modern memory more heavily than the extermination of Jews. The need to respond has led to many memorials and museums, including the impressive Holocaust Museum in Washington, D.C., which evokes events that in a narrow sense were not part of American history. But uncertainty remains about how to treat such a painful past, expressed in conflicts over whether a Christian cross has any place at Auschwitz or what memorial might be appropriate in Vienna. After many false starts and disagreements, a Museum of Jewish History has opened in Berlin. A massive architectural statement, its great slabs surround three paths the visitor can take: one descends into a void representing the Holocaust, one leads to a disorienting Garden of Exile with pillars that are neither vertical nor horizontal, and one leads into displays on the history of Jews in Berlin. Every museum, like memory itself, is an interpretation of history, and history, ever comforting and ever painful, remains subject to controversy.

Seeing the Past through the Present Historical understanding is constantly renewed by new research based on new methods and, even more important, on new questions. A major source of those questions is contemporary experience. The social concerns of the twentieth century stimulated new schools of social and demographic history that have fundamentally altered our vision of the European past. Decolonization and increasing international trade fostered fresh analysis of the historical relations between economies at different levels of development, from the Middle Ages to the present. That research has revised the understanding of imperialism and of capitalism in both the present and the past.

From the 1950s through the 1980s, the harsh realities of the Cold War caused many commentators and politicians to look at history in terms of power politics, the rise and fall of superpowers, and the differences between East and West. The studies that followed illuminated aspects of history often overlooked and affected interpretations of the Cold War itself. With the end of the Cold War, we see more clearly the effects it had on domestic parties, social programs, and basic freedoms around the world, raising new questions about even the recent past and contemporary policy.

As societies today struggle with issues concerning the roles of women and the position of ethnic minorities, historians have found new ways to investigate the importance of gender and race in other eras. That

research, which dramatically altered views of the past, becomes in turn a potent element in current debates.

Periodization These changing views of the connection between present and past are especially clear in terms of periodization. In the 1950s and 1960s, it was common to say that the world had entered the Atomic Age, because the promise of atomic energy and the fear of atomic warfare seemed to shape an era. In the 1990s references to the Atomic Age had become rare because both that promise and that fear had faded. Similarly, the promise that World War I would make the world safe for democracy is now remembered primarily as a bitter irony; but should stable democracies in fact become the European norm, that achievement might well be seen as having been at work since 1918. Some observers see 1968–1970 as a turning point, when failed revolutions, a new kind of social criticism, and the oil crisis undermined confidence in established institutions, consumerism, and perpetual economic growth.

Many historians, diplomats, and politicians once identified the decline of Europe as one of history's major trends. In that light a new era could be said to have begun with World War I or a generation later when a continent tragically dominated by the Axis plunged into a war that destroyed Europe's international power and left it subject to Soviet and American domination. In 1940 France dropped from the ranks of the world's most powerful states; Germany did so five years later; and in the 1950s even victorious Great Britain could no longer sustain an international position comparable to that of the United States and the Soviet Union. The economic crises of the postwar period and the loss of colonial empires seemed to confirm a process of relative decline in Western Europe's strength. Thus, in the 1950s Arnold Toynbee's widely admired, multivolume *Study of History* echoed the earlier gloom of Oswald Spengler in proclaiming that a millennium of European preeminence in world history had come to an end.

Shifting dates just a few years, however, could produce a periodization that points to a new era in European history beginning in the 1950s and marked by rapid social change, unprecedented prosperity, and the trend toward European union. Neither periodization is wrong; each fits a different set of questions. The questions asked of historical evidence may evolve from prior research, from a body of theory, or from current concerns. The findings that result lead to new understanding and, in turn, new questions. To think about European history in terms of current issues can thus be fruitful both for historical research and for insight into the present. Many of the world's pressing problems, after all, have roots in the

history of Europe; and Europe's future will be molded through its response to worldwide trends.

Its very complexity makes historical analysis not merely good training but essential to assessing our own condition. The twentieth century was an era of ethnic slaughter, totalitarian brutality, and two world wars. It also witnessed unprecedented wealth, freedom, and well-being. How these contrasting aspects may be related is central to understanding the world in which we live.

Europe and the World

A Global Era Today, the extent of communication, technology, and trade seems to be creating a new kind of global society. That, too, has a relevant past. Recent research by archaeologists and historians has uncovered extensive connections of commerce and culture even in the ancient world and in the early Middle Ages. There is now impressive evidence that metals, olive oil, wine, and new technologies moved along routes that reached from Asia to Europe. Restless Europe created the basis for a global era through the crusades, the voyages of discovery, the conquest of the New World, the spread of Dutch and British trade in the seventeenth century, the building of empires in North America and India a century later, direct rule in the age of imperialism, and the extension of Western interests in the competition of the Cold War. This expansion involved knowledge of the world and its peoples, bloodshed, idealism, and greed. There is no reason to think that the process of building a global society will be simpler or have political and cultural effects that are any less mixed.

To many, globalization is synonymous with Americanization. America's economic power has been felt in Europe since World War I, became more prominent after World War II, and is experienced now through multinational corporations even more than governments. Some Europeans have seen the United States as foreshadowing their own future ever since its founding, and that feeling has been strengthened by Europe's own democratization, the widespread use of English, the prominence of America's commercial culture, and the power of American technology. Many in Europe see globalization as a cultural, economic, and environmental threat.

Despite its great wealth, Europe will not again dominate the world as it once did. At the most, it will be one of many poles of wealth and power. Having learned to exercise their diplomatic influence in the interstices of Cold War competition, European nations have become accustomed to limited influence in circumstances like those in which many states of the former Soviet Union now find themselves.



Advertisements for American and Japanese corporations dominate the patriotic symbols of Britain's past in London's Piccadilly Circus.

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Cultural Exchanges In part because Europeans have been more consistently interested in other societies—as objects of exploration, study, conversion, and exploitation—than people from any other region, European ideas, institutions, and techniques have spread around the world and are so much a part of local history that in many places they are no longer merely European. In the last fifty years European societies have become far more open to extra-European influences through commerce, mass communications, and formal study but also through the massive presence of Americans, Asian tourists, and immigrants from the Middle East, Africa, and the Caribbean.

These enriching cultural encounters have produced a long history of misunderstandings, abuse, and resentment that is part of world politics today. They have also led to concern everywhere that local ways will be overcome by the homogenizing impact of global contact. While it is true, for example, that urban life around the world has become more similar (from its conveniences to its problems of traffic and pollution), it is also true that Western influence, even when reinforced by brute force, the power of wealth, and new technologies, has not obliterated cultural differences. Within Europe itself local cultures have often found ways to preserve much of their identity while adapting to outside pressures; regional differences have survived the laws, armies, and roads of ancient Rome; the demands of national states; the intrusion of railroads, newspapers, and universal schooling; and the impact of telephones, television, and computers. European cities are crowded with restaurants that offer American fast

food in addition to Chinese, North African, Middle Eastern, Indian, and Vietnamese foods.

EUROPE IN THE GLOBAL ECONOMY

Economic growth, once primarily a Western preoccupation, is now a universal goal. The power of the Japanese economy and the extraordinary growth of other Asian economies may be as significant for Europe (and as great a competitive challenge) as the economic expansion of the United States has been. Many experts expect this pattern of growth to extend through much of the rest of Asia, including the giant economies of China and India, and to much of Latin America and the Middle East. Development on this scale would have enormous implications for Europe, implications extending beyond the fact of Europe's high productivity, its historic ties to the non-Western world, its investments there, or its role as a principal source of economic and technological assistance.

National Standing

As the pioneer of an expansive capitalism, Europe has long experience of the fact that comparative economic advantages rarely last. The decline of the great commercial centers of the Middle Ages was followed by the relative decline of Renaissance Italy, then Spain, and then the Netherlands as the centers of shipping, banking, and textile production moved north. Shifts in relative economic strength speeded

up with industrialization. England had the world's most productive economy and was the world's greatest trader for much of the nineteenth century, only to be overtaken by Germany and the United States.

Trade and Wages An immediate challenge arises from the tendency of international corporations to shift production from older centers to developing countries in which wages are lower. Even if neoliberal theories are correct in predicting benefits for all in the long term, the immediate social impact is serious. High and seemingly permanent unemployment is already a major problem across the Continent. The historic pattern that led to higher wages and increased consumption may have been broken, for labor unions were weakened by changes in the workforce and by international competition that favors low-wage areas. The policies traditionally favored by the left to raise workers' incomes become less relevant when governments declare their helplessness before the pressures of global trade. The balance of power among capital, labor, and the state seems to have shifted.

While the majority of Western Europeans have enjoyed increased freedom and a rising standard of living, a significant minority suffers unemployment, segregation, and discrimination. Thus, many Europeans worry about the creation of a permanent underclass and what some have called "the two-thirds society," societies in which two-thirds of the population continues to prosper, enjoying increased wealth and leisure, while a bottom third is left out forever. Even mild economic downturns in a world in which economic growth is expected to continue can have serious social and political consequences. The revolutions of 1848, the political crises at the end of the nineteenth century, the revolutions in Russia, the rise of fascism, and the fall of communism were all related to economic crises. Thus the concern that a downturn, especially when large segments of the population are already hard-pressed, would challenge the social principles and the political stability of modern Europe as seriously as industrialization and the Great Depression did in the past.

The Limits of Growth In fact, perpetual growth may be doomed by demographic and ecological constraints. Industrial expansion in nineteenth-century Europe benefited from growing populations, but now demographic factors are more likely to have a negative economic effect. In Europe, as people live longer and families are smaller, the population grows older; and an aging population requires more services and produces less. Currently, birthrates are so low in a number of European countries that their population is actually declining, while population growth continues to be strong in

Africa and Asia, with enormous implications for international relations as well as domestic economies.

The still graver issue is how much growth the environment can sustain. Italy suffered for centuries from the erosion of a mountainous terrain that had been stripped of trees in order to supply the shipbuilders of ancient Rome and of the medieval maritime republics. In the seventeenth century the Spanish economy was severely harmed by the effects of overgrazing. Since the Renaissance, cities have tried to regulate pollution, and in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries states tried to control practices likely to cause flooding or threaten the animals that nobles liked to hunt. Until the end of the eighteenth century, however, Europeans usually understood environmental disaster as an act of God, like epidemics and natural catastrophes such as earthquakes and volcanic eruptions.

Europe was fortunate in the nineteenth century that, as its supply of timber or grain or other critical resources seemed about to run short, unexploited sources of energy, new agricultural techniques, and the expansion of trade permitted a timely readjustment. The rest of the world may not be so lucky in the future, and predictions of environmental catastrophes no longer seem so exaggerated. Western European societies today spend a great deal of money to combat the pollution they create. The far graver effects of pollution in Eastern Europe, still being discovered, will be a burden at least through the next generation. Environmental issues challenge the status quo and suggest policies that run counter to the immediate interests of specific groups and sometimes of whole regions. They divide traditional political parties and push governments into new areas of activity, and they are often so international that responsibility is diffused and responses are necessarily complicated. The many important environmental movements in Europe have enjoyed only limited political success, despite their strong appeal, especially to young people; but they offer added reasons for a distrust of politics, formal institutions, and established interests.

THE FUNCTIONS OF THE STATE

The modern state is a European invention that has spread around the world. From the Carolingian and Norman monarchies of the Middle Ages and the city-states of Renaissance Italy to the present, the steady growth of the state has shaped European history. The national monarchies of Spain, France, and England made the state an instrument for creating military might, dispensing uniform justice, and supporting a national culture. With the French Revolution and

Napoleonic rule, the role of the state increased enormously, its intrusive efficiency expanding as it more fully engaged the entire citizenry. The demands of nationalism, democracy, and two world wars added still more to the state's power and the range of its activities. So did fascism, communism, and programs of social welfare. International organizations have also proliferated in this century, but in all of them, member states have tenaciously defended their individual sovereignty. Yet many thoughtful observers now suggest that the state may be losing some of its functions and much of its autonomy.

Economic Policies

Modern economic life has added to the responsibilities of the state, which is expected to provide a stable currency and banking system, an environment favorable to investments and trade, and the education, detailed statistical information, and means of communication that postindustrial societies require. These demands of course are not entirely new.

Directed Economies The city-states and monarchies of the Middle Ages sponsored guilds and free cities, where duties and taxes were reduced, in order to stimulate the economy. The fact that the states of the early modern period adhered to theories of mercantilism, restricting imports and encouraging exports through regulation, is a reminder of how ideological economic policy often is.

The last twenty years have seen an enormous growth in the power of international corporations eager to shift capital and plants for economic advantage, independent of national states. The governments themselves, especially those in the most developed economies, have tended to accept the argument that reducing trade barriers is beneficial to all. In the early phases of industrialization, governments abolished guilds as organizations that stifled competition and protected the privileged and inefficient; but those same ordinances also made labor organizations illegal, a situation rectified only after generations of conflict. Today the free movement of goods and capital tends also to create an international labor market, undermining the state's role as protector of employment and wages.

By the 1970s most informed observers outside the communist world suspected that Soviet-style planning was not working well. A very different kind of planning, looser, more general, and reliant on free markets was very much in favor, however. In France, a planning office with a large staff of experts and a consultative assembly representing business, labor, and governmental agencies created long-range programs and drafted legis-

lation for parliamentary action. Most other European countries had, and to a large extent still have, comparably comprehensive arrangements. Nearly all sought to manage their economies, indirectly through tax and fiscal policies and sometimes directly through nationalized industries and subsidies.

Now the trend is away from such intervention. Members of the European Union were prepared to surrender much of their fiscal sovereignty to a new central European bank at the same time that they were abandoning many older policies intended to give direction to the economy. West Germany's economy became Europe's largest while limiting the government's direct role in economic affairs. In England the Conservative party under Margaret Thatcher launched a systematic campaign to limit the government's economic role and to dismantle the welfare state. Governments in France and Italy are selling off state-owned industries; and the nations of Eastern Europe are, to varying degrees and often at great social pain, allowing prices, wages, production, and distribution to be largely determined by the free market.

Social Policies When socialist parties first gained power during the Great Depression, they found themselves applying the policies of economic liberalism, balancing budgets and reducing deficits. In 1996 and 1997, parties that were once socialist won elections in many European countries, including Britain, France, and Italy. Concerned to stimulate competition and contain social expenditures, they have followed budgetary policies not very different from those of their opponents.

The social activism of European governments was aimed at much more than the economy, for it sought to create a more just and egalitarian society. Large-scale programs for housing, welfare, health, and education implied some reallocation of wealth from the well-to-do to the less fortunate. In practice, the middle of society probably benefits as much as the poor, and the accompanying tax burden is in fact too great to fall on the rich alone.

Now, both the cost and many specific policies of the welfare state have come under attack; yet few Europeans seem to favor reducing social programs to the level of such programs in the United States. Unemployment is lower in the United States and in Britain than on the Continent, but the disparity between rich and poor is also much greater in America, and Britain has a higher proportion of the population at or below the poverty level than do continental nations. Thus, the tension between the goal of social equity and the desire to encourage investment and to meet international competition remains unresolved, the fault line of contemporary politics.

Diminishing the State

Arguably, these debates about what functions the state should perform are beginning to undermine the state's position as the dominant social organization.

Bureaucracy The state, and its bureaucratic mode of organization, became a pervasive model adopted throughout society. In principle organized for well-defined tasks, bureaucracy was expected to deal with specific problems rationally and objectively and was supposed to be managed by people selected for their talent and technical training. Each nation developed its distinctive bureaucratic style reflecting its own history—the independent role of the aristocracy in England, the service tradition of the Junkers in Prussia, the centralized expertise of royal and Napoleonic government in France (adopted in many other countries) and so forth.

The institutions with which governments deal—political parties, businesses, unions, education systems, hospitals—have tended to be organized in similar bureaucracies and in theory maintaining similar standards of fairness and expertise. In practice, of course, no government agency is removed from special interests and political prejudices. This bias makes bureaucracy itself a central issue in modern society. Bureaucratic organization can subvert official policies and inhibit social flexibility. Its procedures tend to be especially resented in democracies and its cost unpopularity tangible in the tax rate.

In the past decade many Europeans, finding fault with bureaucracy, have become increasingly critical of the state's prominence. The state has become an object of suspicion, not so much for being the captive agent of the ruling class (the classic Marxist reason) or as a threat to individual liberty (the traditional liberal fear) but simply as a concentration of power dedicated to its own interests. To some extent a similar criticism is applied to other large organizations—business corporations, political parties, and universities. A distrust of institutions is an important element in what are known collectively as the New Social Movements (NSMs). Like environmentalism and feminism, NSMs that have had the greatest effect operate beyond ordinary politics and look beyond the state, preferring to found new groups, influence public opinion, and affect individual lives.

Federalism Criticism of the state has strengthened the call for increased federalism. Regional movements appeal to traditional differences in customs and dialects and at the same time make very modern arguments about their distinctive and neglected economic needs and about the obtuseness of distant officials. Even in effective democracies, the political process of-

ten seems far removed from the people, a sort of private game of interests. The breakup of the Soviet Union was a criticism of centralized communist rule as well as an expression of local nationalisms. Though not so thoroughly federal as Germany, France has created regional governments, and Spain has granted increased regional autonomy. In 1997 an Italian assembly worked on creating a federal structure, and the Scots voted for devolution granting increased local rule and a parliament of their own (which they had rejected a few years before). In accepting the advantages of smallness, national governments shed some of their historic functions (especially in areas such as urban planning, cultural subsidies, social services, adult education, recreation, programs to attract investment, and tourism).

The Military While the economic and social roles of the modern state are being challenged, so is its most traditional function as the locus of military power. With war in Europe unlikely and the Cold War ended, European states have reduced their military budgets. British and French forces played an active if subordinate role in the Gulf War against Iraq and an even more subordinate one in Afghanistan. Perhaps in the future national pride in the military can be satisfactorily expressed through limited peacekeeping missions. The major European nations have joined in missions that helped to undermine the white government of South Africa, to bring about conversations between Catholics and Protestants in Northern Ireland, negotiations between Palestinians and Israelis, and pacification in the Balkans. But European democracies have clearly not been eager to take major risks to quell brutal fighting in Rwanda and Burundi, and they were embarrassingly slow to respond to the crises that followed the breakup of Yugoslavia. To correct that, members of the European Union proposed to create an international peacekeeping force of their own.

The European Union In this light the European Union takes on considerable historical interest. There are many reasons for the remarkable momentum behind its growth. The most recognized, of course, is its reasonable economic success. A reason often overlooked is its moral and social appeal as the embodiment of a new kind of polity, socially progressive and antinationalist. Ireland elected its second consecutive woman president in 1997, and of the five candidates, four were women. When asked why women had such prominence, the influence of the European Union on Irish culture was one of the first explanations the candidates gave. As the former communist states of Eastern Europe prepare to make their case for membership in the EU, they seek to establish that they meet the standard of modern democracy that the EU is thought



After the publication of Salman Rushdie's *Satanic Verses*, angry demonstrations erupted around the world in the spring of 1989. Here, a protester in Paris holds a sign that reads "Death to Rushdie."

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to represent, including free speech, civil rights, and equality for women and minorities.

In some respects the European Union is absorbing many of the traditional functions of the state. National governments have made sacrifices that many believed politically impossible in order to meet the criteria for joining the European single currency, the Euro. Adopting the Euro, however, means that each nation surrenders control over its own currency, a sovereign power that states have manipulated for millennia and a symbol of authority from the ancient world to the present. Great Britain, without a written constitution, now has in effect a written bill of rights, the result of decisions by the European court. A great deal of the legislation that issues from Brussels on everything from insurance to safety in the workplace and standards for food is adopted by national legislatures with minimum review.

Perhaps, then, the European Union will replace the national state in many realms. On the other hand, the fear that it might do so was one of the principal objections to the Maastricht treaties heard throughout the

member countries. Denunciations of EU bureaucracy and its voluminous rulings are even louder, especially when established practices are criticized from abroad, as when the farmers of Normandy are told they must make Camembert cheese with pasteurized milk or British companies are told that chocolate bars should not contain vegetable oils. Not having found a way to make its institutions democratic, the EU does not yet have the legitimacy of the democratic state.

QUESTIONS OF VALUES

Ironically, at the very time that certain values seem to be widely accepted as human rights that are applicable everywhere, there have been strong criticisms of the assumptions on which those ideals rest. They question whether one society or group has the right to impose its standards on another and deny that European values have timeless and universal meaning. Greater liberty, knowledge, and prosperity increase the burden of difficult choices that individuals must make.

Human Rights

The belief that its principles should be universal has been characteristic of Western thought. Greek philosophy searched for truths applicable to everyone, and Roman law was extended wherever Roman civilization could reach. Christianity has always emphasized the need to carry Christian teachings to all peoples, and in the last two centuries Europeans have variously but confidently proposed capitalism, liberalism, Marxism, and democracy as ideals to be universally embraced.

Specific Issues Within the European Union and among nations that aspire to join, there is effective unanimity on the importance of human rights ranging from freedom of speech and religion to the rights of labor and opposition to the death penalty (no state that employs the death penalty may belong to the EU). The Council of Europe and its Court of Justice have similarly set very explicit standards so that, for example, Croatia began in 1996 to remove restraints on a free press in order to be allowed to join the Council.

Many people in Europe (and many more in the United States) criticize Eurocentrism and emphasize cultural diversity as an important value in itself. Such concerns induce self-consciousness about advocating human rights around the world. The very conception of such rights may be "fundamentally a product of the liberal imagination, reflecting the complacent cultural imperialism of the modern Western world."¹

¹Stephen Shute and Susan Hurley (eds.), *On Human Rights: The Oxford Amnesty Lectures, 1993*, New York; Basic Books, 1993.

In 1989 Salman Rushdie, an Indian Muslim educated in England, published *Satanic Verses*, a novel that the Ayatollah Khomeini considered blasphemous in its references to Muhammad. To Khomeini the book was the latest of many assaults from Western culture on an Islamic way of life. Supported by the other leaders of Iran, he pronounced a death sentence on Rushdie and on all who, knowing the book's contents, participated in its publication. Rushdie was forced into hiding. Western intellectuals and political leaders expressed outrage and reaffirmed their commitment to freedom of expression. Crowds of militant Muslims demonstrated in the streets of England, India, Pakistan, the Middle East, and North Africa to protest against insults to Islam and the imposition of Western values. Rushdie lives in guarded seclusion.

The Problem of Choice These issues are not just differences between East and West, for there is conflict within Europe and America between those who give absolute priority to individual rights and those who place social values first, between those who insist on the right of individuals to make moral choices, even wrong ones, and those who insist that society and the state must embody and enforce some absolute truths. The movement to accord to women all the opportunities for education, careers, and independent activity permitted to men can thus be seen as a logical extension of individual rights. To some it will mean the dangerous destruction of a tradition that built the family around the distinctive domestic role of women. Such conflicts between social needs and personal aims were explored in Classical Greek drama, wrestled with by the Church fathers, and recast during the Renaissance and the Reformation. The great intellectual battles of the Enlightenment were often fought on just these issues, and they have remained divisive ever since.

Several factors, however, have made these disputes especially difficult today. Mobility, education, science, and market economies have broadened the range of personal choices. Matters such as diet and dress that were once simply determined by custom have become personal statements, and people are expected to make wise choices about their lifestyle and their occupation, about where they live and how they spend their leisure. Furthermore, decisions about even such intimate choices as marriage and divorce, contraception, and abortion are surrounded by public discussion and debate—in which religious leaders, moralists, and feminists disagree because these are issues of both personal identity and social ethics. In practice the wide availability of contraception has made possible vast changes in human relations and has allowed women a freedom that seemed impossible at the beginning of the century. Many people are also convinced, however, that these

changes have devalued human life and the sanctity of marriage. Knowledge of genetics will exacerbate ethical issues of choice.

The Family These concerns are among the reasons for widespread fear that the institution of the family is being undermined, despite the likelihood that belief in the importance of the family may be as high as it has ever been. There is little reassurance in the fact that alarm over threats to the family has been heard from thousands of pulpits for centuries; that serfdom, slavery, and poverty have also endangered the family; and that the Christian view of human nature and the Freudian view of the human psyche both acknowledge that the constraints of family life are difficult to accept. Despite all the pessimistic predictions, the family has survived. It has survived the effects of industrialization, which separated household members for nearly all their waking hours, moved millions of people to new places, and deprived the family of the traditional social support of relatives and village custom. Indeed, the expectations of the family have steadily increased since the eighteenth century. The Victorian conception of the Christian family raised the norms for loyalty and comity, and they have risen higher since then. Marriage in the twentieth century is expected to be a mutual choice and a delightful partnership in which child rearing lasts longer and is more intensive than ever before.

Warnings that society is losing its ethical compass are difficult to assess in historical terms. For some commentators, the spread of acquired immune deficiency syndrome (AIDS) became the basis for denunciations of sexual promiscuity, homosexuality, and the ease with which people and disease now move across continents. A quite different assessment of modern values follows from those observers who emphasize instead the extensive scientific research on AIDS in Europe and the United States and the widespread determination that the victims of this disease should not be treated the way lepers were for centuries.

Social Responsibility Many people now argue that feelings of alienation, which Marx attributed primarily to the faulty organization of production, have become more general, affecting not just craftsmanship but attitudes toward society and work in general, taste in entertainment, and the prevalence in modern Western societies of crime and drug addiction. Or perhaps this behavior is not so different from the alcoholism of Hogarth's London or the centuries of peasant revolts, highway robbery, cockfighting, prostitution, and public hangings in the past.

Critics often assert that the contemporary world has experienced a sharp decline in civic responsibility, and

they point to examples like weak neighborhood ties and gratuitous vandalism. This tension between individualism and social responsibility, familiar in the United States, is at the center of intense public concern in Europe and underlies the debate between neoliberal advocates of free markets and defenders of the welfare state. The issue is particularly acute in former communist societies. There, individualism is for many a new battle cry that is especially attractive to the young, but one that can be used to excuse racketeering and worse. A poll of teenagers in Russia in 1997 asked them to list the careers that most attracted them. Of the thirty-six choices, contract killer finished in the middle, cosmonaut dead last. Understandably, the press worried about a return of the nihilism that was strong in Russia exactly a century earlier.

A generalized sense of responsibility may be growing, nevertheless. Environmentalism asks individuals to sacrifice some personal convenience for a larger good; and from France to Finland half to two-thirds of all glass is recycled, which means that every day millions of people make an extra effort in behalf of a social benefit they never see. Similarly the spreading ordinances against smoking or boycotts against manufacturers who hire underpaid workers all give more weight to a social good than to individual pleasure.

No question has raised the issue of social responsibility more dramatically than the Holocaust, a source of continuing anguish. In 1997, more than fifty years after the event, a court trial in France hammered home the fact that many French people had cooperated with the Nazis in rounding up Jews to be sent to concentration camps, and official organizations of French police and attorneys apologized for having once acquiesced in anti-Semitism. Swiss banks confessed to still holding the funds that Jews had deposited on their way to death or exile. Fresh accounts appeared about the profits that Swiss interests had garnered from cooperation with Nazi Germany, and in Sweden newly published documents revealed that major firms had carefully assured their German contractors that they employed no Jews. The Roman Catholic Church apologized for the indifference of many Catholics to the plight of the Jews, and the pope appointed a commission to study anti-Judaic prejudice in the Church. Memories that whole societies had conspired to repress have become the occasion for wrestling with the nature of moral responsibility.

Communists, too, have found soul searching necessary, and many of them took the occasion to praise a book written by a group of French historians, most of them Marxists, attempting to assess how many human beings communism had killed around the world. On the eightieth anniversary of the Russian revolution, the European press was filled with comment on its estimates: 85 million people killed (half

of them in China), including 15 million killed in the Soviet Union between 1917 and 1953. The commentators could all remember, and many had marched in, earlier commemorations of the Russian revolution when across Europe thousands sang songs and carried banners expressing their hope in revolution. The modern citizen has reasons both for hope and for disillusionment.

THE NATURE OF COMMUNITY

Conflicts over social justice, moral values, and culture make for deep disagreements over what a social contract might contain or whether society rests at all on the kinds of principles that Locke and Rousseau described and on which liberalism was founded.

Cohesion and Conflict

Freedom, some people argue, has gone too far, and prosperity has proved to be morally dangerous. Yet highly organized societies leave individuals feeling powerless and manipulated despite the apparent array of choices before them. Significantly, social control, a central concern in the writings of the Frankfurt school and Michel Foucault, has become a favorite subject for social research, which finds it operating through advertising and education as well as through religion and custom, laws and institutions. The effect, these critics argue, is to keep the disadvantaged docile and to obscure issues of social justice. Suddenly, the question of what kind of social contract should be extended to foreign immigrants or to citizens who merely lack the skills most in demand has become one of the burning issues of modern Europe.

Religion Around the world, nationalism and vibrant religious movements demonstrate the power of community feeling, raising the question of whether Europeans will once again turn to such movements as they have in the past and whether postindustrial societies can satisfy the desire for social solidarity. Although fundamentalist religious movements remain weak in most of Europe, there is a significant Catholic fundamentalist movement in Italy; a Protestant one in Northern Ireland; Muslim ones in Britain, France, and Russia; and Orthodox ones in the former Soviet Union. Religious clashes have been endemic in Europe—part of medieval battles against heretics and Muslims, warfare between Protestants and Catholics, and modern conflicts between church and state.

Religion can mobilize opposition to current social trends, as in the frequent campaigns against immoral ways, whether of dress or drugs; opposition to the state,



Anselm Kiefer
***BURNING RODS*, 1984–1987**
 Kiefer's paintings often move beyond abstraction to evoke the history of the ancient Hebrews, Nazi Germany, and the contemporary world.

The Saint Louis Art Museum. Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Joseph Pulitzer, Jr., by exchange.

as in the Solidarity movement in Poland; and opposition to other social groups, as in the enduring conflict in Ireland. Under John Paul II, elected pope in 1978 (and the first non-Italian pope in 455 years), the Roman Catholic Church has become more resolutely conservative and outspoken on theological, institutional, and moral issues while remaining a vigorous critic of modern materialism and the injustices of capitalism. Conceivably, religious issues could heighten some of the conflicts in contemporary European society as they did in the 1920s and 1930s, even though church attendance in most European countries is the lowest it has ever been.

Identity Ethnic conflict, too, has rarely been absent in European history, and Yugoslavia in the 1990s provided frightening proof that it remains possible for political leaders to inflame ethnic hatreds for their own purposes. Such efforts are in fact under way in much of Eastern Europe, and parties opposed to foreigners have gained attention and votes in France, Germany, and Italy. Western societies, which have generated the most powerful ideas and most effective movements opposed to racism, have also spawned virulent racist movements. The memory of Nazi genocide must affect any assessment of Western civilization and any evaluation of modern history, and nationalist movements anywhere in Europe are bound to evoke that fear. Nazism did strengthen the sense of German national identity, and national sentiment remains strong throughout Europe. As the Falkland war, the union of East and West Germany, and bloodshed in the Balkans show, political leaders can play no stronger card than an appeal to national loyalty.

In the last half-century, Western Europeans have been drawn closer together and gotten to know each other better than ever before. The question is whether a fulfilling sense of community can come either from pride in a more integrated Europe or from regional loyalties that encourage a symbolic nationalism without a state. Polls indicate that 51 percent of the people living in EU countries feel that being European is part of their identity (men more than women, the young more than those older, and citizens of the founding six nations more than those in countries that have joined more recently).

Splintered Cultures

Sharing culture once implied proximity; now it occurs among people similar in class or age more readily than place. Eurovision allows national networks to participate in Europe-wide transmissions, and styles in music and dress have become more global than European. Formal or high culture has also become more international than in the nineteenth century, in part because exiles from Hitler's Europe and Stalin's Russia made cultural life more international and transatlantic.

Whose Culture? Nevertheless, at negotiations on the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade in 1994, the countries of the European Union supported France in insisting that their mass media must reserve some support for European productions. That argument was not about the content or function of popular culture but where it originated and who profited.

Research in the sciences and humanities conducted in Europe now often has a distinctively and perhaps in-

creasingly European rather than national flavor. Scholars from one part of Europe teach and work in another, and research teams include people from several European countries. In the arts individual performers, orchestras, and works of art move freely across Europe's national borders, and student exchanges within the European Union have become the norm. No previous civilization supported so much scholarship, so many centers of learning, or so many artists.

Contemporary observers are less confident, however, than those Enlightenment thinkers who more than two centuries ago compared ancient and modern culture and decided that the moderns had the advantage. At the beginning of the twenty-first century, the proportion of Europeans certain of modern progress is probably lower than a century earlier. Instead, revelation of mass murder under a Soviet regime that proclaimed humane values and sustained an admirable high culture serves as a reminder that the expanded capacities of modern society include the capacity for evil. The role of culture is much clearer as a basis for opposition than as an expression of commitment. It was in the euphoria of liberation that Czechoslovakia picked a playwright as president.

Popular and High Culture Part of this unease about the role of culture stems from the troubling separation nowadays between popular and formal culture. The great literary works of all ages continue to be taught in schools and universities and are still read with pleasure. More people than ever before hear classical music and visit museums and art galleries. Yet commercial entertainment, ubiquitous and international, conveys quite a different set of values; and the morally earnest culture of the nineteenth century, of which so much was expected, threatens to become merely academic, a matter for special study by experts. The very forms that defined that culture—long novels and epic poems, symphonies, operas, impressive museums—are, by current standards, discouragingly demanding of attention, time, and money. Ironically, this older bourgeois culture was lavishly supported under communism; but now state subsidies for elite culture, though far more common in Europe than in the United States, are questioned everywhere.

The music, art, and literature that the twentieth-century avant-garde proudly called modern and that it used to attack the established high culture from which it grew never achieved a broad popularity. Doubt about

human rationality and disdain for elites have made anti-intellectualism respectable, and there has been a remarkable revival of interest in the occult. Computers, after all, can also be used to plot astrological charts. For centuries, Europeans have taken culture to be the most significant expression of society, and we tend to identify historical eras by their characteristic cultural achievements. If that is done in the future, what will be said of this era?

The Consolation of History Because every era tends narcissistically to believe that its problems are unique, that very assumption deserves to be doubted. Europe today faces no threat comparable to the barbarian invasions of ancient Rome or the Black Death. If social change now is rapid, we have learned to expect and even anticipate it; the changes that followed the fifteenth century or those in the hundred years after 1780 may well have been more shocking and harder to absorb. We should not let nostalgia make it seem that earlier ages enjoyed a confidence and comforting unanimity denied to us. Rarely in Western history has a single philosophy or set of values enjoyed undisputed hegemony. The view that other eras were informed by a single spirit is largely the product of distance, which makes outlines clearer and fissures more obscure. The competing claims of throne and altar and the disputes about forms of transubstantiation were once as socially shattering as issues about public and private ownership, ethnic minorities, or abortion and euthanasia are today.

And there are encouraging lessons to be learned. Good causes can be served by ordinary people with all the normal human flaws. The resistance movements that fought fascism and are rightly honored throughout Western Europe were often formed around old conflicts and resentments. If the future is uncertain, as futures always are, that is partly because what human beings choose to do does make a difference. History takes a turn at the intersection of long-term trends and accident, where personalities interact within larger frameworks of ideas and social structures. European history demonstrates that the past is inescapable but also that memory is malleable, that radical transformations can be consonant with great continuity. That being so, the western tip of the Eurasian peninsula can be expected to generate in the future the conflicts, dangers, discoveries, institutions, customs, ideas, and dreams that have made the Western experience such a compelling experiment.