

# EUROPE — REALITY OR MISSION<sup>1</sup>

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To say anything worth while about the European concept is not easy after so much of significance has already been spoken and written. Allow me to start from my own experience. This is something that an old man may be permitted, provided he steers clear of pedantry.

My parents were Italian and were impassioned patriots. Business took my father to Germany, but there, too, he strove in the cause of his native country and the zeal with which he carried out his consular duties went far beyond what was required of him. When we came to Germany I was a small child. At home we spoke Italian, but at school German was spoken and was the language in which I learned to think. It was inevitable that German should predominate as the tongue in which I acquired learning and experience. It was also the language of the universities at which I studied later and in which my own creative activity began to develop.

This whole situation was a cause of serious conflict when the question of a calling was added to the mere thirst for knowledge, for I had to choose the country in which I should practise that calling; after all, one's 'profession' is mostly bound up with examinations, diplomas, in short with the life of a community and is therefore related to a specific country. From the intellectual point of view, I was bound to pursue this profession in Germany, since my education and view of life were German; indeed I did my thinking in German, for you have to think in a language. On the other hand, the link with Italy was still strong; for my parents it was 'home', and therefore the country, they felt, in which their son should live and work.

All this was more than fifty years ago and I do not know whether a young man of today would feel this dilemma as I did. Probably not, for much has happened since — in the great world around us, through wars, deportations and flight; but also in the world within us, in the way we think and feel. In those days at any rate the ties with one's home country, formed by all that was understood by patriotism and duty, were very strong; and hence it was that the growth in me of the European idea offered the possibility of an honourable solution to the conflict.

I was able to surrender Italian citizenship and to acquire German nationality and to become part of the German intellectual community without a breach of loyalty, since this step was taken within a framework which included both countries: its name was 'Europe'. I took this step towards Germany in the awareness of being a European.

I hope you will forgive my dwelling so long on personal matters, but I wanted to show how much the award of the Erasmus Prize inevitably means to me. It serves to confirm the rightness of a concept which began to exert its influence quite early in my life.

In the years between 1956 and 1960 there was published an interesting book by Margret Boveri. It was called 'Der Verrat im XX. Jahrhundert' (Treason in the XXth Century). I have no judgment to pass on its historical authenticity; but it is a highly intelligent book and speaks from a depth beyond the reach of mere learning. Al-

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<sup>1</sup> Acceptance Speech upon being awarded the Erasmus prize, Brussels, 21 April 1962.

well?

I should like to look for the answer in a problem which has long been causing me concern, and which will be familiar to many.

The question whether scientific research will continue to progress presents no problem; research has within itself so strong a drive that it will go forward under its own momentum. The same can be said of technology; it develops logically of itself. Science and technology give man power over nature and, to the extent that man, too, is living nature, over the human being himself. This power is growing at an increasing pace; with it we are advancing towards ever greater independence and wider horizons. And if we define the essence of man, as does the Bible (Genesis, Ch. 1 v.26), as his ability to have dominion over all the earth, then every increase in power means progress towards man's fuller realization of himself.

All this is obvious. But the problem that must seriously engage the attention of anyone who has grasped its implications is this; is there not something primitive in this formula? Does it not equate in too simple a fashion the quantitative growth of power with the existential growth of man? What is the ratio between the growth of power and man's humanity?

We do well to bear in mind a fundamental law of the philosophy of civilization; that nothing acts in one direction only -- there is no action without reaction. Power is the capacity for action; but every influence I exert produces a reaction which in turn exerts an influence on me. The very fact of possessing power, of being able to use it, has an influence on me; it urges me to use this power in the form of action. The urge may become compulsive, even demoniacal; the responsibility which this power lays on me as to whether and how I use it, and so on...

Can this power go on growing to infinity and with unlimited speed, and yet allow man to remain man, in the true sense of the word? This question brings to mind the damage which can be caused by the progress of civilisation; the injury to body and mind from the aberrations and excesses associated with the development of civilisation-phenomena which have been a source of anxious preoccupation ever since highly developed civilisations have existed.

More important is another subject for concern -- the fact that the steady advance of science and technology is removing man farther and farther from nature. 'Nature' is what is there 'of itself', what obeys its own laws, what renews itself again and again through its own fertility. 'Civilisation', by contrast, is what man makes, produces, keeps in being. The more man's power increases, the farther he moves from nature in the direction of civilisation -- this means, however, towards an existence which does not spring from itself and is not made secure by its own inherent laws, but is made by man himself, so that its character is arbitrary and insecure. The myth of Atlas comes to mind; condemned to bear the world upon his shoulders, he cannot stride forward freely beneath its weight; if he falters, the universe collapses.

Where is the limit beyond which the burden is too great for him who bears it?

And then again, the very possession of power, the use of power as such, is a spiritual act involving personal responsibility. Can man support and answer for unlimited power? Is it right to see in him a being who is gradually to catch up with God? Are the works which pious faith once assigned to 'God' to be increasingly taken over by man?

Is it true, as the postulates of atheism have it, that man is potentially all powerful, and that, inexorably, he fulfils his own purpose more and more fully as he gains and exercises more power? Will the ability to master the scale and effects of this increasing power grow in proportion to the power, will man be able to bring these effects into harmony and create a viable whole? Or is the growth of power leading him into increasing danger?

also invade man's inmost self. A term has been found for this, a term that sounds innocuous — as though we were ashamed of what is really meant; we call it 'brain-washing'. It is now possible, against a man's will, to change the way in which he sees himself and the world, the standards by which he measures good and evil, his very status as a person. This has been done and is continually being repeated; in the form of advertising and propaganda it already plays a part that is anything but harmless in a world of ostensible freedom.

This, too, is an example of human power — more subtle, less obvious in its effects, but even more terrifying than the atom bomb.

The phenomenon could be illuminated from many more angles. The ways in which man can assail his fellow-man are becoming increasingly exact, increasingly powerful, employing them to subject his thoughts, control his desires, determine his standards and by delving into man's subconscious, to direct his conscious acts.

All this has created possibilities of action never before dreamt of. By way of comparison, let it be remembered that until a relatively short time ago it was forbidden to use the human corpse for purposes of study. The aversion to encroaching upon man's ultimate inviolability was so strong that anatomical research was attended by considerable risks for its practitioners.

Power is a phenomenon that filled the ancients with awe. "Many are the awesome things of this world, but nothing can inspire greater awe than Man", chants the chorus in Sophocles' *Antigone*. He who has power can dominate. But what assurance is there that his domination will be for the good of either ruled or ruler?

The forces of nature, of whose immensity we are so acutely conscious in this hour of history, are part of a system that controls and at the same time safeguards their action — the laws of nature itself. In man, the power to act belongs to the realm of freedom. That is to say, it can be used rightly or wrongly. The manner of its use determines the course of history, of destiny; rise and fall, weal and woe. Where is the system within which the use of power fulfils its purpose?

I do not think I am being unduly severe when I say that the problem has not yet been understood in all its gravity, let alone attacked. But who is qualified to state the problem and contribute to its solution?

It does not seem to be America that is destined for this task. The history of that great country is still too short; it only began indeed with the dawn of modern science and technology. And the American mentality — if such generalizations are to be allowed — is far too closely wedded to a faith in the certainty of universal progress. Individuals or certain groups in America no doubt sense the problem, but they are likely to be regarded as exceptions to the rule.

Nor will it be Asia, I think. Asia's history extends back into primeval time, it is true; but it seems to be breaking with its past and throwing itself into tomorrow's tasks at an alarming speed.

To speak of Africa in this connection is premature. For the present its contacts with science and technology seem, from the point of view of true culture, to be creating confusion rather than advancing progress. It is my belief that this is a task for which Europe is especially befitted.

Let us not forget that Europe's history of over three thousand years has brought it without a break to the latest developments of science and technology. Europe did not precipitate itself upon them headlong, but has evolved them by a process of gestation; it has thus had time to get used to them.

But besides that — and more important — it has had time to shed many an illusion. The real Europe harbours no unqualified optimism, no fundamental belief in universal and inevitable progress. The values of the past are still so real to it that Europe

status to a discredited word, of 'humility'. It is the humility of a strength which desires that right shall reign on earth. There is no splendour, no majesty in power displayed, in this form, it is purely practical. All the same, it may be the real meaning behind the present worldwide revolutionary ferment, for men all desire a valid order backed by power, but it must be an order which renders service. Perception of this truth and its realisation in fact might also be a task for Europe, that same Europe that has practised so much violence and oppression in the name of a superiority that has lost its substance. If you tell me that I am describing an ethical Utopia, I would remind you of how frequently Utopias have been the predecessors of realities to come.

Admittedly the Europe of whose mission I have been speaking does not yet exist. Earlier on I referred to a law whereby the peripheral pressure exerted upon a given sociobiological area has the effect of bringing the separate parts within that area closer together. It must not be forgotten however that the word 'law' in connection with historical processes is an inexact term. It does not denote inevitability, but states a rule in regard to events that conform to a purpose. To view history as a process evolving inevitably in prescribed forms is an illusion. History does not occur naturally, it is a man-made process, the accomplishment of which is not automatic, but has to be willed.

'Europe' is something political, economic and technical; above all it is an attitude of mind, and formidable obstacles confront the creation of that attitude. The primitive mentality — and its influence is still felt everywhere — regarded anything strange as wrong, dangerous, hostile in fact, and this psychological formula finds a place also in political theory. The State is presented as a structure which may have enemies — or friends; but especially enemies. These formulas remind us of how strong is the resistance to such processes as the creation of a truly European attitude of mind and of how much must yet happen before it comes about.

To mention only one task that shows the magnitude of what there remains to be done: if Europe is to become a reality, it is first essential that every European nation shall re-think its history and see its past in the light of this great construction of tomorrow. How much self-conquest and self-analysis does that not call for! History is there to warn us how little it can be taken for granted and how great is the danger of failure.

We have as an element in our cultural make-up a conception of the civilisation of ancient Greece and I do not need to recall its beauty and formative value. Yet we should not forget something that the phil-Hellenes are apt to overlook — that the Greeks neglected their greatest task, the establishment of a State which should combine the vital forces inherent in all their peoples and races. The basic impulse, creative in so many directions, that drove them — the spirit of rivalry and competition — prevented this. They allowed the fateful moment to pass, and it was left to foreigners, the Romans, to create a kind of unity, a unity without freedom. Europe, too, may let its hour pass. If that should be union would mean, not an advance towards a freer life but a lapse into bondage for all.