

The legitimation of Europe

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Our topic „the legitimation of Europe“ linguistically combines two completely contrary concepts into a problematic formula. On the one hand it calls Europe a reality, on the other hand it articulates an idea, the legitimation of this reality. The sociologist Max Weber defines „legitimation“ as self-justification of life chances. Thus „legitimation“ is action, it has to be established.

Applied to our topic the message is: Europe is a life chance. The historic sociological life chance called Europe is legitimated whenever Europeans make Europe their project by establishing its constitutional law. This means intellectual work on the concept of self-justification.

I am going to analyse this concept forthwith. This concept has three dimensions: „the self“ – „just“ hinting to the meaning of „justice“ and -right or „rights“ – and in the „fication“ the latin word for doing „facere“ is enshrined. (– establishing). Now I am going to analyse these three concepts.

Firstly the concept of self-justification formally pronounces Europe`s identity by using the word „self“ which is the pronoun of identity. Secondly the concept of self-justification refers to the idea of justice and leads us to its content. Thirdly the concept of self-justification in its element „fication“ points to the fact that the whole concept requires human activity.

Those who can accept my analysis of the concept of self-justification see the European project as a life chance. They legitimize this project in itself.

This concept of self-justification will be the basis of my speech.

First I am going to deal with the concept of „the self“ and present my concept of Europe in a nutshell. All concepts of Europe are polarized. Europe versus Europe. Let me mention some positions that are at odds with one another: Religion versus reason; faith versus doubt; mythical versus critical thinking; empiricism versus rationalism; (material) existence versus idea; particularity versus universality; philosophy versus science; humanities versus natural sciences; tradition versus evolution; reaction(ism) versus revolt (rebellion); individualism versus collectivism, finally analytical thinking versus spiritual vision. These polarities make Europe special. We might call them complicated dialogues. The culture of Europe is based on the continuity and intensity of these dialogues.

What is and has always been important for European culture is dynamic clashes as well as supplementing one another, also antagonisms and competition. Dialogue characterizes Europe formally.

But what about content?

To answer that question I have to deal with the second element in the word „self-justification“: Just(ice). Europe is based on ideas. The French Revolution shaped the long way to freedom through its motto: Liberté – Egalité – Fraternité. Contemporary philosophers, such as Kant and Hegel at once understood the universal meaning of this occurrence. Hegel wrote:

„As long as the sun has been in the sky and the planets have been orbiting it, such an event has not been seen, namely that man discovers his head relying on ideas and shaping his reality in accordance with them. This was a wonderful sunrise. That is why all rational human beings joined in the celebration of this epoch. At this time people were solemnly moved, a

spiritual enthusiasm permeates the world as if the reconciliation of the divine sphere with the mundane one has only happened just now.“

(Werke 12,529)

I am going to translate Hegel's imagery into concepts. My interpretation:

In the French Revolution reason discovers its creative energy. It clearly states the human character in the formula of freedom, equality and brotherhood. Reason understands the meaning of history. In the revolution the Christian message of freedom, equality and brotherhood turned into a political reality. The message manifested itself. This caesura in the history of mankind became a political project named „Declaration du Droit Humaine“. Nevertheless it turned into a horror of freedom during Robespierre's reign of terror as Hegel explains in the above mentioned quotation from his lectures on the Philosophy of History. The revolution abruptly ended in Napoleon's imperial military dictatorship. Only one of the ideas survived, namely equality, formulated in the Code Napoleon.

Nevertheless a step in the right direction! Legal certainty for citizens, that is for everybody survived(endured). The idea of equality had become concrete. A legal sphere had come into being.

But what about liberty and brotherhood?

Now I am going to leave behind the discourse on the history of ideas in order to develop a system of ideas that legitimize Europe.

Liberté manifests itself subjectively, for it is my liberty that leads to my actions and my self-determination and manifests itself as the sanctuary of my individuality. But this freedom is, at the same time, connected with the

idea of justice. The German language reflects this connection. It says – literally translated - „I must do myself justice“ (meaning: „I must be true to myself“). Only I can do that, only myself. Authentic liberty adopts laws but at the same time subjects itself to them. I am free by seizing liberty as a thinking, feeling and active (acting) human being. Liberty is extremely dynamic. Liberty guides people. It fights against false authorities, tyrants and privileges.

For, other human beings, my neighbours, are in the same situation as I am. Consequently we both acknowledge the social construct of neighbourly rights. Equality is different from liberty although it remains closely linked to it. Equality constitutes, as I mentioned above, the legal sphere which liberty created. Equality guarantees the legal certainty of and for all citizens.

People all over the world are legally equal. As individuals, however, that they always remain, they are different from one another.

Finally brotherhood.

It is driven by basic convictions. It is these basic convictions invisibly emanating from the innermost of human beings that feel solidarity with fellow beings and nature. The basic convictions bring forth attentiveness that lives inside human beings but has an effect on the outside world. Basic convictions are essential. They manifest themselves as dignity. Dignity in connection with liberty and justice makes human beings.

Now I am going to connect these three ideas.

Solidarity together with liberty and justice is a productive symbiosis.

Liberty and justice are genuine manifestations of solidarity. I seize liberty in my actions to remain true to myself. These actions show objectively (considering the traces I have left behind in my life) whether I acted justly.

The contemplation of my actions and their consequences tells me whether my actions were egomaniac and driven by profiteering or based on spiritual energy and the spirit of good neighbourliness. Liberty and justice are the two sides of the same medal. The medal itself, however, the being of the human being, the human being itself, is constituted by the basic convictions. It is this solidarity that empowers all thinking, acting and feeling. Repressive structures of alienation disappear. This is the core of Jesus' message: mend your ways to live a different life.

Let me sum up: Europe gets its legitimation from its self-justification as a life chance if it sees itself as a supportive society of people who voluntarily grant each other rights.

A final comment on justice: The knowledge of justice is an essential possession of mankind. The Greeks regard Solon 'the legislator', as one of the seven wise men. A linguistic analysis of the word 'justice' shows that it means setting directions, setting things right and regulating. This meaning is to be found in words like right, upright and righteous. The right way of life, the upright posture, that is life in the legal sphere. There is no alternative to this. If you lose this attitude, life itself is lost.

That is why Kant called justice sacrosanct. In his words: „The rights of man, that is human rights, are more sacrosanct than anything else in the world.“

Now I am going to deal with the third concept which is „fiction“ .

Quo vadis Europa? Europe is more than ideas. Europe is a life chance on a global scale. But – has Europe seized this opportunity? We have just been caught unaware by the crisis in Ukraine. Europe is speechless. Why?

Because Europe first and foremost developed into an economic union without any political vision worth mentioning. Europe now lacks the means to face the unexpected crisis. Europe did not develop the energy of its own roots into a political culture. Europe realized a neo-liberal, economically perverted concept of liberty (justice) and a perverted concept of the distribution of goods. But politics and policies need a cultural basis, that is the ideas of the French Revolution. These ideas are more than philosophical paradigms. They are cultural life forces. Liberty and justice are synonyms of life. A new policy ought to overcome Europe's paralysis. The core of this new policy is dialogue, a cultural achievement emanating sensitivity and energy. In dialogue justice comes into being. Liberty and equality are its vital elements. This needs to be explained:

In dialogue the interlocutors grant each other liberty. Concepts of the enemy dissolve or do not arise at all when we reveal ourselves. Liberty teaches us frankness, transparency, criticism and self-criticism, tolerance and moderation. Equality supports dialogue. The interlocutors grant each other rights. You have to look through your partner's eyes.

This attitude must be based on historical knowledge. For, all being has become what it is. When I put myself in the shoes of my interlocutor, I show him respect and meet him at eye level.

Dialogue is based on reason and trust. For, in the immediate reality of dialogue people show their own limitations and thus reveal themselves.

They challenge one another. This requires courage. Courage is the ability that our soul (Gemüt) provides us with. This energy of empathy is a child of the human resource „brotherhood“. Getting involved with the interlocutor without fear, and joining forces with him, that is libidinous, erotic energy.

It is an educational task to develop a culture of dialogue. This is a socio-political effort whose perfection would be a step towards the legitimation of Europe. So, how shall we constitute Europe?

It gets its legitimation if it defines itself as the advocate of human rights and the higher ranking ideas: liberty, equality and brotherhood are guaranteed for individual life plans in the constitution. Everything revolves around the individual, not around national interests, not around geostrategic advantages, not around the readjustment of boundaries.

What must be kept in mind? In a nutshell: The sublime but simple manifest: human dignity is sacrosanct. Here we are faced with justice that existed before states came into being (norma normans).

This justice binds all later justice, restricts rulers and influences European society. Such a European mentality of humanity summons states before the court of human rights. This is not utopian (unthinkable). Europe is a democratic confederation of states which means that the political parties only assist in the development of informed political opinions, but NGOs are just as important. The homo politicus would be the norm in Europe just like Master Eckhardt's homo justus. That is not utopian (unthinkable).

With ownership comes responsibility. Everything you own, whether you worked for it or inherited it, is a gift from society. For it was the industry

of other people that provided you with institutions and methods that made it possible for you to prove your powers. That is why the following rule is of utmost importance: public welfare is more important than the interests of individuals.

A Europe based on these ideas would be a legitimate alternative to US capitalism and authoritarian states such as Russia or China. But, don't forget this would be a human creation, always endangered and fragile.

Nevertheless, Europe might revitalize the world!