Autumn of Nations

Pierre Manent

Europe's present situation is best understood by looking at the sharp contrast between the bright official picture and the seriousness of the gathering threats. The official picture shows a brand-new Europe evolving naturally—that is, progressively—out of sturdy but nonetheless antiquated nations. Shedding the burden of the past, our dear old nations from north, south, east, and west stride gallantly into the future by means of an unprecedented human association, one that reconciles the particularity of roots with the universality of purpose. Thus, while the substance of each nation is gently whittled down, the substance of Europe as a whole is proportionately enriched. At the end of the day, then, we all will be good Europeans, and our old nations will be within Europe what regions today are within each nation.

If ever there was a pie in the sky, this is surely it: With the demotion of the nation as a political form, particularity and universality lose their oldest and most effective link, and the components of political man come unhinged. We cannot know where we are headed once the attempted national synthesis has come undone.

The assessment I intend to make here may appear unduly, perhaps even extravagantly, bleak. Like every other human being endowed with a modicum of good sense, I prefer peace to war, comfort to misery, pleasure to pain, and even virtue to vice when the former is not too demanding. Certainly I do not positively enjoy the drums of doom. The reality, however, is that nearly every development in these last few years—including all those momentous steps taken to improve our lot—has contributed

to my belief that the future of Europe is quite grim indeed. From the Maastricht Treaty to the launching of the euro to the indefinite expansion of the European Union, governments have relentlessly upped the ante and made the wager even more risky; the cost of any serious glitch has dramatically shot up. We have been so prematurely tied together by a common currency that any run-of-the-mill crisis could plausibly lead to the utter collapse of the noble European enterprise that for half a century now has carried our best hopes.

To be sure, friends of liberty do not wish to speak badly of what has developed in Europe these last few years, since the fall of Communism. We are grateful to all those who contributed to the victory of liberty and decency in Central and Eastern Europe, and who brought the two parts of our continent together again. Nevertheless, the return of liberty to half of Europe was by no means a properly European victory. A victory in Europe and for Europe, certainly, but not a *European* victory. What we have witnessed is the collapse of Communism, rather than the victory of democracy. To be truly victorious, you see, you ought to desire victory. To crave it. And as far as it was a victory—a political victory—it was a nearly exclusively American victory, though as a European, I regret to say this. Let us consider briefly the demise of Communism, one of the strangest phenomena in human history.

Whatever contempt or disgust we may harbor toward the Communist enterprise, we must admit that it managed to pull off a hugely successful death: Drowning under the applause of the entire Western world. My intention here is not to remind us that an average Communist bully like Gorbachev was everywhere lionized and in some places canonized, however distasteful the whole thing was. My point is rather that the incredibly corrupt and criminal enterprise of Communism was not condemned. Nor was it even judged by ordinary politicians and the citizenry at large. On this score, both Eastern and Western Europe, those who suffered under Communism and those who were supposed to guard against it, share in the same moral laziness. As far as I know, only in East Germany and the Czech

Republic were the instruments of tyranny called to account, and only some of them, however mildly, punished. In general, people simply recoil from thinking about Communism further than to agree that "it does not work." So Communism is just one of many things that admittedly don't work, somewhat like attempts to square the circle. But because man is a moral and political animal, a thinking being who cannot live too far from truth, there is, as a result of this failure to confront the nature of Communism, the ugliness of the Communist lie, a festering sore at the root of our claims to victory. And so Europe will not reap the moral and political fruits to which it is not entitled.

The United States, on the other hand, has already gathered those sweet fruits, because it was, after all, an American victory. The bulk of the weaponry and strategy was American, as was the unity of resolve within the politically decisive class, and the president with the courage to say loud and clear that the Communist empire was evil and crumbling, and then to act according to that judgment. It was not a European victory because European countries—I can speak here only about Western Europe—did not really want it, with the notable but ambiguous exception of Germany, whose political class wanted it only as a means by which to reunify the fatherland. As far as European countries wanted anything, they wanted the preservation and continuation of the status quo, or at most its improvement through the construction of a united Western Europe.

This failure of Europe to bring about, and then to confront and pass judgment on, the demise of Communism will haunt our continent for many years to come. I will limit myself to considering the political consequences of this fact, leaving the moral analysis to citizens of formerly Communist countries, who may resent my efforts as reflecting the self-righteousness of a pampered Westerner.

There is no doubt that, as a result of her apparent victory, the European Union enjoys a surge of *seeming* vitality and strength. Indeed, candidates are queuing up at her door. Yet there is both a morality and a responsibility inherent in any true victory, for it is proof that you have been able to gather your material and moral forces and to apply them with a continuity of purpose. Real victory gives you a new perspective: You look at the world from a higher vantage point, and the world looks up to you with heightened expectations. True, everything can quickly come to naught—and you may even feel *too* good—but there is nevertheless a promise and a fecundity in true victory. The present American triumph is proof enough of that. In contrast, there is always a dangerous hollowness in a victory that is only apparent, in which we reap where we have not sown. In an apparent victory, the world of which we take advantage is still better than we are, however good we may feel. We cannot even acknowledge this serendipity: Since we Europeans no longer believe in God, we are unable to thank him for his gifts.

Thus the present state of Europe is characterized by a dangerous and widening gap between appearance and reality. The advantages that, however unequally, we enjoy together are not matched by a proportionate European contribution. This gnawing hollowness is as much a part of the European reality as any industrial or financial accomplishment. It is merely obscured by noisy announcements of, and feverish preparations for, an enormous European enterprise. While we regularly fail the test forced upon us by events—first Communism, and more recently, Bosnia and Kosovo—we continue to impose on ourselves tests of a growing arbitrariness, indeed of a comic arbitrariness. Like pious or other "superstitious" people, we burden ourselves with more and more superfluous works, all the while evading our plain duty. This contrast between an ever-growing European pretension and extension, and a brazen dereliction of duty—alas, if we only had the nerve to be brazen, so unaware are we of any political duty

devolving upon us—has come more and more to characterize European mores. While what was once Yugoslavia was burning—and it is still smoldering—we Europeans were busy burnishing fine new coins. And we are still at it.

I am well aware that thoughtful partisans of the new Europe would accept a large part of this indictment, adding only that these all-too-real failures prove precisely the urgent necessity of this enterprise. We will gladly shoulder our responsibilities, they say, when we are able to, that is, after Europe has been built. Thus every critique of the present Europe is an argument for looking up to the sky (to Europe as it could be) or beyond the horizon (to Europe as it will be). This argument is as irrefutable as an argument can be, and they will be reading from the same score even after Rome has burned to the ground. But my quarrel with this argument is not that it falls short of the Popperian criterion. It is rather that it rests on a political assumption that is momentously brittle: The European nations, or Europe as a plurality of nations, are now and forever unable to take unified political action. Let us then be satisfied to bide our time and fine-tune our sophisticated common institutions. For example, since we live in a political interregnum, the new body politic must be elaborated from non- or sub-political elements, the decisive one being a common currency. Underlining this assumption is, of course, the belief that the nation as a political form is now obsolete, and utterly unable to advance the political destinies of the European peoples.

I would be the last to deny that the arguments for the obsoleteness of nations are powerfully persuasive, if not overwhelming. One is tempted to say that, like the Chinese emperor of yore, the nation as a political form has lost the mandate of heaven, or that the *Geist*—the spirit of history—has at long last deserted it. This diagnosis is all too easily documented.

The most obvious argument is also the strongest: The greatest, or at least the biggest, European nations wasted their blood and treasure and wounded their honor in two world wars that originated on their soil. World

War I—the Great War—is the more meaningful in our context, since responsibility for the slaughter was shared, however unequally, among nearly all of the participants, and because it laid the groundwork for World War II. And from this poisoned well both Communism and Nazism sprang forth. However much the circumstances of the time and the place—not to mention the hazards of war—may have borne upon the unfolding of the mayhem, its primary cause undoubtedly lay in the imperial urge, the self-adoration, and the fateful hubris of the major European nations. There was something unprecedented in the process through which self-sacrifice gave way to self-mutilation and the frenzied love of death. Not even under kings and priests, or during the worst cruelties of religious wars, had these baptized peoples ever behaved so badly. And it was only a foretaste of things to come: The evidence itself, at least in this case, convinces us that world history is in fact the world tribunal, and that the nation state stands condemned without parole.

As if this were not enough, the most recent and potent developments of human life and activity seem to confirm that our nations, after failing us so cruelly in the past, are now utterly unable to hold their own against the wave of the future, let alone to take advantage of it. The revolution in economic, financial, and technological means, which goes by the name of "globalization," has produced the extraordinary result that, for the first time in history, nothing less than the whole world is the natural and necessary frame of our exertions. The old self-sufficient nation, for which foreign trade accounted for only a tiny fraction of its activity—indeed, as another means of attaining a more complete autarky, according to the Aristotelian precept that held some ground until recently—is on the road to extinction, or so it seems. In more than one sense, then, "we are the world." The national governments, particularly in Europe, have submitted, however reluctantly, to this new law of an ever-expanding globe, renouncing the

age-old principle of self-sufficiency. But then, Aristotle would ask, what remains of a political form when it has lost—or abandoned—autarky? No doubt, the once proud nations of Europe have bowed their heads.

It is not just a matter of economic inevitability. Nearly all politicians, in nearly all European countries, have increasingly substituted the European perspective for their own national perspectives, even when they do not feel any strong sympathy for the European enterprise as such. It seems that once you are at the helm of a European nation, you have no choice but to adopt the larger perspective, the European one. This impressive fact cannot be the result of a string of misfortunes or individual weaknesses. The only explanation seems to be that, when in charge, politicians (whatever they may say on the stumps) discover their dear old country's lack of density, of spontaneous orientation—precisely the hollowness I attributed above to the European Union. I will not expatiate here on the alarming intellectual passivity and pathetic artistic poverty that is rampant in many European nations today, even in those that had for many centuries contributed mightily to the spiritual life of Europe and the world at large. Indeed, it is difficult not to notice that as soon as our nations cease to pay attention to the higher law of Europe, they assume compulsively their old calamitous selves, and let loose the silliest nationalism. Thus when the Bosnian crisis flared up, for which Milosevic was undoubtedly the first to blame, the foreign ministries in London, Bonn, and Paris all entered a contest to see which one could most resemble its 1914 predecessor. I am still not sure who won.

There is no use prolonging this sad litany. We would no doubt do best to rest our case and say farewell to the nation with the bittersweet mixture of gratitude and contempt warranted by history. Perhaps I have long exhausted the patience of the reader, who surely feels that I have only been stating the obvious. If indeed I have just restated it, it is only because these facts are now a part of the picture at hand, the picture most in favor today, an expression of the ruling facts and reigning opinions. But it is only a part.

Now comes the other part. Even if our nations are verily destined to disappear into Europe, we ought not to forget that it is still the national

form that stands as the cause of its own impending overcoming. After all, if there was ever a common market in the first place, it is because, after World War II, two nations that had drawn the sword against each other thrice within the space of two generations—France and Germany—decided to consider each other partners, allies, and even friends. This politically fateful decision was made by nations, and not by any supra- or post-national institution. The European enterprise is thus rooted in two national purposes that are joined and supported by other national purposes. It will not do to say that this was just an at-the-outset phenomenon, that the enterprise has since shed its national skin and become a reality beyond nations. First causes never die. If ever the French-German bond were to snap, that would be the end of the European project.

If the origin of the European Union lies in the national form, it is because everything of importance that evolved on our continent from the fourteenth century on was produced, or at least conditioned, by this form. This form is in fact so resilient that it has been able to accommodate, within its recognizable bounds, the feudal monarchy, absolute monarchy, and the democratic republic. Thus when I read *King John*, I recognize my English neighbors, just as they recognize me when they read about Joan of Arc. It is this resilience that gave the national form a decisive edge against its two great competitors in the fateful contest between political forms: The city and the empire. We must recognize this most elementary fact: Despite the prestige of the Greek city and early Roman Republic on the one hand, and the undying glory of the Roman Empire on the other, from the fourteenth century on the nation has constituted the only form in which European peoples were able to make sense of their lives.

Therefore, when Thomas Aquinas was teaching in Paris, Europe existed at least as much as it exists today. But the European peoples would soon choose the national form, because only by means of this form could they strike the right balance between liberty and civility—the balance that is the enduring secret of our continent, so long as we remain faithful to its genius. Through the nation, we were able to keep at arm's length the promiscuous

tumult and narrow parochialism of cities, as well as the brutal aloofness and indiscriminate embrace of empires. Only by means of our nations were we able to be "good Europeans." To round off this point, it is convenient to add that since the beginning of civilization, man has lived in one of three political forms: City, empire, or nation. A rather limited range of choice indeed, which should give pause to those who are tempted to discard our good old nations so glibly.

Following the development of European history—and I admit this is a bird's-eye perspective—I am naturally compelled to take up the theme raised most frequently and justifiably by people who view the European enterprise with skepticism. Democracy, as we understand it, came into being within the framework of the nation. When European peoples tore down the monarchic and aristocratic scaffolding that supported their several civil associations, they were able to govern themselves, indeed to continue living together, because citizens could regard one another as members of the same nation. I admit that the relation between nation and democracy is difficult to ascertain. It is no doubt a highly dynamic and volatile one: On the one hand, the democratic movement multiplied the power of European nations while the nation gave "flesh" to the democratic abstractions "general will" and "sovereignty of the people." On the other hand, the nation was the democratic alternative to democracy—that is, the alternative to democracy in a democratic context—since the enemies of the democratic movement, the "reactionaries" or "nationalists" proper, had recourse to national passions in their rejection of the passions of equality and liberty, and could thus turn the tide of democracy against itself. In sum, the nation gives democracy a body, which can then become democracy's worst enemy.

This terrible dialectic was played out time and again in the various wars and totalitarian movements of this past century. The net result is that in Europe, democracy and the nation parted company. Democracy took on a life of its own, belittling the base necessities of its body while basking in its intellectual glory and purity. This sublime emancipation was all the easier

to achieve since the democratic idea, as a principle of justice, does not depend on any political frame of reference: It can occur in a family, a village, a city, a region, a nation, the whole world, or any new circumscription of mankind you may devise. The principle of consent does not bring with it any political form as such. The democratic principle does not contain its political effectiveness.

And so we have arrived at a singular historical fact: The nation has long been the condition of democracy, but in certain circumstances it became its enemy. To prevent the latter state of affairs, then, it is tempting to try, once and for all, to detach democracy from its condition altogether. This is precisely what the present democratic movement is trying to do: It attempts to make democracy unconditional, to free the democratic soul from the national body, and to endow democracy with the purity of angels. Perhaps, then, to take these attempts to their logical extreme, democracy could be made the master—and thus never the prisoner—of its own body. Since every limit or circumscription would be arbitrary from the point of view of the democratic principle, democracy could create for itself a body without limits, a body of indefinite extension, all to ensure that democracy could never become the slave of its own condition. You think confidently that such an indefinite body is an impossibility, until it dawns upon you that our European Union pretends to be just such a body, that behind the convenient veil of humdrum bureaucracy, "Europe" is indeed the astral body of angelic democracy. For such a development to succeed, then, we need to suppose that the human condition has been radically altered such that man as a political animal has undergone a decisive modification, or else that man is simply no longer a political animal. It is a risky wager to make when embarking on an enormous political enterprise.

There is thus a fateful contrast between the origins of Europe, to which I alluded above, and its final state. The coming-into-being of Europe was rooted in the deliberate and prudent actions of already constituted political bodies. And it could still be said that, up until the signing of the Maastricht Treaty, the edification of Europe evolved as the common action of a

definite, albeit growing, number of European nations. The so-called supra-national institutions were forced to content themselves with a functional, indeed ancillary, role, however bombastic their rhetoric could be on occasion. Since then, however, the enterprise has taken on a new and ominously ideological character. We had our first hint of this during the debates attending the ratification of the Maastricht Treaty, when the self-appointed representatives of the European Idea would not take a popular "no" for an answer, and ensured instead that peoples would be summoned—thrice a year if need be—to vote until they gave the required "yes." It was apparent, particularly in France, that those reluctant to travel further into the uncharted land of supra-nationality were not considered normal citizens entertaining legitimate opinions, but rather benighted persons beyond the reach of rational argument. They were aggressively ridiculed, and their anxieties went unanswered. Sometimes a condescending pundit would deign to humor the bumpkins; needless to say, however, the media, that most servile herd in human history, unanimously enlisted in the Hosts of Light.

Surely my lingering bitterness does not escape the reader. It reflects the disillusionment I felt when I realized, with a kind of finality, that otherwise intelligent, competent, and well-meaning people would not pay serious attention to the most reasonable of arguments, and that accordingly the whole enterprise would not stop, or even be slowed down just a bit, until it had ended in a colossal failure. Nobody bothered to explain why the new political body had to grow without limit, or at least until it encompassed all lands belonging to Europe on the map. I concede that we were not explicitly offered the absurd possibility of welcoming half of Russia and a speck of Turkey into our mammoth new enterprise, but that is only because nobody bothered to define the political meaning behind the geographical notion of "Europe." We had to be content with the assumption that the more Europe expanded, the better it would be for itself and for the world. Some will say that the admittedly awkward geographical growth is a popular stalking-horse for a legitimate, indeed compelling, political argument,

namely, that the ultimate aim of the European enterprise is to bring together Western Europe with its Central and Eastern counterparts. And with that I come to the most difficult part of my argument.

Out of sympathy alone, who would refuse to welcome formerly Communist-dominated countries into the European Union? Yet here we must remember that a political union is not determined merely by human affinities or historical memories. Nor, for that matter, is it excluded by economic disparities: If such a union were politically necessary, or even convenient, we should hasten to receive Eastern candidates, however high the potential cost. My objection to this unbridled expansion, however, is that there is no single, specifically political argument for its necessity. The European Union is already a giant unable to move more than one finger at a time—it is already choking on itself. Not surprisingly, it has failed every test pertaining to common policy. I have already mentioned Bosnia and Kosovo: Whatever was done about these hot spots, as we know, was done by the United States. Whatever was tentatively sketched by the European Union was sketched according to the preferences of the European nation most immediately concerned. For example, Turkish entreaties were rebuffed by German misgivings, just as the Cyprus candidacy was cleared to please Greece. Of course, there could be no more childish way of antagonizing a potent neighbor, and of heightening the risks of war on those shores. What goes by the name of European policy, then, is but the vectorial result of the disconnected velleities of European nations. If you increase the number of participants, you succeed only in increasing the number of velleities and aggravating the awkwardness of the vectorial result. In any case, the result will usually approximate zero, since an insuperable palsy inevitably sets in. There is a French saying that a camel is a horse designed by a committee; what would the horse designed by a trans-European committee look like?

It is not immaterial to notice that, despite their nullity and inflammatory obnoxiousness, the half-baked velleities of our congregated nations were finally reined in by the United States, which, at long last—and this

was very late in the day, to be sure—put out the fire in Bosnia and in Kosovo. I do not mean to suggest that the United States is a pure white knight, and Europe a bunch of bumbling ne'er-do-wells. It is simply a fact that a multi-headed animal never goes anywhere, and the more heads on his neck, the less his sense of direction. And we must not forget that our American friends are largely acting out of old habits formed in the wake of World War II, when Europe lay devastated. It is less than probable that, whatever interests they have in the stability of Europe, they will come to our rescue when our umpteen European nations, tied together by a common currency that we insist is working, appear unable to police our nearest neighborhood. You tire of helping a self-declared giant tie his tie.

It can be argued that, under the convenient veil of an impotent multilateralism, a common European policy determined by Germany, or at least elaborated according to her wishes, is slowly taking form. Politics evolves according to a specific law of gravity, and the heaviest naturally carries the day. I, for one, estimate that it is a good thing, and only fair, that the demographic and economic might of Germany is now adequately reflected in the political counsels of a united Europe. Moreover, because of the federal nature of this country, there is much that other Europeans can learn from the German way of doing things. And surely if there is any political rationale for the extension eastwards, it lies with the instincts and interests of Germany: It is quite natural and legitimate for her—and rather generous, too—to try to bring her zone of influence, not to say her burgeoning half-empire, under a common roof. The confluence of this German national purpose with the general ideological urge towards expansion for expansion's sake makes the process almost irresistible.

For obvious reasons, Germany has displayed a timidity in the political realm that may have done her honor, but was in any case excessive. She has now finally found her well-deserved place at the heart of Europe, and should not aim further. I do not suppose for a moment that any significant segment of German society harbors hegemonic tendencies, but

the confluence to which I just referred has already resulted in the decision to add Hungary, Poland, the Czech Republic, and additional countries into the European Union. This development will bring about one of two results: Either the complete palsy resulting from elementary political dynamics—indeed, statics—I sketched above, or the breaking up of the whole on account of the nations of the west and south, France among them, refusing to accept a new dispensation of the traditional pieces of the political-power pie. They would judge rightly that the original contract had been broken. It would not do to say that such a bolting would reflect a jingoism unworthy of serious consideration, since any such national reaction would be a direct response to a preceding national excess on the part of our German friends.

It will be a long time before national interests and instincts disappear. Indeed, nothing could be more ruinous than to speak and act as if the overcoming of nationality has already been achieved. For the time being, and for a long time to come, the invocation of super-nationality, however sincere, will necessarily be a mask for national purposes. The row in Brussels surrounding the appointment of the European Central Bank's first president in 1998 offers a case in point. The French president's horse trading made for a very poor spectacle indeed, but it would be wrong to think that Gallic jingoism conflicted with enlightened super-nationalism. With the selection of Wim Duisenberg, the German candidate, the governing of economic Europe was simply delivered into the hands of Germany. It is true that all other members went along with the German wish; it was thus all the more necessary to raise a cautionary fuss.

I should stress again that I do not speak with any animosity or defiance toward Germany. It is precisely because I consider the French-German bond the palladium of Europe that I fear most of all any estrangement between our two countries. Appearances can be meretricious. And the current French president is not very good at tending to them. But it would be very surprising if France turned out to be the only European country

with national interests and instincts, all the others having already reached a higher plane of humanity, where pure impartiality and disinterestedness reign supreme. If we all still belong to the same needy, calculating mankind, then we ought to take our partiality into account. Nothing is to be gained by pretending to inhabit an ideological surreality in which the operation of mundane motives has been abolished.

The European Union already is too numerous by half. The addition of new members could not fail to complete the paralysis of all the European cogs and wheels, without bringing any significant benefits to the newcomers. Can the candidates really feel that, aside from superior wealth, our countries are overflowing with accomplishments in which one should be eager to share? They were submitted by force for half a century to an idea that seemed true and good. I do not mean to compare the Communist idea to the European one, but the latter is also a tantalizing and possibly treacherous light in the distance, one of those "vague ideas" to which Tocqueville claimed democratic peoples are particularly prone.

I have just underscored the vague ideological character of the European project, once it has detached itself from its national components. But ideologues accuse one another of being ideological, and the reproach of abstraction is fairly abstract itself. After dwelling on the practical—that is, political—difficulties of its realization, it is high time to try to weigh more precisely the meaning and value of the project itself.

Beyond all political and economic hazards, the strength as well as the weakness of the European project lies in its intrinsic nature or purpose. It seems fair to note that it does not bring any new spiritual, moral, or political principle into the world. If you define it as a purely federal project, a matter of coaxing self-governing political units into a mighty new representative republic and bringing into the world a new nation conceived in liberty, then the United States of America did that a long time ago, and with resounding success. Generally speaking, we are all engaged in the modern democratic project, which ordinarily makes use of pre-existing nations. The

European enterprise, on the other hand, distinguishes itself only by its indeterminate gigantism and its animus against nations, or, conversely, by an arbitrary particularism for which it is unable to account: The point on the map at which the enterprise stops will be determined by fiat. The more universalist it becomes, the more arbitrary the limits to that universality will be (and the more humiliated and indignant the peoples waiting across the border). If, in fact, everything develops on schedule, Europe's growing strength will add new problems every day to the old ones that her weakness prevents her from solving. Perhaps we will become a giant nobody notices, or cares about? Most importantly, the success of which we dream will inevitably put us on a collision course with the United States. Thus, the institutional machine we devised for keeping peace on our continent will decisively disturb the world order that has prevailed since 1917.

It is not that I reject out of hand the idea of a challenge to the Americans. On the contrary, I never shrink from a good fight. And it can even be said that competition is the wellspring of Western society. But I have difficulty descrying what the meaning of such a challenge could be for human beings. Contrary to what reasonable Europeans generally think, there is meaning in old European nations challenging mighty new America. They are legitimately proud of what they have done, of their contribution to the life of the world, possibly even of their contribution to the independence and sheer greatness of America. They are old, sinewy peoples who feel too young to die. In this friendly but real contest, each nation, as part of Europe, opposes its finely articulated substance to the stronger, but perhaps somewhat simpler, substance of America: It stands for the old complexity of human motives against the American disposition, which produces an enormous amount of energy on the basis of individual rights and self-interest. But why try to transform Europe into a second American empire? What good human purpose would this serve? Why unreflectingly disrupt the trying but fruitful dialectics between the Old World and the New World, which thinking persons on both sides of the ocean have never ceased to

ponder? Whether by God's ordinance or mere chance, there is already a place on earth where democracy reigns unconditional and supreme: Every suffering, indeed every impatient person in the world is already a potential citizen of the United States. There is a place on earth where rootless democracy has taken root from its own seed. Why try to duplicate this successful experience on a soil that is much less congenial? The great philosophers of liberty have long noticed that European liberty was largely dependent on the complex partitioning of the European domain. In European quarrels, the weakest was, if not exactly a match, at least a hard nut to crack, so that the diversity of our continent was a main cause of its liberty. Why then run headlong (or worse yet, slide uncontrollably) into a gigantism and uniformity in which the thinkers to whom I have just referred saw the sickly marks of Asian despotism? Americans have indeed produced a variant of gigantism and uniformity which is friendly to liberty. But they took possession of a huge, open continent with no internal boundaries. One need only compare the skyline of any major American city to the new buildings in any European capital to understand that the genius of Europe stumbles when it tries its skill at gigantism.

To bring to light the meaning of the European project, I have just now supposed that it could indeed be successful. As I made clear from the outset, however, I strongly doubt it. The project was born in an ideological age, an age in which every dreamer—from the most harmless to the most criminal—has proposed his own version of a New Europe. Terrible experiences have taught us that the only ideology viable in the long run is democracy itself. Democracy furnishes the working mechanism of our nations, and it enlarges the horizon which they are endlessly pursuing. Yet nothing in our old nations prevents us from looking up and away toward humanity itself. Why be so impatient with our dilapidated fences? Why precipitate them into a melting pot? Nothing prevents our old nations from acting together. It is true, our old nations are tired. It is good for them to have a larger perspective for their action, a European perspective. But this perspective

must be conceived, and executed, with moderation. Only through moderation will it strengthen both our individual nations and Europe itself, instead of discouraging the former and destroying the latter. The European organization is a useful, indeed necessary, artifact. But if we put our entire soul into it, or if we begin to think that it has a soul, we will surely lose our way.

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