



## **The Idea of Europe: From Antiquity to the European Union**

Anthony Pagden (ed.)

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The title of this volume suggests panoramic coverage of space and time, and a theme of ambitious scope. The collection itself turns out to be a motley collection of 15 essays representing a wide range of intellectual traditions and disciplines (law, politics, anthropology, history). Overall the volume is probably best described as a venture in historico-cultural studies, broadly conceived. Taken individually many of the contributions are well worth reading, and, given the eclecticism of subthemes and approaches, there is probably something here to suit every taste and preoccupation. The general tone of the collection is expansive and discursive, and in that sense is a very enjoyable read — the kind of book you could take on a long journey.

For political theorists there is little in the way of theory as such, though a good deal of conceptual exploration, and some in political thought. Of most interest to me were the works by Blom and by Tully, and Asad's piece on representation and Islam. Hans Blom's 'The Republican Mirror: The Dutch Idea of Europe' usefully directs our attention to a strain in 17th century Dutch political thought combining a republican view of political institutions as safeguards against domination with a view of society as liberal, implying a presumption against the inculcation of civic virtue. In eschewing, too, goals of national expansion and the quest for glory, and emphasizing instead continuities between processes of exchange across and within territorial borders, this view is arguably closer to liberal interdependence theories of international relations than to 'realist' theories, and in its potential to bridge the divide between IR theories and standard political theories may prove fruitful in theorizing the European Union. James Tully's 'The Kantian Idea of Europe: Critical and Cosmopolitan Perspectives' is an exercise in compliance with Kant's exhortations. Here, he turns the enlightenment gaze onto Kant's own notion of the Pacific federation, and in particular probes its presumed cultural neutrality. In dissecting the suppositions of Kant's 'monologue', Tully proposes amendments to make the Pacific federation a truly postimperial and cosmopolitan 'multilogue'. The revised federation aspires to enable critical



reason-giving exchanges between citizens constituted as free and equal by their being related in terms of diverse constitutionalism and diverse federalism. Again, the relevance of this discussion to today's EU is clear and timely. Although an anthropologist, Talal Asad's 'Muslims and European Identity: Can Europe Represent Islam?' engages an issue of current concern in political theory, and his essay seems to take him to a place not a million miles away from, say, Iris Marion Young's discussions of representation and of 'differentiated solidarity'. For Asad the important issue is whether 'Europe' can compose itself as complex space and time, populated by multiple minorities, and with political arrangements allowing the coflourishing of multiple ways of life. (He doesn't answer this question, but his tone is not optimistic.)

For those of us who prefer such things the collection lacks, however, a clear focus or a strong degree of coherence. Neither the title and its subtitle, nor the initial blurb and early part of the introduction — which make clear that the idea of Europe is to be explored through the notion of European identity — are an accurate guide to its contents. Antiquity receives some discussion in Pagden's early chapter 'Europe: Conceptualizing a Continent' but barely a nod thereafter. The EU is dealt with in three chapters — all very sound, but only one of them (Risse and Engelmann-Martin's case study of German identity and European integration) addressing the ostensible theme of the book. Insofar as the remaining essays have a historical dimension, they concentrate on short periods within a span beginning in the 11th century and ending in the early 19th. The inclusion of more than one of the essays seems to hinge merely on its dealing with something going on in an actual place that can be deemed without further argument to be part of Europe. The connections between 'the idea of Europe' and ideas of 'European identity' are taken as implicit: never really explored, much less spelt out and established, and, where they are touched on, little that is original emerges. Indeed, more than one contributor notes that the idea of 'Europe' has for most of the period under discussion not been anywhere near as pervasive or potent as the idea of Christendom, and it seems a pity that more wasn't made of that insight. In a way, the ambiguities around 'the idea of Europe' have permeated the anthology. In writing about 'Europe' contributors seem to be addressing any one or a combination of: (a) a general cultural-historical conceptual construct, of the same class (say) as 'the Orient'; (b) a post-WWII set of interlocking frameworks of political institutions, headed by those of the EU; (c) various occurrences of human activity located in particular and specific national or local bits of the landmass we call Europe. Oddly, this plurality — and conflation — of assumptions occasions no real comment within the volume itself. It is hard not to come away feeling that even though many of the chapters offer food for thought, the collection as a whole is strangely unreflexive; and though



it skirts its stated object in ways that are often illuminating, it never quite gets to grips with it.

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