

Research Article

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The Liberal Soliloquy: The Elite Expression of Shared Loneliness in Modern European Nationalism and Supranationalism

<https://doi.org/10.1515/culture-2018-0001>

Received July 21, 2017; accepted January 23, 2018

Abstract: In this article, I explore the problem of identity at the national and European levels historically and sociologically, exposing the liberal thread that runs through the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Looking to key historical and artistic figures, I argue for the continuity between early nationalist and European integrationist impulses, maintaining that—despite their seemingly contradictory essence—the two are bound together by a liberalism (viz. the pursuit of the natural rights of man) they hold in common. I contend that this connection illustrates that the initial efforts to construct the nation in the early nineteenth century and a supranational Europe more than a century later can be understood as idealistic liberal projects that have failed due to the populist turn upon which their success depends, leaving the cultural elites behind both projects in a shared loneliness.

Keywords: liberalism, nationalism, Pan-Europa, supranationalism, European integration, Franz Kafka, Gustav Mahler, Krzysztof Kieslowski, Richard Coudenhove-Kalergi

In his great unfinished novel *The Castle* (1926), Franz Kafka tells the tale of K., a wanderer who struggles to find his place in a village after having been summoned there by way of an administrative error. Kafka's opus, however, seems to have been more than a work of fiction, suggesting at if not outright mocking the institutional intricacy and bureaucratic inertia that had prevailed in the Habsburg Empire. Yet this infrastructural density was more than just a feature of the Habsburg State, pointing to a particular conception of nationalism that the Habsburg Crown implemented as a means of creating a sufficient centrifugal force in the Empire to withstand the lure of belonging to the ethnic nation as divisive nationalisms grew ever stronger through the nineteenth century (Deak 105-106). In essence, one could argue that the Habsburg Empire's failed "institutional nationalism" helped create and also exemplifies the sense of alienation critical to the rise of modern national cultures.

At around the same time that Kafka was beginning work on *The Castle*, Richard Coudenhove-Kalergi was penning *Panuropa* (1923), the political tract that would serve as an inspiration for the European Union in decades to come. Establishing its headquarters in Vienna's *Hofburg* Palace and gathering together artists and intellectuals such as Thomas Mann, Bronisław Huberman, and Sigmund Freud, as well as influential politicians like French President and Foreign Minister Aristide Briand and Cologne's young mayor Konrad Adenauer, Coudenhove-Kalergi's Pan-Europa movement represented an ambitious plan to create a pan-European political and cultural entity that would erase the divisive nationalisms of the day. Yet today Europe seems little nearer to creating a space that transcends the most divisive of nationalist utterances. If anything, it is moving ever further apart, the rhetoric of nationalism growing

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increasingly virulent in an era of escalating insecurity and violence. My point of departure is to ask why nationalism continues to appeal to so many while sentiments such as supranationalism fail to persuade.

In this article, I explore the problem of identity at the national and European levels historically and sociologically. I begin from the basic supposition that European integration represents an attempt to dilute nationalism. But perhaps more surprisingly I go on to argue for the continuity between nationalist and European integrationist impulses, maintaining that the two are bound together by a liberalism (viz. the pursuit of the natural rights of man) they hold in common.

To advance this view, I contend that nationalism was a project headed initially by members of an ascendant bourgeoisie to address—whether consciously or not—the sense of alienation they experienced at the dawn of the modern period on account of a series of abrupt social and economic dislocations and discontinuities (Gellner 22-24). These initial nationalist utterances—however cynical they might seem given their role in providing the bourgeoisie with greater relevance—built upon an Enlightenment-era liberalism that resulted in the concept of the nation bearing a universal yet deeply-personal imprint however exceptional and organically-connected each nation was alleged to have been (Gellner 2). In essence, the first impulses of nation-building were, however physically-bounded the result, meant to create a universal brotherhood of man. The fundamental tension implicit in this construction was further exacerbated by the nation being obliged to undergo a transformation to ensure the nation-state's sustained viability in the industrial age. Indeed, in the second half of the nineteenth century, European leaders felt compelled to simplify the nationalist message in an effort to broaden its appeal among the masses via a series of “invented traditions” that made the nation ever more exclusive and deeply felt (Hobsbawm 1; Mosse 2). In so doing, I postulate that nationalism was lost to the nation-states that single-mindedly cultivated it for its political and economic utility, distilling it into an ever headier tonic for the multitudes. I believe that in this process of commodification nationalism evolved into an ideology no longer related to its initial utopian liberalism. It thereby became an ideology no longer able to address the needs of the artists and intellectual elites—those Carl Schorske calls the “educated bourgeoisie”—leading to their alienation—what I call a “shared loneliness”—from society at large (Schorske xxvii, 7). True, some intellectuals embraced an ever more chauvinistic nationalism—ultimately expressed via fascism—while others turned to communism's universalism in response to their frustration with the violent and illiberal nationalism that had been created by the beginning of the twentieth century. But a great many of Europe's elites looked to a new formulation—European integration, or supranationalism—as a means of re-inserting the shared liberal spirit back into a Continent that had been ripped asunder by nationalist conflict. Yet their efforts seem to be failing due to their detachment from the *vox populi*. As such, I mourn the fact that the liberal project of European integration may have been stillborn precisely because of its attempts to marginalise the nationalism that had already permeated society and has maintained its coarse and popular appeal whatever its destructiveness. Indeed, European integration—and by extension the European Union—is perhaps bound to fail precisely because it is bound up in an inescapable paradox; it must reject populist nationalism for having been diluted to achieve its success while at the same time attain a similar popularity to succeed on anything more than a relatively short-term administrative level.

To advance my argument, I use a miscellany of intellectual and artistic sources as evidence of the intertwined trajectory between the national and the supranational. I begin by looking at early expressions of modern nationalism—such as were in evidence with the Brothers Grimm or Johann Fichte—as a means to better understand the early conflation of liberal functionary and intellectual outlooks. I then move into the latter parts of the nineteenth century and the first decades of the twentieth century to examine the artistic works of Franz Kafka and Gustav Mahler and how their identities are enmeshed in their work and how the themes therein point to the failure of nationalism as an intellectual force. Thereafter, I turn to a discussion of Richard Coudenhove-Kalergi and Pan-Europa as a bridge to the period of European unification. From there I take up the thread of European unity into the early postwar period by way of a number of intellectuals and their thoughts before I conclude by looking at how the more recent tension between the individual and the collective is treated in Krzysztof Kieslowski's *Blue* and what this might mean for the European project. I deliberately select these sources from deep in the heart of the Habsburg lands or from along its periphery in a conscious effort to position the discussion at the boundary between the universal and the national, while

also turning to artists cognizant that their liminality accords them a vital social role as prognosticators of doom or delight via their often unguarded reflections or—just as often—as a function of their self-selection as cultural critics (Turner 110-111).

I hope this exploration will problematise the relationship of nationalism to European integration and address how the resonance of, as well as the antagonism towards, nationalism illustrates that nationalism's expression is not only—as Benedict Anderson once wrote—part of “a deep, horizontal comradeship” but that the intellectual and emotional impulses that lay behind its creation also reappear in a liberal pan-European project bound for irrelevance unless it is able to find a solution to the challenge of how to tie liberalism and populism (Anderson 7).

Europe's modern age begins with the explosion that is the French Revolution. However great this eruption may have been, its long-term significance lay not in the violence that it unleashed but in its successful consolidation of the theretofore politically marginalised bourgeoisie. As such, the Revolution's lasting importance lay in the consecration of a liberal ethos—the principle of liberty and the potential for equality—that would define Europe for the next two centuries despite efforts to the contrary.

Yet the primacy of the liberal ethos could not be accomplished through the work of artists and dreamers alone, also relying on a “bureaucratic turn” and its embedding in a common shared edifice that resulted in the necessity of creating a class of state workers to defend the newly triumphant liberal code (Gellner 19-20). Perhaps one of the earliest examples of the conflation of the bureaucratic with the artistic is best seen in the period of the Napoleonic Wars. As we know, Napoleon began his long battle with the rest of Europe at the turn of the nineteenth century. In so doing, he created a conflict that was at once territorial and ideological. In both ways, the conflict pitted the emergent modern state of France against a Europe certain of the threat to established aristocratic authority that Napoleon presented. What they perhaps failed to understand was that the threat lay not on the battlefield but in a deep and all-consuming liberal bureaucracy that was established at that moment but would become a vital feature of the modern age. The German philosopher Johann Fichte, writing in the wake of Napoleon's 1806 victory over Prussia that stimulated his nationalistic *Addresses to the German Nation*, suggested at the new guiding role that the liberal bureaucracy would play in the modern world while also foretelling their being overrun by populist national impulses:

Now, for the first time, therefore, it happens that the fundamental reconstruction of the nation is offered as a task to the educated classes, and if they were really to accept this offer, that, too, would happen for the first time. We shall find that these classes cannot calculate how long it will still remain in their power to place themselves at the head of this movement, since it is now almost prepared and ripe for proposal to the people, and is being practised on individuals from among the people; and the people will soon be able to help themselves without any assistance from us. (Fichte 17)

Even the full expression of Romantic Nationalism could not eradicate this liberal bureaucratic turn. For, in rejecting the Enlightenment's homogenising equality, Romantics were unable to destroy the impulse of individualism that liberalism had forged. The Confederation of the Rhine—the political structure so beholden to Napoleon that had signalled the end of the Holy Roman Empire in 1806—was a fertile ground for artistic Romantic expression while also being the centre of a new bureaucratic culture that had a hand in the creation of German nationalist sentiment. The Brothers Grimm—those giants of German Romantic literature—were as deeply indebted to an ethos of civil service imposed by Napoleon as they were to the Germanic legends they sculpted into the *Kinder- und Hausmärchen* (1812), known more generally as Grimm's Fairy Tales. And so despite their service to the King of Westphalia—Napoleon's youngest brother Jerome-Napoleon Bonaparte—they helped create a new national culture, illustrating already the tight bonds between bureaucratic service and artistic production as a common liberal reality bound the two seemingly disparate fields together (Schmidt Ihms 44). In their contradictory service to a foreign monarch while attempting to craft a national ethos, they also pointed to a fundamental paradox that would come to plague nationalism: the complexity of embedding oneself in a national community while in possession of the genius to transcend that very same community.

By the latter half of the nineteenth century, if not before, the middle class had triumphed and established a bureaucracy and artistic vision to correspond. But the middle-class liberal supremacy that

had been achieved was built upon a base of economic development that required two things: first, industry; and second, the hands of the many to operate the machines. As such, the nationalist project was massaged into a coherent narrative that encouraged the feeling of nationhood—patriotism—in the many so that they might continue to make the sacrifices that their state required.

But in the process of spreading nationalism by way of a series of populist symbolic constructions, the most introspective members of the bourgeoisie lost control of the very project that they had tried to guide, just as Fichte had prophesied. And so the artists and intellectuals of the middle class felt once again lost in the world, divorced from the many around them as their predecessors had been less than a century earlier. None less than Friedrich Nietzsche would express this sentiment precisely, mourning in the preface to his 1886 edition of *The Birth of Tragedy* how “the German spirit, which not long before had still had the will to dominate Europe and the strength to lead Europe, was just making its transition, under the pompous pretense of founding a *Reich*, to a leveling mediocrity, democracy, and “modern ideas”!” (25). Or, as Judit Frigyesi notes in the introduction to her study of Bela Bartok and Turn-of-the-Century Budapest, “The city becomes a dream world of the happy middle class, whose members frequent cafes, balls and operettas, listen to gypsy music at restaurants, watch the ladies dressed according to the new fashion of Paris or Vienna ...” and goes on to note that intellectuals saw “such a carefree life was absurd—it indicated the self-deception of a generation who remained indifferent to social reality” (Frigyesi 4).

But this “self-deception” is precisely what is absent from Gustav Mahler’s music. Indeed, Mahler commented on the fiction of what Frigyesi calls “happy fin-de-siecle Vienna” in his works, showing up the contradictions and ruptures within society that not only reflected but ultimately refracted the bourgeois artistic trends of the day. And as an imperial subject, perhaps Mahler could not have been anything else, having been born in 1860 in a German-speaking enclave of the Habsburg Empire (Kalischt, situated in the modern-day Czech Republic). His father was an alcohol distiller and merchant, a profession that, in musicologist Eric Werner’s colourful description, marked Mahler as “a provincial petit bourgeois” (261). By the mid-1870s, Gustav Mahler had moved to Vienna to continue his musical education. After completing his studies in 1878, he worked his way through much of Central Europe, taking ever more important musical posts until finally returning to Vienna in 1897 and assuming the position of conductor of the Vienna Opera—but only after taking the required step of converting to Catholicism.

And while his work as a conductor—as well as the anti-semitic attacks of the day—point to a tension with wider society, it is in the music that he wrote that we find the greatest revelations. For his music—mixing Jewish, German, Bohemian, and Austrian elements—plainly reveals his conflicted and contested identity. Time and again, Mahler’s musical themes interrupt one another, each vying for—but never achieving—supremacy. Perhaps nowhere is this clearer than in the third movement of Mahler’s first symphony, the musical themes interfering with each other in a way that the eminent conductor and scholar Leon Botstein says reflects “the attendant extramusical implications” of Mahler’s music (25). Perhaps there is truth in Mahler’s apocryphal quote—sometimes attributed to his wife Alma—that “I am thrice homeless, as a native of Bohemia in Austria, as an Austrian among Germans, and as a Jew throughout the world. Everywhere an intruder, never welcomed” (Mahler 109).

This sentiment of alienation reappears in Franz Kafka’s work. As noted at the outset of this work, Kafka’s *The Castle* outwardly concerns itself with the tale of a Land Surveyor who is called to a village to work. It seems, however, that his summoning is the result of an administrative reality in which the inefficiency of the system has resulted in his arriving long after the need for a Land Surveyor had disappeared, if it had even existed at all; as the Superintendent notes “You’ve been taken on as Land Surveyor, as you say, but, unfortunately, we have no need of a Land Surveyor” (Kafka 79). In essence, the Land Surveyor’s place in this society is in error. The novel is not, though, devoted to his securing employment but to an exploration of the Land Surveyor’s inability to embed himself within the small community in this unnamed town, just as Mahler had perhaps failed to understand his place in his community.

I believe, therefore, that the bureaucratic inertia articulated in Kafka’s novel is more than simply a criticism of the Habsburg Empire’s failed “institutional nationalism.” Rather, I contend that in essence Kafka was not only mocking the Habsburg attempt to craft a political nationalism in an era of the ethnic nation but critiquing the very nature of nationalism itself. The novel is therefore an exploration of Kafka’s

inability to embed himself within the national community, just as Mahler had perhaps failed to understand his place in his world. The essential characteristic here, in my opinion, is the sense of alienation that the main protagonist feels throughout the novel.

Yet there lies too great a temptation to frame this idea of alienation as one that unites only Central European Jews such as Kafka and Mahler who struggled to embed themselves in their wider milieu. So limited, one would miss the opportunity to universalise the discussion and use their art to better understand the project of European nationalism and community construction better.

A number of years ago, I came across a short article by Henry A. Lea—himself an exile from Nazi Germany—that amongst other things discusses the shared perspectives in evidence in Kafka and Mahler's work. In his work, Lea points out something critical that I had perhaps felt but never clearly seen before; namely, he commented on how the work of both artists shared a “radically subjective” perspective that gives both a “hermetic or enveloping quality” (348-49).

I believe that Lea is on to something really critical that speaks not to just these artists and their works but to the wider problem that I am trying to comment on here. Simply put, I think that the perspectives of both artists (as well as perhaps countless others in the period, such as Søren Kierkegaard earlier in the century) were shaped by a sense of alienation that modernity had brought on. This condition is perhaps best understood via Emile Durkheim's positivistic framework for Anomic Suicide, wherein he argues for the appearance of periods in which there is a fundamental disagreement between social conditions and the expectations of the individual. In these periods of disharmony (“when society is disturbed by some painful crisis or by beneficent but abrupt transitions”) Durkheim posits that society is unable to exercise its moral authority upon man, leaving him stressed to the point of “self-destruction.” (“Whenever serious readjustments take place in the social order, whether or not due to a sudden growth or to an unexpected catastrophe, men are more inclined to self-destruction.” 246)

Of course, Durkheim is not suggesting that all men turn to suicide in such periods. I would, however, suggest that the sense of instability identified by Durkheim may be behind the inward turn by sensitive thinkers such as Kafka and Mahler. Indeed, these artists may have turned ever more inwards during a period of ongoing instability in which nationalism, the very ideology that these artists' ancestors had birthed to synchronise their feelings with a wider moral imperative, was no longer available to them due to the changes it had undergone to achieve its popularity.

Now some might argue that my examples are geographically precise. That is, that the inward turn by Kafka and Mahler was one of the responses to the death throes of an imperial Habsburg culture that failed to appeal to many seeking to find their place in society as the nineteenth century unfolded. But I posit that this is not a matter of Habsburg culture per se. Rather, the attempt to craft an imperial-cum-political nationalism was—whatever its novelty—little more than another nationalist expression that could no longer include those artists and intellectuals who adhered to the view that liberalism was meant to bear a universal imprint. And so while sensitive artists may have turned inwards, the *lumpenproletariat* turned towards the appeal of an imagined community—a community that they shared with millions of others who they would never meet but could be imagined into existence via cultural, social, and political utterances and articulations.

And from this came the frightening nationalism of the modern period—the nationalism that would allow millions to kill countless others in a contest for political, cultural and social supremacy. And the nationalism that Richard Coudenhove-Kalergi railed against. Some of course might say—aware of Coudenhove-Kalergi's background as a mixed-race aristocrat who considered the whole of Europe his homeland—that he was bound to fail to fit into any one national community. But to me the fascinating thing is that both the artistic expressions of the final years of the Austro-Hungarian Empire as well as the cultural and political expressions of the interwar period can be seen as linked, led by cultural and intellectual elites failing to find a sense of community in the nation. Moreover, the attempt to create a community of elites was no longer to be found in the nation but in a new bureaucratic and administrative structure meant to transcend it.

Seen through this lens, the resonance of Coudenhove-Kalergi's Pan-Europa movement amongst intellectuals and artists of the interwar period is both predictable and a striking revelation. Artists and intellectuals of the day—men such as Thomas Mann and Albert Einstein—felt, to paraphrase British poet

T.S. Eliot, “a hollowness” that the nation could not fill. Instead, Pan-Europa allowed them to embed themselves in a different type of community less defined by borders and antagonisms and more by way of an unbroken connection to the liberal values they continued to respect in a time of great turmoil. Indeed, the Pan-Europa movement represented a return to a conception of community that rejected the xenophobic turn of nationalism over the course of the nineteenth century, replacing it with a supranationalism very much akin—tellingly—to the cosmopolitanism of the Enlightenment and of liberalism.

Moreover, and perhaps even more surprising, is the fact that there seems to have been a common worldview that once again tied together substrata of bureaucrats and artists, as had occurred at the dawn of the nineteenth century. Yes, Coudenhove-Kalergi was no artist, yet his vision appealed not only to artists but to others who seem to have rejected the divisiveness of nationalism. His movement therefore became a veritable constellation of great political and artistic minds united by a common—though admittedly dogmatic—vision of the supremacy of liberal European civilisation.

The trajectory of Pan-Europa—its interwar apex achieved in Aristide Briand’s September 1929 speech to the League of Nations wherein he called for a federal restructuring of Europe—was most obviously interrupted by the illiberalism inherent in the rise of Hitler’s ferocious nationalism and the horrors of war. Yet the moment also brought with it the very type of reflection necessary to re-orient European intellectuals towards the creation of a new, anti-populist—and admittedly elitist—project guided by the spirit of the Enlightenment. The Austrian writer Stefan Zweig, just before taking his own life in Brazil in 1942, would conclude:

I have seen the great mass ideologies grow and spread before my eyes—Fascism in Italy, National Socialism in Germany, Bolshevism in Russia, and above all else the arch-plague nationalism which has poisoned the flower of European culture. I was forced to be a defenceless, helpless witness of the most inconceivable decline of humanity into a barbarism which we had believed long since forgotten, with its deliberate and programmatic dogma of anti-humanitarianism (7).

And so out of the ashes of this conflict the European movement was reborn. The end of the Second World War brought forth a new movement towards European unification that brought together the liberal-cum-artist and liberal-cum-bureaucrat yet again. The Hague Conference of 1948 seemed to be the great expression of a new liberal project that would create a new Europe, undergirded by a profound belief in the dangers of the collective and the liberties of the individual. Headed by a functionary—and bureaucratic—liberal ethos, the Schuman Declaration, the ECSC, and the EEC have all led to today’s European Union.

But the populism of the age could not be so easily overcome. Socialism remained a draw, serving as a counterbalance to the nationalism that had horrified and ultimately destroyed so many, though it too was ultimately driven by the desire to create solidarity among vast swaths of people. Its appeal was also very much compromised by its being identified as an instrument of the Soviet Bloc meant not as a path to amelioration but to subterfuge. Nationalism too retained its appeal amongst the many who had seen fascism not as the logical conclusion to the nation but solely as an aberration. Even intellectuals who embraced European integration in the early post-war years failed to understand how the ideals of populism might stand in the way of a re-envisioning of Europe; at the 1948 Hague Conference Salvador de Madariaga invoked not the project itself but the peoples of Europe in saying “This Europe must be born. And she will, when Spaniards say ‘our Chartres’, Englishmen say ‘our Cracow’, Italians ‘our Copenhagen’ and Germans our Bruges’. Then Europe will live.” Also in attendance at this conference, Winston Churchill expressed a similar populist sentiment in proclaiming that “Europe can only be united by the heartfelt wish and vehement expression of the great majority of all the peoples, of all the parties, in all the freedom-loving countries no matter where they dwell or how they vote.”

Yet critically and in my view decisively, this populist sentiment was pushed aside in the early years of European integration as the project was guided by a dense bureaucracy bent on the federation of Europe. Indeed, the early years of European integration were pursued in an atmosphere of quasi-secrecy—as though Europeans themselves could not be trusted with a knowledge of the project’s goals (Shore, 207). As such, the institutional arrangement of Europe revolved around a series of institutions—the High Authority/European Commission, the Council of Ministers, the Common Assembly/European Parliament, and the European

Court of Justice—that only slowly achieved ever greater importance as the veins of bureaucracy spread into the sinews of the then six nation-states that composed the European Community. These institutions were largely populated by functionaries who performed their functions carefully and diligently, as though compelled to keep the secret of European integration to themselves (Mancini and Keeling 175; Shore 208).

But as in the nineteenth century, such a bureaucratic arrangement could not last. So, by the time that Europe was experiencing a set of structural problems in the 1970s (known as “Eurosclerosis”), the solution sought was to democratize the structure and construct a “people’s Europe” by way of a renewed push for togetherness and—critically—a series of symbolic acts meant to persuade the people of their affiliation with Europe (Tindemans 26; Adonnino 3). The institutions, too, began a process of closer engagement with the European citizenry, first by way of a series of critical European court rulings beginning in the 1960s (Alter 126-127) and then via direct and democratic elections to the European Parliament beginning in 1979. This trend continued through the 1980s and 1990s, as European Commission President Jacques Delors launched numerous populist campaigns such as the ERASMUS student-exchange program with the goal of creating a populist and popular EU edifice.

These efforts, however, seem to have done little to propel integration to a new level of success. Indeed, though the EU has travelled a long way and made much progress in maintaining some semblance of peace throughout much of Europe for well over half a century, its basic antagonism with the idea of nationalism has failed to go away. On the contrary, the tension here might be greater than ever before. As a consequence, the very efforts to re-create the contours of the nation yet simultaneously forge a universalist spirit at a European level have led to nationalist retrenchments and outright mockery of the European projects to create anthems, flags, and spectacles and to remind Europeans of their connection to a shared culture (Shore 227-229). The most recent setbacks—beginning with the attempt to create a Constitution in 2004 and ending most recently with Brexit—have clearly illustrated the cost of trying to hurriedly and forcefully democratise and thereby popularise a project born in the anti-democratic elitism of liberal humanism.

So will we ever resolve this tension? My feeling is—as suggested at the outset—a firm negative. Why? I think there are two inter-related reasons here. First, as I noted earlier in the article and which I feel I do not need to elaborate too carefully beyond pointing to the recent Brexit cataclysm—nationalism’s success over the past two centuries has resulted in an insurmountable tension between nationalism and any project, such as supranationalism, that seeks to limit the former’s supremacy however much it may be built upon a similar liberal kernel. Second, artists have not felt compelled to engage deeply with the European project, failing to see in it any real potential as a source of community in the way that their nineteenth-century forebears had seen nationalism as a possible solution to their isolation near the beginning of the modern age. Instead, one sees an eerie parallel to the nineteenth century, with a great many artists strengthened not by the *Volk* but by their distance from it. Thus, we again see a long evolving turn away from the institutional and a faith in the people and toward a return to the subjective and the personal, much as had occurred with Mahler and Kafka. Moreover, the distrust for any sort of institutionalisation or a common spirit in evidence from the many behind the Iron Curtain has further compromised the possibility of any broadly applicable sentiment—whether liberal or socialist—from achieving success.

Let me explain this critical last point by way of an example. In 1993 the Polish filmmaker Krzysztof Kieslowski created *Blue*. This film, the first of his Trilogy respectively building upon the French Revolutionary themes of Liberty, Equality and Fraternity, tells the story of a recently widowed young woman who completes her husband’s score for the Unification of Europe. She does so, however, not in celebration of the continent but as part of a personal narrative of liberation—as a way of understanding her individual place in society in the immediate wake of the death of both her husband and child in an accident. Neither the film nor the piece of music is therefore a work celebrating anything other than the idea of *personal* liberty. It is, in sum, not only an exploration of the individual’s place in society, just as Kafka and Mahler’s works had been, but also a recognition of the complexity of cultural and intellectual elites to embed themselves in the community, whether national or supranational. In the end, the artist turns away from the collective and toward the personal as a sanctuary, with isolation becoming the only true form of liberty.

So we are not therefore speaking of a conceptual model of change that points towards overcoming nationalism or of building a united continent. Rather, we are returning to the idea of how the individual

fits—or fails to fit—into their community, whether national or beyond. In essence, we find ourselves returning to the classic model of liberalism based principally on the search for the natural rights to which we are entitled, albeit only in isolation.

The modern European cannot but dwell on this and see that the problem is not therefore explicitly one of political structures but of the way in which man finds meaning in the modern age. The nation was an experiment that tried to solve the problem of the essential void by creating a solidarity that linked not only those that belonged to the invented nation but all men by way of a shared set of liberal values. Yet the utility of the nation was too great for it to maintain so delicate a balance. Instead, the people were separated one from another by a set of self-understandings as arbitrary as they were vicious. At this point, the construction lost its credibility to those that had birthed the nation at its outset, artists and intellectuals turning inward to question the ever-growing distance they saw between themselves and their alleged brethren. The traumatic events of the twentieth century brought to light for many the brutishness of nationalism. Yet the supranational did not possess the requisite power to erode the authority with which nationalism had been endowed, however horrible its consequences. Despite—or perhaps because of—their awareness of supranationalism's immaturity, postwar integrationists consciously kept to themselves in a new type of shared loneliness, attempting to build the base of a new liberal continental solidarity almost in secret. Their hesitation to engage with the people at a critical juncture early in the postwar period could be seen as key to the European project's failure. But in truth it may have been instead their inability to recognise the historical patterns that would have illustrated that the liberalism of the modern age is deeply contested and that its establishment is fraught with peril, if at all possible on anything more than an individual basis.

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