



Universiteit
Leiden
The Netherlands

Imaginaries of a perpetual crisis and the future of Europe: on the project of reimagining Europe

Tsagdis, G.; Uljée, R.; Zantvoort, F.W.

Citation

Tsagdis, G., Uljée, R., & Zantvoort, F. W. (2025). Imaginaries of a perpetual crisis and the future of Europe: on the project of reimagining Europe. In *SUNY series in Contemporary French Thought* (pp. 1-10). New York: SUNY Press. Retrieved from <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/4211772>

Version: Publisher's Version

License: [Licensed under Article 25fa Copyright Act/Law \(Amendment Taverne\)](#)

Downloaded from: <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/4211772>

Note: To cite this publication please use the final published version (if applicable).

Chapter Title: Introduction: Imaginaries of a Perpetual Crisis and the Future of Europe: On the Project of Reimagining Europe

Chapter Author(s): Georgios Tsagdis, Rozemund Uljée and Bart Zantvoort

Book Title: Reimagining Europe

Book Subtitle: Thinking in Crisis

Book Editor(s): Georgios Tsagdis, Rozemund Uljée, Bart Zantvoort

Published by: State University of New York Press. (2024)

Stable URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/jj.23276099.3>

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at <https://about.jstor.org/terms>



JSTOR

State University of New York Press is collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *Reimagining Europe*

Introduction

Imaginaries of a Perpetual Crisis and the Future of Europe: On the Project of Reimagining Europe

GEORGIOS TSAGDIS, ROZEMUND ULJÉE, BART ZANTVOORT

Europe is in crisis; indeed, Europe finds itself amidst a perpetual, overlaying manifold of thematized and unthematized crises. Some of these directly concern its territory and identity: the refugee exodus and the more recent invasion of Ukraine have brought Europe to, and arguably beyond, a breaking point. In parallel, “supplementary” discursive crises of nationalism, xenophobia, Islamophobia, revisionism, and diverse forms of insularity have both proceeded from and precipitated new forms of cultural-political desolation. Next to these geography-bound crises, Europe has shared in the anxieties wrought by the pandemic and the deeper agony of climate collapse and the sixth extinction. Despite bearing less of their brunt, due to geographic and economic parapets affording temporary shelter, Europe recognizes that all that was is no more.

As its global privilege erodes by ever greater waves of misery crushing upon its shores, Europe is swept up against the straits of its history, having to confront the closure of what, looking backwards, one may determine as the “European project.” This project, notwithstanding its Greco-Roman, Christian Medieval, and other prehistories, ran roughly from the late Renaissance and the global spread of colonial domination, up until the ruins of the Second World War. Since then,¹ Europe has wallowed in a series of epilogues, weighed down by a past that cannot be overcome. Faltering at this historic threshold, in Europe one has

come to realize both from within and from without that the next step is without a “beyond,” tangled up in the immanent, shared trouble of planetary politics.

Europe’s own philosophical tradition is primed to understand this suspended step as a crisis of spirit, effecting a dissolution of Europe’s self-understanding. In Derrida’s words, this is the moment “when the movement of Spirit fails and European discourse and its decisions do *not* coincide with Spirit’s return to itself in absolute knowledge.”² At this juncture, the crisis of European spirit should constitute an awakening call, the sounding of an alarm. The crisis of spirit should—at last and at least—be a moment of *krinein*, a moment when the need for a judgment is understood; the moment, when, perhaps, a decision (if only perhaps provisional and incalculable, threatened and threatening) is reached. At present, however, the horizon of a decision appears to recede interminably. The crisis of spirit indicates, precisely, a crisis of crisis, a state in which the recuperation of the manifold crises has become impossible.

Indeed, the very notion of crisis and its constitutive temporality have undergone a transformation, thereby calling attention to the paradoxical nature of its meaning. Drawing on the intertwining of a medical and a religious paradigm, *krisis* has always designated an exceptional moment or phase, a moment of “decision.” In the Hippocratic tradition, the word referred to that moment in the course of an illness, following or anticipating intervention, when it was decided whether the patient would succumb or revive. In the Christian tradition, the word invoked the Last Judgment, the moment upon which the eternal fate of souls was to be decided and, by the same token, the course of secular time concluded and replaced by the eternity of heavenly glory. However, the moment of divine judgment was understood as a *revelation*, inasmuch as the fate of the souls was not so much imposed upon them, as it was made apparent. Not only in the Calvinist doctrine of predestination, but in all denominations, the moment of Revelation shows forth what the divine economy and the path of each soul has already made inescapable; similarly, in the case of illness, in the decisive moment, no decision is taken; rather, the fate of the patient and the thrust of the illness, as a whole, are revealed. Upon the moment of crisis, no one decides, yet all is decided. A rupture between a before and an after is effected.

Today, however, we inhabit a new temporality of crisis and a new mode of indecision. Instead of a passage, crisis designates at present an enduring state, a constant emergency and permanent uncertainty, indefi-

nately extended into the future. Thus, the paradox of crisis, by definition the eventual disruption of normalcy, is normalized in all domains of social life, becoming the *Leitbegriff* of modern politics. At this point, judgment is divorced from the idea of resolution and repeatedly postponed; as a consequence, the prospect of a decision diminishes evermore, tangled in labyrinthine, principally bureaucratic processes of decisions that never conclude. Proceduralism, devolution, and inclusiveness allow everyone to decide, without anything being decided. From waste management to border control (sometimes indistinguishable from one another), the exercise of power is “algorithmized” even where digital algorithms are absent. The diffusion of sovereignty and the dominion of a cybernetic governmentality mean that in the ocean of crisis there is no *kybernētēs*, no helmsman, no decision. Europe is no longer a continent, but a tempestuous sea, a conglomerate of abiding eddies.

The naturalization of crisis announces itself as inevitability; in order to numb the truth that what was will no longer be, Europe proclaims about the permanent crisis: “It was always thus and always thus will be.” In its inevitability, crisis has become an instrument of rule, serving to legitimize those governmental processes that dispossess citizens and deprive them even further of any possibility of decision—if the state has resolved not to decide, citizens should not take the possibility of a decision into their hands. Thus, responsibility is hollowed out, and meaning, or rather sense, is blunted.

Historical and linguistic sense are among the first senses to be distorted. One’s very relation to history, historical consciousness, and historical conscience at once, as well as the capacity to utter and articulate what is politically significant become exceedingly difficult and therefore exceedingly necessary. As Fredric Jameson remarks, this process entails a weakening of history itself, resembling a schizophrenic position, in which the subject is essentially reduced to an experience of material signifiers, referring to nothing other than “pure and unrelated presents in time.”³ In this depthlessness of time, we are witnessing the tragedy of European history as a farcical rerun, the aporia of language confronting the aporia of history. We cannot speak; we must speak; we shall speak. The question “What is Europe?” must return to and measure up against the question of entelechy: “What was it to be?” If something of the potential to reimagine Europe is to be conjured up, it can only happen in dialogue with the imaginaries that have guided Europe to its abiding crisis. The questions of internal and external borders, of homogeneity and

coherence, identity and equality, legitimacy and rights, democracy and representation can only be raised insofar as the question of Europe, its destiny and its destination, is raised as a whole, from its forever receding origin to its incalculable future.

We cannot evade or ignore these questions. Philosophy, in turn, cannot evade or ignore the old, profound, and intimate nexus that has tethered it to Europe's constitution and destiny. Throughout European philosophical history, Europe as project, idea, and ideal has been thought in tandem with the essential task of philosophy. In the works of Kant, Hegel, Husserl, Heidegger, and others, we find a conception of philosophy as a science of universality and Europe as the place where this universality is destined to unfold itself. In this manner, Europe has always served as the privileged domain of universal reason. Europe must now mobilize all of its resources to consider its *locality* in the face of not only the deterritorializing forces of global capital but also of the abiding and necessary effort of postcolonialism to break open the circumscribed space that for centuries constituted the center from which a material and intellectual domination of the expansive horizon of the colonized periphery was effected. Accordingly, the decolonization of philosophy is a task of liberation, incumbent on every non-European thinker, as much as it is a European vital duty.

The stakes of this duty are painfully palpable, as the European response to its different crises remains beholden to its history of exceptional universalism and the corresponding question of who is to be included within it. The motto of the EU, "unity in diversity," at best facile in its vagueness, becomes actively malicious when the self-understanding of the European community is premised unequivocally on its philosophical tradition, when universal reason is viewed as Europe's essence, and a foreigner is welcomed to the European community, only insofar as they conform or assimilate to this reason—a particularly European version of the "good immigrant." Francois Fillon, an erstwhile French presidential candidate, summed up this entrenched disposition when he stated that France is not a multicultural society and that foreigners must assimilate because "when you come to someone's house, by courtesy, you don't take over." Welcoming the other only insofar as they do not disrupt the European way of thought and life, and thus, by extension the European body politic, is premised on a weaponization of the universality of European reason, which keeps exploiting the "other" in ways that remain eerily similar to the colonial use of this very same reason. From the incapacity

of decision making on the supranational level to the rise of nationalism within its states and its inhumane response to migration, Europe shows at one and the same time it is growing ever more monolithic and ever more disjointed. Unless the aforementioned vital duty of confronting its philosophical legacy is assumed, a duty that involves the realization that this legacy cannot lead to a singular Europe and does not demarcate a privileged interior and interiority, this contradiction will continue to deepen.

The aim of the present edited collection is to undertake a fraction of this task. All its contributions seek to reimagine Europe beyond essentialism. Some of its chapters do so by investigating what remains to be thought of in the works of Plato, Descartes, Hegel, Husserl, Heidegger, and Patočka, trying to identify the ways these thinkers can aid us in contesting Europe from *within*. Other chapters turn to postwar philosophers such as Derrida, Agamben, and Esposito, who seek to think Europe from a perspective of *limits*, *thresholds* or *margins*, in order to open a thought beyond the European closure and to explore the possibility of a community, established not under a transcendental signifier (God, man, the race), but rather guided by difference. We hope that you will find each contribution insightful both in itself and in its place in the overall project.

The Structure of the Present Volume

The contributions to this edited collection do not allow for a very strict thematic division. We have, however, decided to divide the book in three parts, each part emphasizing another aspect of the discourses on Europe within the philosophical literature. The chapters in the first part, titled “Idea, Memory, Method,” engage, in different ways, with the question whether there is such a thing as an originary idea of Europe that could be discovered within its own tradition. In the first chapter, titled “The Divided Origin: Re-membling Plato’s Europe,” Georgios Tsagdis queries the foundations of the Greek *polis* and its significance for the Hellenic world, in order to prepare a ground on which its legacy can be placed and understood and from which its relevance for contemporary Europe becomes apparent. It does so by looking at the *polis in motion*, that is, at war, or rather, at a series of internal, external, and fictional wars, the way they are cast in the Platonic corpus and more specifically in

the dialogues *Timeaus*, *Critias* and *Menexenus*, as the backdrop against which political life can be set into relief. Guided by the work of Nicole Loraux and Pierre Vidal-Naquet, this exploration enables, accordingly, an understanding of the ways in which the polis fabulates its glory and remembers its wounds, in order to constitute itself, to establish its origin and thus demarcate its political space and historic destiny. As Tsagdis argues, the legacy of these modes of originary remembrance continue to inform our European imaginaries.

The second chapter, written by Vera Bühlmann, is titled “*Entwurf* of the Method and Ethics of Its Discourse: Notes on Cartesian Rationalism, Reconsidered.” Here, the question is asked whether we can think of Europe as a project, and if yes, of what sort—a utopian one? One of infinite critique? A pragmatic one of *realpolitik*? An exclusively European, a global, or even a universal one? This article characterizes the political form of Europe as an architectonic form, in Massimo Cacciari’s sense of an *Entwurf*. Such architectonic *Entwurf* is more than a construction in terms of its applied logics (reasoning), in that it keeps “feeling the pull of its own throw.” Can there be an aesthetics to such a “feeling-torn,” in the sense that “feeling the pull of the throw” would not be entirely passive, but could also form an active ethics and logics? The essay explores how such an aesthetics can take shape through a relation to the Cartesian notion of *methodic doubt*. Engaging with Descartes’s commonly overlooked *World* (1629–33), it examines the role of impersonal and geometric fabulation, with which Descartes proposes to accommodate one’s own conduct of reason discursively and architectonically. Accordingly, the essay proposes to address geometric fabulation, its objective ideation, and its notion of an impersonal subject as the reference pole for an architectonics of political form. It relates the idea of an architectonic aesthetics (of how to feel the pull of the throw in an *Entwurf*) to the Cartesian notion of methodic doubt, foregrounding that such a method proceeds in discursive pursuit of an indefinite objective, rather than being guided by dogma or by formalism. The overall interest is to examine if and how we can find helpful direction today with respect to our contemporary impasses as to how political form is to be reasoned adequately—and how to think of Europe as a project worthwhile to continue imagining.

Frank Chouraqui’s chapter, “Europe as the Crisis of Play,” introduces a hypothesis about the essence of European modernity, namely, that it should be defined as the cultural invention of seriousness. The essay begins by examining one of the things that we take to be ques-

tioning the very essence of modern Europe, namely, the current refugee crisis and its effects on European societies and institutions, including reactionary populism. Chouraqui suggests that what this crisis indicates by contrast is that Europe is to be defined as a social, historical, and existential compound informed by the mismatch of care and action and proceeds to examine the relations between Europe so defined and the more traditional Nietzschean idea of Europe as nihilism. Proposing that the resulting notion of Europe is most consonant with a remark from Johan Huizinga's *Homo Ludens* (1938), where the latter seems to define European modernity as the dismantlement of play, Chouraqui shows how the examination of the refugee crisis and nihilism on the one hand and of play on the other can reflect fruitfully on each other.

Riccardo Villa's contribution, "Of Ships and Palaces: Inverted Images of Europe in Crisis," describes the image of Europe in terms of architectonics, in which history is not just a reconstruction, but a double movement of construction and deconstruction. Drawing on Carl Schmitt, Manfredo Tafuri, and Massimo Cacciari, Villa understands Europe as *project*: something that breaks away from established grounds of evaluation, while still feeling "the pull of the throw." Thus, Europe finds itself beyond historical, analytical, or geopolitical definitions, while nevertheless producing its future in an agonistic entwinement with such definitions.

The chapters in the second part of the book, "Europe's Other(s)," deal with the question of Europe in relation to its (self-)difference. Thomas Mercier's contribution is titled "Europe and Its Phantoms: Walter Mignolo's Decolonial Critique of Jacques Derrida's Deconstruction." Mercier asks how we can rethink "Europe" after postcolonial and decolonial critiques exposed the intimately colonial dimension of the European project—a project that has advanced in the world under the name "modernity." In this perspective, "reimagining Europe" would suggest breaking away from a certain image or self-image of Europe, one indexed on universalism, Eurocentrism, and colonialism, so as to imagine a "provincialized" Europe, at last. This would be a Europe from which former colonies would be "de-linked," as suggested by Walter Mignolo, in order for Europe to become what it has perhaps always been: just one culture among others, a regional space and a local history that merely imagined itself as global power and took over the phantasmatic role of forefather and civilizational leader.

In "Europe without Eurocentrism? An Essay in Critical-Colonial Studies," Chiara Bottici and Benoît Challand argue that the critical

question of our time is not rejecting or supporting the European project but rather trying to understand the possibilities that such a process opens (or closes) for those who are *inside* as well as *outside* of it. The chapter adds therefore another, yet often underexplored, layer of criticism, namely, a critical-colonial approach. By showing how Europe was created in its colonial peripheries and still thrives there, Bottici and Challand propose to look at the project of European integration with a double lens. In particular, they reflect on the theories produced by those who are *in* or *in the margins* of, but not *from*, Europe, to rethink the European project in a global context marked by mass migration, challenges to established forms of citizenship, and the new forms of oppression.

Agnes Czajka's "A Europe of Refugees" asks what Europe does and should stand for and what it means to be European. Czajka asks furthermore to what (histories, ideas, and ideals) and to whom (to which "selves" and to which "others") Europe is responsible or indebted. She finds that although, at times, such "soul-searching" risks, and indeed comes dangerously close to, the narcissism and navel-gazing that typifies Eurocentrism, it is not devoid of critical potential. Focusing on the current "refugee crisis," the chapter explores the critical potential of bringing together and interrogating the work of Derrida (on Europe and crisis), Nietzsche (on the "good European"), and Agamben (on the refugee). In his gloss on Arendt's "We Refugees," Agamben explores the possibility of looking to Europe "not as an impossible 'Europe of nations' . . . but as an aterritorial or extraterritorial space in which all the residents of the European states . . . would be in a position of exodus or refuge, and the status of European would mean the citizen's being-in-exodus . . . like in a Leiden jar or in a Moebius strip, where exterior and interior are indeterminate."⁴ Bringing Agamben's work into conversation with that of Derrida and Nietzsche, the chapter explores the critical potential of figuring Europe as a Europe of refugees.

The third and final part of the book is titled "After the End" and questions, from different angles, how to think Europe, and the idea it has of itself, in terms of its finitude, its decay, and its possible revival. In his contribution, "The End of Europe: Herder and Hegel on Progress and Decline," Bart Zantvoort remarks that the idea of Europe has long been thought from the perspective of its end, not just in the sense of the telos or goal of its trajectory of historical and philosophical development, but also in the sense of Europe's decline or demise. When conceptualizing the decline of Europe, thinkers such as Nietzsche, Spengler, Heidegger,

and Horkheimer and Adorno will readily come to mind. However, as this chapter shows, the narrative of decline goes back much further: it is rooted in the historicism of Hegel and Herder and is bound up in a curious way with the progressive notions of historical development that both these thinkers share. This chapter will explore Herder and Hegel's ideas on Europe and cultural development and decline in order to shed light on three issues: first, the way in which the narrative of cultural decline and the decline of Europe are interwoven with the notion of historical development and progress in history; second, the organic model of the rise and decline of cultures developed by Herder and Hegel and its relation to the narrative of universal history; and third, the historical law by which, according to Herder and Hegel, cultures decline and what this can tell us about the decline of Europe.

Ovidiu Stanciu's essay, "The Ends of Europe: On Patočka's Concept of Post-Europe," lays out the main tenets of Patočka's discussion of the concept of "post-Europe" and "post-European humanity" as they emerge from his late works *Heretical Essays in the Philosophy of History*, *Plato and Europe*, and *Europe and Post-Europe*. Stanciu insists on the intimate link established between the political end of Europe and the intrinsic finitude of the European historical project. He reconstructs Patočka's philosophical genealogy of Europe and post-Europe and explain that his diagnosis of an "end of Europe" rests on a critical discussion of the teleological narrative of Europe advanced by Husserl in his *Crisis*. Finally, Stanciu attempts to make sense of Patočka's thesis that the demise of Europe does not foreclose the possibility of a renewal, that even after its historical collapse, there still remains a "specific future for Europe."

The third essay in this part is by Lorenzo Girardi. His chapter, "Patočka, the Second World War, and the European Project," provides an evaluation of the Second World War as a turning point in Europe's spiritual and political life, as envisaged by Patočka. Girardi argues that Patočka's concept of "solidarity of the shaken" needs to be actively given shape and institutionalized so as to make it a factor in history, as Patočka puts it. The way this has arguably taken place is discussed in a manner that might account for Patočka's pessimism, while also linking it to his so-far-underdiscussed indications of the importance of political institutions. Girardi links this to the use and abuse of reference to the Second World War and the Holocaust in contemporary discourse in and on Europe.

Thomas Telios's chapter, "Solidarity as Freedom: Jürgen Habermas, Jean-Luc Nancy and the Future(s) of the European Project" begins with

the claim “We have never been European” in order to dismantle the Habermasian European project down to its elements and trace its limitations back to what Telios calls Habermas’s “political solipsism.” While, in toto, Habermas’s ethics is pluralist qua its discursivity, its epistemology remains solipsistic qua its universal-pragmatist epistemological assumptions. This also has far-reaching consequences regarding which political model of identity should be furthered. Telios shows that Habermas’s new concept of a “*legally constituted civic solidarity*” that came to replace his older moral understanding of solidarity cannot rectify these problems. Telios argues that, nevertheless, the concept of solidarity needs to be upheld. In the last section, he turns to Nancy’s concept of freedom and interprets it as a model for European solidarity that results in the creation of a third space, where the differences of the various national states, while being respected, encounter each other and give rise to a shared and common *European form of life*.

Rozemund Uljée’s essay, “The Promise of Europe,” seeks to demonstrate, with reference to Derrida, that despite its troubled past, Europe still holds a promise for philosophy. The aims of this chapter are twofold: the historical aim is to trace the philosophical self-understanding of Europe with regards to universality throughout its history. The philosophical aim consists in showing how the notion of the promise reveals how Europe can no longer be thought in teleological terms. In other words: Europe does not work as a transcendental schema that regulates our historical experience of meaning. Instead, as Uljée argues, Derrida’s account of the promise, and the temporal structure that belongs to it, shows that what Europe is and aspires to be must be invented anew each time.

Notes

1. Undoubtedly, every origin is preceded by another origin; the first always appears as second. Accordingly, the prologue of the epilogue is already written by modernist art and philosophy, as new modes of existence coalesce around the First World War.

2. Jacques Derrida, *The Other Heading: Reflections on Today’s Europe*, trans. Anne-Pascale Brault and Michael Naas (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992), 31.

3. F. Jameson, *Postmodernism, or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1991).

4. Giorgio Agamben, “We Refugees,” *Symposium* 49, no. 2 (1995): 118.