

The Pursuit of Europe: A History

By Anthony Pagden. Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2022. Pp. 432. Hardcover £25.00. ISBN: 978-0198757665.

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Any work on the history of ideas, perceptions, and representations of Europe is a welcome contribution to the field – especially in these troubled times and especially in the anglophone world. This is still more the case when it comes from a well-known intellectual historian and an expert in early modern history. Anthony Pagden has written a compelling, informative, and thoroughly enjoyable account of the complex path(s) taken by ideas about Europe and European identity/ies from the eighteenth century to the present. Dissecting and analysing the works of an array of scholars, from Voltaire, Montesquieu, Gibbon, Herder, and Kant, to Hegel, Guizot, Mazzini, Valéry, and Benda, finishing with Derrida and Habermas, Pagden offers his readers an elegant account of an extremely complex subject matter. Yet, importantly, while this book is essentially meant as an overview, it is more than a mere narrative, not least because it is studded with thought-provoking references to the works of present-day philosophers and social theorists, casting light on a variety of different questions that the author and the readers face as they proceed.

Pagden's point of departure is the Age of Enlightenment – in itself a contentious notion with which he is very familiar. With this choice, he is on well-trodden ground. Indeed, Federico Chabod, in his lectures held at the University of Milan between 1943 and 1944, which later became the classic *Storia dell'idea d'Europa* (1961), adopted the same starting point. And so too did, much more recently, Gerard Delanty (*Formations of European Modernity* [2013]). Such a choice is, of course, based on a series of assumptions and implies a specific definition of what Europe is. In particular, Pagden identifies the Enlightenment as the cradle of a set of values that were intended to form a secular, tolerant, free, and cosmopolitan society (see his *The Enlightenment and Why it Still Matters* [2013]), a society thought up and imagined within European civilisation and indissolubly tied to it. Here, in this vision, it might be said that the “darker” side of the Enlightenment is set aside. However, rather than an oversight, this is a deliberate stance, one that implies a clear idea of Europe, what it has been, and what it stands for. It is a very positive, even flattering image – misleadingly so.

In passing, it is worth noting that, at present, in the anglophone world, there is no monograph-length work on discourses about or ideas of Europe in the Age of Enlightenment – a theme much more extensively tackled by French, Italian, and German historians. Returning to Pagden, the later chapters of his work, which are arranged chronologically, analyse the configuring of ideas about Europe throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Central to these chapters is the complex relationship between European identity/ies as it was/they were construed at the time, on the one hand, and the development of nationalism and imperialism on the other. With regard to the former, Pagden rightly and persuasively points out that “nation” and “Europe” were not antithetical notions – *Gegenbegriffen*, to use Reinhart Koselleck's felicitous expression – but, in point of fact, they often reinforced one another. The case of Giuseppe Mazzini, one of the many authors Pagden focuses on, might be emblematic in this regard. This is not to say that contradictions and contrasts between the two notions were secondary but, rather, that their relationship was at that time (and, indeed, still is today) much more complex than is usually assumed. Pagden also calls attention to and problematises – again, rightly so – the interplay between imperialism and Europeanism, emphasising the extent to which the former, while producing tensions between the states of Europe in the scramble

for Africa in particular, engendered at one and the same time an Othering process that fostered a feeling of European commonality in contrast, in particular, with the colonised peoples of Africa and Asia.

The last chapter, “The Once and Future Europe,” is one of the most interesting parts of this book. In it, Pagden touches upon a series of critical issues that directly pertain to ongoing debates about European identity as well as the EU and its future. So, the question of the need to rethink the idea of (national) sovereignty in today’s global economy; the issues arising from the functionalist approach to integration which, largely responsible for the integration process, has contributed to the current crisis of political legitimacy and has produced the democratic deficit; the need, in an increasingly multiethnic context, to rethink profoundly the very nature of political legitimacy and for EU member states to “detach their specific historic and ethnic cultures from the political, legal, and ethical project which now sustains them all” (311). These are some of the themes intelligently, if briefly, considered by Pagden, and it is delightful to see such a brilliant historian use his vast knowledge to rethink some of the main challenges that the Old Continent is facing today. In more than one way, the last pages of this book are a call to Europe to learn from its history the lessons that may enable it to forge a stronger unity – a unity built on precisely those values that, in this ever more chaotic and menacing world, are increasingly endangered.

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From the Holy Roman Empire to the Land of the Tsars: One Family’s Odyssey, 1768–1870

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This is largely a “life and times” biography of Johannes Rosenstrauch (1768-1835), whom author Alexander Martin himself describes as an “obscure individual person” (viii). Add to that a title which is more descriptive than dynamic, and one can imagine how prospective readers might early on decide to avoid this work. Yet those who pass it by will have missed a wonderfully engaging study, one that brims with insight.

Even a simple biographical overview of this “obscure individual” is not easily rendered. Rosenstrauch’s life stretched from the German provinces to the Russian empire, where he died. Even that overview conceals the life of a man who was born in the eastern borderlands of Breslau in Silesia and married in Westphalia in the northern Rhineland to a woman he met during his time in the Hessen city of Kassel. He had stints across the north in the late eighteenth century, during which he made it as far east as the Dutch Republic. In 1809, Rosenstrauch relocated to Moscow, which gave him a front-row seat during Napoleon’s invasion three years later. He survived that onslaught only to shift thereafter to St. Petersburg, though in 1820 he relocated yet again to the Black Sea region, known in the Imperial era as New Russia. Odessa and Kharkov figure prominently.

That is one layer of the story. Rosenstrauch also shifted occupationally from the role of barber-surgeon in his early adult years, to an actor in a largely travelling theatre, to a Moscow and St. Petersburg merchant to, finally, Lutheran pastor in the Black Sea steppe