

Cultural Roots of Europe

Abstrakt

Kulturowe źródła Europy

Pytanie o tożsamość Europy jest interesujące z powodów naukowych, jest też politycznie naglące w obecnym momencie rozszerzania się Unii Europejskiej. Jak postaram się pokazać, korzystając z analiz m.in. E. Husserl'a, J. Patočk'i, E. Morin'a, H.G. Gadamer'a, G. Reale'go i R. Buttiglione'go, Europa, to pojęcie kulturowo-duchowe, i jako taka, ma określone kulturowe korzenie, które współdecydują o jej tożsamości. Europa to nie tylko wspólnota ekonomicznych interesów, ale przede wszystkim tradycja odkryć związanych z podstawowymi prawami człowieka i ich wcielaniem w życie społeczeństwa, jak pisał Platon: „nie z pieniędzy dzielność [εὐρηστικότητα] rośnie, ale z dzielności [εὐρηστικότητα] pieniądze i wszelkie inne dobra ludzkie, i prywatne i publiczne.”¹

W pracy analizuję 3 główne źródła tak pojętej Europy: Europa (1) rodzi się w starożytnej Grecji, i jej narodziny związane są z powstaniem nowej racjonalności, racjonalności czysto teoretycznej, a także z precyzowaniem pojęcia wolności i prawdy. Ta nowa czysto teoretyczna postawa, nowa *forma mentis* dała fundament (2) rewolucji naukowo-technicznej, która miała miejsce w czasach nowożytnych. Odkrycia Greków zyskują bardzo swoistą interpretację w (3) Chrześcijaństwie, które odegrało ważną rolę w kształtowaniu się pojęcia równości ludzi i ich wartości (godności).

Oczywiście można było by tu wymienić inne źródła kulturowe, choćby takie jak tradycja i kultura starożytnego Rzymu, czy też filozofia Oświecenia. W mojej pracy koncentruje się na trzech wyżej wymienionych źródłach Europy, gdyż – jak postaram się pokazać – one są warunkami koniecznymi tożsamości kultury Europejskiej, bez nich Europa nie byłaby tym czym jest obecnie.

¹ PLATON, *Obrona Sokratesa*, 30 B, w PLATON, *Dialogi*, tom 1, przełożył oraz wstępami i objaśnieniami opatrzył W. WYTWICKI, Kęty 1999.

I . Introduction

The question of the cultural roots of Europe is very important for us Europeans, especially at the present moment when the “new” Europe is being born. In this paper I will try to investigate this question by philosophical methods. My work is much indebted to such authors as E. Husserl, J. Patočka, E. Morin, H.G. Gadamer, G. Reale and R. Buttiglione, thus I find myself in a certain current of thought.

European people actually find themselves in a particular “situation.” An investigation of the cultural roots of Europe will help to see the “situation” we find ourselves in. The question: “where do we come from?” is important for that what we are and where we will go. As Patočka suggests one cannot reach the truth about our “situation” if not through the critical reflection on this “situation”:

The human situation is [...] something that changes since we become self-conscious about it. A naïve and a self-conscious situation are already different. Our reality is always situational, so that if it is reflected upon, it is already different by the fact that we have reflected. Of course, the question is whether by reflection reality is improved. This is not stated in the least. But, in any case, a reflected-upon situation – in contrast to a naïve situation – is to a certain extent a clarified one, or at least in the way to clarification. [...] Reflection moves along the path of opinion and its critique. If we reflect, then, upon our situation, we can change it, and change it into an enlightened, self-conscious one. This enlightening is on the way to truth about situation.²

II. The Concept of Europe

1. What Europe is not

In order to confine precisely a subject matter it is helpful to discern the elements which do not constitute the subject matter or even are in a contradiction with it. Since we try to say what is Europe (*a positive way*), at the beginning of our paper we will try to say what Europe is not (*a negative way*).

² PATOČKA J., *Plato and Europe*, translated by LOM P., California 2002, pp. 1-2.

Europe as not a geographical concept

At first one sees Europe as an area. One can describe Europe as a geographical concept. Europe is a continent. The Latin verb *contenere*, “to contain”³ is the source of the word “continent” which signifies a container in which something is contained. Then a continent would be some sort of a reservoir that contains in itself certain type of flora and fauna, typical for a continent and at the same time different from other continents.⁴ This specific typicalness and difference is due to the fact that a continent is separated from other continents by some natural border (a sea or high mountains) that prevents the migration of certain species and the exchange of genetic material; thus specific species present in a continent develop on their own without any interruption from outside, from other continents.

One can see that Europe has no such a natural border that would prevent the migration of species and from an exchange of genetic material. There is no such border between Europe and Asia. Therefore, Europe cannot be defined, if we want to define it with adequacy, as a geographical concept – as a geographical continent. One can say that Europe is a peninsula of Asian continent.

Moreover, Europe cannot be a geographical concept since throughout history its borders had been mobile and transitory. One can say ironically that Europe is a geographical notion without borders with Asia and a historical notion with inconstant borders.⁵

³ “Etymology: in senses 1, 2, & 3, from Latin *continent-*, *continens*, present participle of *continēre* to contain, hold together, be continuous; in other senses, from Latin *continent-*, *continens* continuous mass of land, from *continent-*, *continens*, present participle

1 archaic a: whatever contains something; RECEPTACLE **b:** whatever restrains or bounds something

2 archaic: whatever is the seat or the external representative of something or represents the totality of a complex being

3 obsolete: CAPACITY, CONTENT

4 a: a continuous extent or mass of land : MAINLAND **b obsolete:** the land, the earth, or the world

5 a: one of the great divisions of land on the globe; *specifically:* a large body of land differing from an island or a peninsula in its size and in its structure, which is that of a large basin bordered by mountain chains (as No. America, So. America, Europe, Asia, Africa, Australia, and Antarctica) **b usually capitalized:** the continent of Europe used with *the* <traveling on the *Continent*>

6: a large segment of the earth's outer shell including a terrestrial continent and the adjacent continental shelf,” in *Merriam-Webster's Unabridged Dictionary*.

⁴ See: BUTTIGLIONE R., *Europa jako pojęcie filozoficzne*, Lublin 1996, p. 29. Here my knowledge will be much indebted to this book as well as to the lecture of Prof. Buttiglione, under the title *The Philosophical Roots of Europe*, which I was lucky to listen to as a student in The International Academy for Philosophy in the Principality of Liechtenstein in the winter semester 1998.

⁵ See: MORIN E., *Pensare l'Europa*, tr. it. R. BERTOLAZZI, Milan 1988, p. 23

Europe as not a political construction

Europe is in a moment in which is being constructed its political status. Some people think that it is an exactly political action that give birth to such an entity as Europe. They assume that it is enough to issue legal documents in order to give birth to Europe.

In order to explain the identity of Europe, they refer to its political history, to its “formal” side (e.g., the issue of documents stating union of coal and steel etc.). They commit an error of putting a sign of equality between Europe as was shaped through ages through different cultures and Europe which is coming to existence now – the European Union, stressing that what really is Europe is a political and economical effort which began in XVIII century. This what they do not see is the fact that all those political and economical efforts are possible because of something which lies in the bottom of this unification and gives possibility of it, and at the same time is of a different essence than those legal documents.

Such a assumptions contradict the common sense. If Europe were merely a construct of political actions, it would disappear during the II World War, as if it was something ephemeral, which exists at one time and disappears at another, since the countries of Europe were in the state of war. Yet Europe existed. One cannot say that there was no Europe during the II World War. At the same time one can see the weakness of looking for a foundation and identity of Europe in the political treaties, since it did not prevent and even brought events such as a war. Moreover also in the modern times Europe cannot be identified with a “political reality,” cannot be considered as a political construction since Europe was not a one nation or a one state with its own unified politics.⁶

Thus it is necessary to find some bases that are more efficient than only political documents. In this context one should remember a very important Patočka’s message for Europe:

Europe in its political sense is always talked about, but at the same time, the question of what it really is, and what it grows out of, is neglected. You hear about the integration of Europe: but is it possible to integrate something regarding some kind of geographical or purely political concept? This is a concept lying upon *spiritual* foundations. Only then is seen what kind of question it is.⁷

Morin is of the same opinion:

⁶ See: REALE G., *Radici culturali e spirituali dell’Europa. Per una rinascita dell’“uomo europeo”*, Milano 2003, p. 2.

⁷ PATOČKA J., *Plato and Europe*, op.cit., p. 179.

[...] the coercive authority is not sufficient to maintain a society as unity, there is need of a community and the community entails in the individuals a lived experience of solidarity and love.⁸

Europe as not an economical construction

Not all actions of European Commission are in an interest of a particular country, thus to attain obedience on the part of such a country one has to refer to something which has binding value for this country as well as for other countries, since only in this way it can justify actions which refer to the states which were sovereign and now have to give up the part of its sovereignty. E.g., questions “why do I have to suffer some economical inconveniences for some other country?”, “why do we have to give the money to underdeveloped countries of EU, since they could serve as well as for our country?” appear too many times on lips of a common man.

If such a questions have place than it is not so clear for those who rise those questions why one has to sacrifice something for another. One also sees that by the mere fact of constituting European Union it is not real union since such a questions have place, thus we can see that mere political/economical document cannot make unity between people of European Union. That what gives a real unity to the Unity has to be looked for in an another place. One has to recuperate the meaning of a community and of a person, as Reale points out:

Therefore there is need that the man regains the meaning of the complexity and of the value of its own reality as «person», a value that transcends the value of any other reality.⁹

The political/economical treaties can only be valid when they reflect metaphysical and ontological status of the essences they refer to. As to Europe, the political/economical documents can be binding only when they reflect the essence of Europe. Thus a political/economical document is binding not thanks to its legal status (i.e., it is issued by the organs that are in a power to execute a document) but thanks to the *unity* between the document and the essence it refers to. As Max Scheler rightly observed:

Never and in no place mere treaties alone create real community
[...] at best they express it.¹⁰

⁸ (My translation) “[...] l’autorità coercitiva non è sufficiente a mantenere la società come unità, c’è bisogno della comunità e la comunità comporta negli individui un sentimento vissuto di solidarietà e di amore.” in MORIN E., *Il Metodo 5. L’identità umana*, tr. it. di S. LAZZARI, Milano 2002, p. 181.

⁹ (My translation) “C’è dunque bisogno che l’uomo riacquisti il senso della complessità e del valore della propria realtà come «persona», un valore che trascende il valore di ogni altra realtà.” in REALE G., *Radici culturali e spirituali dell’Europa*, op.cit., p. 97.

2. Europe as a cultural-spiritual and philosophical concept

In defining the specific character of Europe one has to look for help somewhere else. What makes Europe considered as a continent? The continents are not only containers of specific species of animals or plants, they are also containers of specific cultures.¹¹ What differentiates Europe is its culture.¹²

As we have said, in Europe there are not so many different types of flora or fauna that one can find in Asia, but in Europe we have a completely different culture. The specific culture, which developed in Europe, is not due to geographical conditions, it is rather on the contrary, i.e., the culture that appeared in Europe was so specific that it determined geography and we use a term “continent” in reference to Europe, where there is no ground for such a use of the word.¹³ In favor of perceiving Europe as a cultural concept, one can bring up the fact that borders of Europe were never precisely determined. The borders of Europe were one can say in movement, e.g., Augustine was born in Africa but no one has doubt that at that time it was Europe and that he was an European.

We have to be aware that European culture is a specific culture. This culture cannot be confined to one culture of a one nation that belongs to Europe. Each nation contributes to European culture but never exhausts its potentialities. European culture transcends all particular cultures present in Europe. So Europe is reality which is *metageographical* as well as *metanational*¹⁴. Europe is a spiritual reality¹⁵ which has precise cultural as well as spiritual roots, about which we will talk below.

¹⁰ (My translation) „Nie und nirgends stiften blosse Rechtsverträge allein wahre Gemeinschaft [...] sie drücken sie höchstens aus,“ in SCHELER M., *Vom Ewigen im Menschen*, Leipzig 1923.

¹¹ BUTTIGLIONE R., *Europa jako pojęcie filozoficzne*, op.cit., p. 33.

¹² “Thus we refer to Europe not as it is understood geographically, as on a map, as if thereby the group of people who live together in this territory would define European humanity. In the spiritual sense the English Dominions, the United States, etc., clearly belong to Europe, whereas the Eskimos or Indians presented as curiosities at fairs, or the Gypsies, who constantly wander about Europe, do not. Here the title «Europe» clearly refers to the unity of a spiritual life, activity, creation, with all its ends, interests, cares, and endeavors, with its products of purposeful activity, institutions, organizations.” in HUSSERL E., *Philosophy and the Crisis of European Humanity*, Appendix A. The Vienna Lecture in *The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology*, translated by D. CARR, Evanston 1970, p. 273.

¹³ See: BUTTIGLIONE R., *Europa jako pojęcie filozoficzne*, op.cit., p.34.

¹⁴ See: REALE G., *Radici culturali e spirituali dell'Europa*, op.cit., p. 3.

¹⁵ See: Ibid., p. 3, and MORIN E., *Pensare l'Europa*, tr. it. R. BERTOLAZZI, Milan 1988, p.29.

Therefore, the spirit of Europe has a specific character, i.e., it has an infinite task¹⁶. It is infinite in the sense that all the European cultures contribute to it but never exhaust it. None of the European cultures is in “complete” possession of the European spirit. The European spirit is rooted in particular cultures but at the same time transcends particular cultural forms. Each particular European culture contributes to and expresses the European spirit in its own particular way, without exhausting it. Each culture enriches European heritage in a certain aspect. One has to see the particular task of culture in the light of this infinite horizon, which we describe as the truth-in-itself.

As Prof. Buttiglione shows in his book¹⁷ Europe is born in Greece and its birth is essentially connected to the concepts of freedom and truth.¹⁸ This brings the problem of Europe to essential philosophical points (i.e., freedom and truth). Therefore, one can say that Europe is also a philosophical concept, the concept that is open for philosophical analyses.

Man or nation becomes and is sovereign, i.e., free in as much as he is able to constitute his own subjective world not on the basis of his own disordered passions or exterior circumstances but on the basis of the recognized and accepted, i.e., *interiorized*, objective truth.¹⁹ This concept of sovereignty is quite different from the one which is present in political systems, i.e., sovereign is only a state since it imposes the law according to its will and power, and does not recognize any higher authority above it²⁰.

A contribution of a particular European nation to the common heritage of the culture of European humanity can be measured, e.g., by the power of this nation to impose its own way of being. In this case, the sovereignty of a nation will depend on its strength in politics and war. But there is another way of participating in this common heritage, it is through the capacity to create a community build upon the common affirmation of truth, i.e., to be in the service of truth. In this case, the sovereignty of a nation will be based on and expressed through its culture, i.e., a culture which will embody the truth about man in the individual members of the nation, a culture which reflects the truth about man. A nation is sovereign as long as it stands in truth and in relation to truth. Such a nation is sovereign even if it is deprived of political sovereignty. We can

¹⁶ It is connected with the problem of the spirit of Europe, as appearing for the first time in ancient Greece, and the discovery of the ideal sphere and thus of the ideal-infinite task of European humanity. On this subject we will talk below in the part entitled *The birth of (philosophical) rationality*.

¹⁷ BUTTIGLIONE R., *Europa jako pojęcie filozoficzne*, Lublin 1996.

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 39.

¹⁹ See: *ibid.*, p. 131.

²⁰ PATOČKA J., *Plato and Europe*, *op.cit.*, p. 9.

use here the example of Poland when it was divided into three empires: Russia, Germany and Austria. Poland of that time was deprived of its state and sovereignty connected to the state but through its culture, achieved different type of sovereignty and was able to survive as a nation through over one century. It means that Poland, through its specific experience and decisions, comes to something that has universal meaning. Poland, through its history (e.g. the rule “*Cuius regio eius religio*,” which was leading to religious unity of the state was never introduced in Poland etc.), shows the idea that it is the nation and not the state which is sovereign. This idea of sovereignty of the nation (maybe due to the fact that Poland was deprived of statehood for a long time) finds its specific expression in a culture which reflects the truth about man.²¹

All the European cultures have their own aspects that can contribute to Europe and they are called to do so. This aspect has to be in relation to the general truth about man. This general truth is revealed in the concrete (*universo in concreto*), since only in the concrete can it have the power of contributing to our common history and culture. It is the role of every (European and noneuropean) culture – being aware of the truth about man and being aware of the aspects of one’s own culture, which is the concretization of the truth about man, and this in its turn, makes us open to other cultures. It prevents nationalism, which universalizes the aspect of its culture, forgetting about the relation of culture to the truth about man and forgetting that this concretization, the aspect, is only the revelation of truth about man.

Thus the national culture is not self-sufficient and needs a dialogue with other cultures. Through this dialogue, cultures enrich each other in their own specific way (the aspect of culture) of expressing the truth about man.

III. Greeks

The birth of Europe is essentially connected with man’s discovery that they are not subdued to nature and their passions but they are free and can oppose nature and their passions.²² It is not blind freedom (i.e., that I can do whatever I want) but a “rational” freedom (i.e., I direct myself according to a principle that I recognized and *interiorized* and in this way I am free). Men notice that they are not shaped by their environment but that they can shape their environment.

²¹ See: BUTTIGLIONE R., *Suwerenność narodu przez kulturę*, in BUTTIGLIONE R., *Europa jako pojęcie filozoficzne*, op.cit.

²² See: BUTTIGLIONE R., *Europa jako pojęcie filozoficzne*, op.cit., pp. 39-47.

This event took place in history when a small Greek tribe defeated the Persian Empire.²³ Greek people understood that they have to overcome their fear (a passion) and obey a spiritual principle (a moral virtue, e.g., courage).

The symbolic expression of this new spiritual principle one can find in the battle under Thermopile. The Greeks, knowing that they would die, fought to the last man in order to give time to their fellowmen to prepare the defense of the country. Here we can notice that they did not obey their passions and instinct to defend one's life and flee but they obeyed the higher principle. They knew that they have not only passions but they have will, which can go against their passions and follow what one has recognized and accepted as one's duty. They did not obey their passions but they obeyed reason and in this way they were not possessed by their passions but they were in sovereign possession of themselves, they expressed self-control. Only by obedience to reason, which gives reasons why I should be obedient, I am truly free. As Buttiglione writes²⁴, freedom is a capacity to elevate oneself above one's particular passions in order to achieve sovereign self-possession, in this way human intelligence can act more freely and efficiently. In order to act freely man has to know why he has to do what he has to do, man has to have a conviction which in its turn has to be rationally justified.²⁵

A High Point of Greek Philosophy

Here it is important to mention a philosopher who embodied discovery of Greek spirit in a perfect way. What we have said above finds its high point in Plato's philosophy, which is the high point of European humanity and is a cornerstone of the western thought. It finds its significant expression in the words of Whitehead, who writes: "The safest general characterization of the European philosophical tradition is that it consists of a series of footnotes to Plato."²⁶

To Plato's *Wirkungsgeschichte* belong, one might say, every philosophical idea which appeared after Plato. Every important philosopher had to face, consciously or unconsciously, the

²³ Here we do not want to say that the idea of freedom and reason would be completely unknown to other nations, they belong, as ontological values, to every man, but what here is so particular is a fact that Greeks reflected on and were aware of these values, and they attempted to organize socio-political life according to them. See: *ibid.*, p. 49.

²⁴ See: *ibid.*, pp. 46-47.

²⁵ See: *ibid.*, p.47.

²⁶ WHITEHEAD A.N., *Process and Reality*, New York 1941, p. 63.

problems posed by Plato, every significant thought appears and might be placed in the light of Plato's investigations by accepting or by negating it.

Here we do not have enough space to give adequate analysis of Plato's importance for European culture, so I will confine myself only to one point, i.e., Plato's famous "second voyage." In Plato appears the problem which was noticed in the philosophy of Parmenides, i.e., how to get to know the empirical world if the things in that world "are" and "are not" at the same time? Plato asserts that if we would accept as an existing reality – empirical, changeable reality, which was accepted by Heraclitus, and which is always in motion, then cognition would not be possible, for the object of cognition would change all the time. Since there is a subject of cognition, infers Plato, there must be the object of cognition. Thus, besides the changeability and motion there must exist something else – the thing in itself, which must be stable and unchangeable in order to be known. Plato solved that problem according to his vision of reality; he "discovered" another world – the world of the ideas.²⁷

The theory of ideas is the consequence of the second voyage (deÚteroj ploàj) and the discovery of the "supra-sensible world." The sensible, the constantly changing things, cannot account for themselves and they need another type of a "being" which can explain them. This, simplifying, led Plato to his theory of ideas. The beautiful description of a process of discovering supra-sensible and transcendent reality we find in the *Phaedo*²⁸. There man can find the principles according to which one should guide his morally relevant behavior.

The "second voyage", the discovery of the supra-sensible reality is the cornerstone of the future philosophy as well as of western civilization. It is a transposition of the thought, through the dialectics, from the level of sensible to the level of purely rational.²⁹ Whole European thought is conditioned by that distinction between sensible and rational. Patočka in his *Plato and Europe* writes: "without the perspectives opened by Plato, the future history of Europe should have an entirely different form."³⁰

²⁷ See: SEIFERT J., *Essence and Existence. A New Foundation of Classical Metaphysics on the Basis of "Phenomenological Realism," and a Critical Investigation of "Existentialist Thomism"*, in «Aletheia», vol. I (1977), pp. 25-29.

²⁸ See: PLATO, *Phaedo*, 96 A – 102 A.

²⁹ For profound analyses of the problem of Plato's ideas we would advice to refer to REALE G., *Per una nuova interpretazione di Platone. Rilettura della metafisica dei grandi dialoghi alla luce delle "Dottrine non scritte"*, Milano 1997²⁰.

³⁰ PATOČKA J., *Plato and Europe*, op.cit., p. 181

IV. Scientific Revolution

1. The birth of (philosophical) rationality

As we have said above the birth of Europe is essentially connected with the concepts of freedom and truth, but it was possible only through a birth of a new rationality, through a new way of perceiving reality. In this exposition, let us follow Husserl³¹.

The birth of Europe came through a new sort of attitude of the Greek men towards their surrounding world, which is expressed in a new cultural form – philosophy. Philosophy meant nothing else than a universal science encompassing everything that is. Soon philosophy, the one science, began to particularize itself according to the general forms and regions of being, and thus it branches itself to many particular sciences.³²

A man, before discovering philosophy, lived in his natural primordial attitude³³ towards the world (the attitude of original natural life). It is a basic, fundamental attitude to which all other attitudes are considered as reorientations of it. The natural attitude is characterized as a life naïvely, straightforwardly directed at the world, but the world is not thematic as such yet.³⁴ One needs special motives in order to reorient himself and to make the world thematic, but one never loses his natural interests. In this attitude, man lived in the world of finite goals which were realized by certain praxis. In this attitude, man expressed practical interests in order to satisfy particular needs. Man had tasks and accomplishments in finitude.

With the discovery of philosophy, man discovered a different type of goals. It is not finite but it is infinite. Man discovers a new form of attitude, a theoretical attitude. Here we have no practical interests, but theoretical ones. Here we have a transition from the theoretical attitude to

³¹ See: HUSSERL E., *Philosophy and the Crisis of European Humanity*, Appendix A. The Vienna Lecture, op.cit.

³² Ibid., p 276.

³³ As Husserl describes it “Attitude [...] means a habitually fixed style of willing life comprising directions of the will or interests that are prescribed by this style, comprising the ultimate ends, the cultural accomplishments whose total style is thereby determined. The individual life determined by it runs its course with persisting style as its norm.” in *ibid.*, p. 280.

³⁴ Ibid., p. 281.

the practical one, which signifies a revolution of all life and life-goals, cultural products, systems, mankind and its values.³⁵

The great philosophers, Plato and Aristotle traced it back to *qaumfxein*, as origins of philosophy. Man turns away from all practical interests and strives for pure *theōria*.³⁶ Man, through the perception of a multiplicity of views on the world (e.g., a tradition different in many nations) tries to reach the one truth, which is not a representation of reality but is reality in itself. Thus, he devotes himself to the task (an infinite one) of the question of a truth-in-itself. This transition is a transition from curiosity (*qaumfxein*) to the *theōria* of genuine science.

Here we have a search for norms, ideas that are not like real things in space. Scientific, i.e., philosophical acquisitions are not something real but ideal. They have an imperishable character, they are objective, unconditioned. The once acquired truth (idea) serves for the possible production of idealities on a higher level. Science then, presents itself as a task, as an infinite task.³⁷ It is as if going to the infinite horizon, which is the truth-in-itself, but this infinite horizon at the same time is included in that what “actually is.”

As we have already mentioned, through such a discovery of infinity which is characteristic of the ideas, man receives a new task not in finitude, as in the case of the natural attitude, but infinite, going in the direction of the infinite horizon which is defined by the truth-in-itself. It means a revolution in every field of human activity, a revolution in culture. All of this was achieved in ancient Greece with discovery of one all encompassing science-philosophy.³⁸ Of course the rationality as such is not a discovery of the Greeks, since every culture possesses a type of empirico/logico/technical thought that allows for a rational exercise of intelligence as a production of tools and weapons etc. but, as Morin writes,³⁹ it was an instrumental rationality, oriented at practical aims. In Greece, instead, the rationality developed itself not only in

³⁵ “[...] it is a praxis whose aim is to elevate mankind through universal scientific reason, according to norms of truth of all forms, to transform it from the bottom up into a new humanity made capable of an absolute self-responsibility on the basis of absolute theoretical insights.” in *ibid.*, p. 283.

³⁶ “[...] man becomes a nonparticipating spectator, surveyor of the world; he becomes a philosopher; or rather, from this point on his life becomes receptive to motivations which are possible only in this attitude, motivations for new sorts of goals for thought and methods through which, finally, philosophy comes to be and he becomes a philosopher.” in *ibid.*, p. 285.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 278.

³⁸ In society philosophy has “[...] its guiding function and its particular infinite task: the function of free and universal theoretical reflection, which encompasses all ideals and the total ideal, i.e., the universe of all norms. Within European civilization, philosophy has constantly to exercise its function as one which is archontic for the civilization as a whole.” in *ibid.*, p. 289.

³⁹ MORIN E., *Pensare l'Europa*, op.cit., p. 75

instrumental way, but there was developed a sphere of rationality that was purely orientated at a theoretical thought and on the reflection on any type of a problem.⁴⁰

2. Scientifico-technical revolution

This change of the attitude, this new *forma mentis*, which was purely theoretical, was the ground for the “scientifico-technical revolution”, which shaped and defined the European identity in the Modern Age. This new step resumes Greek’s *forma mentis* but at the same time contradistinguishes itself by systematic application of the mathematico-experimental method.⁴¹ Gadamer writes:

In the XVII century occurs [...] a turn following which the relationship between philosophy and science becomes together problematic and constitutive for our culture. The whole patrimony of the traditional knowledge, divided in varied branches and ‘arts,’ from the medicine to the astronomy, from the philology to the rhetoric, now has to take into consideration a new idea of ‘knowledge.’ It was as a new beginning, to which the decisive person of Galileo Galilei must be associated. In reference to his new science, the mechanics, Galilei used the expression *mente concipio*, that is: mechanics is the science that studies pure, abstract conditions of the movement. In this way Galilei discovered the laws of the free fall of the loads departing from a presupposition that is not given to observe in nature: the fall in a vacuum space. In fact then it was not possible to reproduce the situation of a body that falls without encountering resistance in the experimental way. [...] The ability of abstraction required by that reasoning and the constructive power put in work by Galileo – to isolate the varied factors in play, to measure them, to express them in symbolic form and to establish its mutual relationships – indeed were new things, that had to inaugurate a new epoch of the relationships between the man and the reality.⁴²

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ REALE G., *Radici culturali e spirituali dell'Europa*, op.cit., p. 109.

⁴² (My translation) “Nel secolo XVII si verifica [...] una svolta in seguito alla quale il rapporto tra filosofia e scienza diventa problematico e costitutivo, insieme, della nostra cultura. L'intero patrimonio del sapere tradizionale, suddiviso nelle sue varie branche e ‘arti’, dalla medicina all'astronomia, dalla filologia alla retorica, deve ora fare i conti con una nuova idea di ‘sapere’. Fu come un nuovo inizio, a cui va associata la figura decisiva di Galileo Galilei. In riferimento alla sua nuova scienza, la meccanica, Galilei usava l'espressione *mente concipio*, ossia: la meccanica è la scienza che studia le condizioni pure, astratte, del movimento. Così Galilei scoprì le leggi della caduta libera dei gravi partendo da un presupposto che in natura non è dato di osservare: la caduta in uno spazio vuoto. Allora non era infatti possibile riprodurre in via sperimentale la situazione di un corpo che cade senza incontrare resistenza. [...] La capacità di astrazione richiesta da quel ragionamento, e la potenza costruttiva messa in opera da Galileo – isolare i vari fattori in gioco, misurarli, esprimerli in forma simbolica e stabilirne i rapporti reciproci – erano in effetti cose nuove, che dovevano inaugurare una nuova epoca nei rapporti fra l'uomo e la realtà.” in GADAMER H.-G., *L'eredità dell'Europa*, translated by CUNIBERTO F., Torino 1991, pp. 10-11.

V. Christianity

The idea of “the care of the soul”, which is attributed to Socrates and then developed by Plato⁴³, is based on the new concept of the man, the essence of man coincides with its *psyche*, i.e., with its intelligence and its capacity of understanding and willing.⁴⁴ Even though Greek concept of *psyche* (soul) was close to the concept of person, as is presented by Lublin’s personalistic school as *persona est affirmanda propter se ipsam*,⁴⁵ but never reached that depth. Greek’s concept of man was lacking that value that concept of person, introduced by Christianity, brought with itself, i.e., that an individual is an unrepeatable value in itself. The Greek thought was *cosmocentric*, in the center of the world they placed stars and celestial bodies, which were higher in value than a man.⁴⁶

Only with Christianity man is seen in its proper value, also human body, which in Greeks was considered as something negative, e.g., Plato in *Phaedo* considers body as a prison⁴⁷ and a source of all evil⁴⁸, is elevated thanks to the fact that Christ is God incarnated and we all participate in the body of Christ, thus human body receives new meaning.

With a new concept of man a new concept of love comes too. Greek concept of Eros is different to a Christian concept of *agape*. Greek Eros is *acquisitive*. It is the acquisitive force that enriches man and helps him to ascend to higher levels in a metaphysical sense, one can see it in Plato’s *Symposium*,⁴⁹ thus the grater object of love the greater is love in itself. For Eros, a person is the means to achieve something, thus, “dying for another person,” it is not for the sake of the person itself, but for one’s own immortal glory, for that which one presently lacks. Greek Eros is receptive love. On the contrary Christian Agape is *donative*, as we read in The New Testament that there is no grater love than to give one’s life for another. Here we have no logic of proportionality between an object of love and love itself, Christ comes to everybody and those of

⁴³ See the book of PATOČKA J., *Plato and Europe*, which we already mentioned above, and where the concept of the “care of the soul” is presented and elaborated in the profound way.

⁴⁴ See: REALE G., *Radici culturali e spirituali dell’Europa*, op.cit., p. 68.

⁴⁵ See: STYCZEŃ T., *Wprowadzenie do etyki*, Lublin 1993.

⁴⁶ Contrary to that Thomas Aquinas says: “Persona significant quod est perfectissimum in tota natura, scilicet subsistens in rationalia natura” in *Summa Theologica*, I, q. 29, a.3.

⁴⁷ PLATO, *Phaedo*, 62 B.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 66 B-C.

⁴⁹ For more profound analysis of the problem of Greek Eros see REALE G., *Eros dèmon mediatore. Il gioco delle maschere nel Simposio di Platone*, Milano 2000².

them who are the most miserable are certain to be loved by God⁵⁰. Christian *agape* is donating, it is not merely receiving.

Consequently, Christianity brings to evidence a new meaning of freedom. As we mentioned above, Greeks understood that to be free means to overcome one's passions and fears in order to be in sovereign self-possession. Thanks to that virtue and thanks to exercise of philosophy they considered themselves as only free people, all other people, not Greeks, were considered as barbarians. Christianity says that each person is a value in itself and cannot be utilized as a mean to an end. Therefore all man by nature are free. It contradicts the Greek assumption that the only a group of virtuous people can be free.

This new concept of person and freedom will shape Europe and its history. In order to give a sufficient account of the importance of Christianity to European culture one would need more space than we are allowed to devote in this paper, thus we confined ourselves only to mentioning some points, which we considered important for our argument.

European discovery of the person finds its highpoint in Christianity. It is a matter of fact, even though that some people try to deny it.⁵¹ The concept of person developed by Christianity shaped our social and political life up to now.

VI. Conclusions

The identity of cultures is shaped by a specific way in which each culture has made its own discovery of the truth about the human being. Without taking it into account, the culture is not aware about itself. Throwing behind our roots is contradicting that what we are. Only by affirming our past we can say who we are. Only by knowing who we were we can say where we should direct ourselves. By forgetting our roots we can disperse in the relativity of the opinions as well as immersing more and more in a crisis that we already are in. The crisis is characterized by the imbalance between growing development of the sciences and technology and lack of progress of man in a spiritual, ethical and social dimension, forgetting of the transcendental, spiritual sphere of man, the crisis of the "written culture." In consequence of the crisis of European culture, people read less and less since they prefer to devote themselves to *mass-*

⁵⁰ See: KIERKEGAARD S., *Diario*, a cura di C. FABRO, 12 vols., Brescia 1980-1983, vol. IX, p. 28.

⁵¹ The nowadays example of such a situation was the debate on the new European constitution, where at the end *Invocatio Dei* were not included.

media, since it is a quicker way to gain information, man are more preoccupied with “what they have” than with “what they are.” People fall into the despair, since they lack the fitting social role models, *etc.* One can mention many more marks of the cultural crisis. In order to defend ourselves against it, first one should to acknowledge, accept and develop the roots of European culture instead of hoping that the wealth of the society will automatically bring about the effect of a new European culture. As Socrates puts it:

Wealth does not bring about excellence [εὐδαιμονία – virtue], but excellence [virtue] makes wealth and everything else good for men, both individually and collectively.⁵²

As presented here, the concept of European roots, as well as, the concept of European culture is not denying value of other cultures. On the contrary – only if our roots will be rightly understood and accepted we are able to respect other cultures and to have a sound dialogue with them. Let us say it again, one has to recognize the value of ones own culture and owing to ones own culture one is capable of recognizing the value of all other cultures. One needs to see that his own culture is valuable because other cultures are valuable. In fact, we can participate in other cultures only if we are well rooted in our own culture. The phenomenon of the “citizen of the world” who does not recognize the value of any culture, is not a citizen at all. He is an outlaw who is only capable of consuming the fruits, but he is not capable of participating in any society.

One has to perceive the role of each culture, its unrepeatable vocation and meaning for the history of Europe. One has to have respect for other cultures and be aware of their specific vocation in history but at the same time one needs to see the specific vocation of his own culture. Thus, such a conception does not lead to the conviction that there is no better culture than one’s own one, but to an appreciation of other cultures. It does not lead to nationalism and ideologization of one’s own culture. Since, nationalism negates the value of other cultures and other nations except one’s own culture. In consequence, nationalism aims at subordinating other nations to ones own nation. Respect for other cultures stresses the value and the unique role of each culture and nation for the European family of countries. Respect for other cultures aims at subordinating one’s own nation to the common good of nations. Nationalism leads to the attitude of selfish pride. Respect for other cultures leads to the attitude of loving humility. Nationalism leads towards war. Respect for other cultures leads towards solidarity among nations.

⁵² PLATO, *Apology*, 30 B, in PLATO, *Complete works*, edited, with introduction and notes by COOPER J.M., Indianapolis 1997.

European culture owes its specific character to the influence of other cultures and creative integration of them with European culture. It is due to the fact that cultures are not in contradiction with itself but in mutual compatibility, but under the condition, as we have mentioned above, that given culture reveal the general truth about man in particular culture's aspect⁵³. A particular culture gains its specificity due to its characteristic discovery of the truth about the man and the aspects of a truth are never in contradiction but in compatibility. But, what needs to be underlined, in order to reach that compatibility a culture needs to understand its own particular aspect of the truth about man, has to come back to its roots.

⁵³ This "compatibility" must be in the borders of truth, since a "culture" that falsifies the truth about human person by, e.g., negating dignity of the person or her liberty will be not compatible.