Mazower, Mark. Dark Continent: Europe's 20th Century. New York: Vintage Books, 2000.

PREFACE

Why then do the European states claim for themselves the right to spread civilization and manners to different continents? Why not to Europe itself?

—JOSEPH ROTH, 1937[1*]

Europe may seem to be a continent of old states and peoples, yet it is in many respects very new, inventing and reinventing itself over this century through often convulsive political transformation. Some nations—such as Prussia—have been wiped off the map in living memory; others—like Austria or Macedonia—are less than three generations old. When my grandmother was born in Warsaw, it was part of the Tsarist empire, Trieste belonged to the Habsburgs and Salonika to the Ottomans. The Germans ruled Poles, the English Ireland, France Algeria. The closest much of Europe came to the democratic nation-state which has become the norm today were the monarchies of the Balkans. Nowhere did adults of both sexes have the vote, and there were few countries where parliaments prevailed over kings. In short, modern democracy, like the nation-state it is so closely associated with, is basically the product of the protracted domestic and international experimentation which followed the collapse of the old European order in 1914.

The First World War mobilized sixty-five million men, killed over eight million and left another twenty-one million wounded; it swept away four of the continent's ancient empires and turned Europe into what Czech politician Thomas Masaryk described as "a laboratory

*See Notes (page 417).

atop a vast graveyard." "The World War," wrote Russian artist El Lissitsky, "requires us to test all values." Amid the ruins of the *ancien régime*—with the Kaiser exiled, the Tsar and his family shot—politicians promised the masses, enfranchised and mobilized as never before, a fairer society and a state of their own. The liberal Woodrow Wilson offered a world "safe for democracy"; Lenin a communal society emancipated from want and free of the exploitative hierarchies of the past. Hitler envisaged a warrior race, purged of alien elements, fulfilling its imperial destiny through the purity of its blood and the unity of its purpose. Each of these three rival ideologies—liberal democracy, communism and fascism—saw itself destined to remake society, the continent and the world in a New Order for mankind. The unremitting struggle between them to define modern Europe lasted most of this century.[2]

In the short run, both Wilson and Lenin failed to build the "better world" they dreamed of. The communist revolution across Europe did not materialize, and the building of socialism was confined to the Soviet Union; the crisis of liberal democracy followed soon after as one country after another embraced authoritarianism. By the late 1930s the League of Nations had collapsed, the Right was ascendant, and Hitler's New Order looked like Europe's future. Against the liberal defence of individual liberties the Nazis counterposed the racial welfare of the collectivity; against liberalism's doctrine of the formal equality of states it offered Darwinian struggle and rule by racial superiors; against free trade it proposed the coordination of Europe's economies as a single unit under German leadership. Yet how bewilderingly fast fortunes changed in the struggle of ideologies. In the 1940s—the century's watershed—the Nazi utopia reached its zenith, and then as swiftly collapsed. Fascism became the first major ideology to suffer conclusive defeat at the hands of the history it claimed to have mastered.

In the long run, the 1940s were important for another reason too. The exhausting, murderous experience of total war—the culmination of nearly a century of imperial and national struggles inside and outside the continent—led to a growing weariness with ideological politics across the continent. The great tide of mass mobilization began to ebb, and with it the militarism and collectivism of the inter-war years.

Believers became cynics at worst, at best apathetic, resigned and domesticated. People rediscovered democracy's quiet virtues—the space it left for privacy, the individual and the family. Thus after 1945, democracy re-emerged in the West, revitalized by the challenge of war against Hitler, newly conscious of its social responsibilities. Only now it faced competition from the Left not the Right, as the Red Army, having crushed Nazi Germany's imperial dreams, brought communism to the new Soviet empire in eastern Europe.

Although the Cold War represented the last stage of the ideological struggle for Europe's future, it differed crucially from earlier phases in its avoidance of real war—at least on the continent itself. To be sure there were crises; but in general, the two superpowers lived in "peaceful coexistence," aiming at each other's ultimate demise, but accepting each other's right to exist in the present for the sake of continental stability and peace. The two systems armed themselves for a war that could not be fought, and competed to provide welfare for their citizens, and to bring economic growth and material prosperity. Both offered some astonishing initial achievements; but only one proved capable of adapting to the growing pressures of global capitalism. With the collapse of the Soviet empire in 1989, not only the Cold War but the whole era of ideological rivalries which began in 1917 came to an end.

What all ideologies have in common is that they like to present their own utopia as an End to History—whether in the form of universal communism, global democracy or a Thousand Year Reich. They share what Ignazio Silone once described as "the widespread virtue that identifies History with the winning side." They read the present back into the past, and assume—for instance—that democracy must be rooted deeply in Europe's soil simply because the Cold War turned out the way it did. Today a different kind of history is needed—less useful as a political instrument but bringing us closer to past realities—which sees the present as just one possible outcome of our predecessors' struggles and uncertainties. After all, democracy reigned supreme in Europe as the First World War ended, but was virtually moribund two decades later. And if 1989 marked democracy's victory

over communism, it was a victory which could not have come about without communism's earlier comprehensive and shattering defeat of National Socialism in the war. It was thus not preordained that democracy should win out over fascism and communism, just as it remains still to be seen what kind of democracy Europe is able and willing to build. In short, what I describe here is a story of narrow squeaks and unexpected twists, not inevitable victories and forward marches.[3]

Ideologies matter, not so much as guides to history, but as vehicles for belief and political action. If the dogmas of the past no longer hold us in their grip, this does not mean they were merely grand deceptions from the start. The end of communism has been described as "the passing of an illusion," but a funeral oration is not a historical analysis. After 1945, fascism was similarly explained away as a political pathology by which insane dictators led bewitched, hypnotized populations to their doom. Yet the wounds of the continent cannot be dismissed as the work of a few madmen, and its traumas will not be found to lie in the mental condition of Hitler or Stalin. Like it or not, both fascism and communism involved real efforts to tackle the problems of mass politics, of industrialization and social order; liberal democracy did not always have all the answers. "We can no longer afford to take that which was good in the past and simply call it our heritage," writes Hannah Arendt, "to discard the bad and simply think of it as a dead load which by itself time will bury in oblivion."[4]

National Socialism, in particular, fits into the mainstream not only of German but also of European history far more comfortably than most people like to admit. If Soviet communism involved a truly radical break with the past—an attempt, in Europe's most underdeveloped and war-torn country, to create a new property-less society, to hold together a disintegrating empire and simultaneously to telescope an industrial revolution into a few years—Nazism, by contrast, was less ambitious and far more secure at home, and ultimately far more aggressive abroad. Its revolutionary rhetoric masked greater continuities of ideas and institutions with the past. Its construction of a racial-nationalist welfare system simply pushed to extremes tendencies visible in European thought more generally and it held power against negligible opposition in Europe's most technologically advanced

economy. Yet this solidly established regime was committed in a way the Soviet Union never was to overthrowing the Versailles settlement by force. This is why it was the Third Reich which posed the most serious challenge to liberal democracy this century, and why an analysis of the changing content of European democratic thought and practice means acknowledging the very real possibility that emerged in the late 1930s of a continent organized along Nazi lines.

It would of course be possible to take a very different view of the century, focusing less upon fascism than upon communism. Marxist historiography, exemplified recently in Eric Hobsbawm's panoramic *Age of Extremes*, downplays fascism's significance in its concentration upon what it regards as the fundamental struggle between communism and capitalism. If I have chosen not to do that here, it is partly because communism's impact upon *democracy*—important though it was—was in general more indirect and less threatening than the challenge posed by Hitler. But it is also, and more basically, because if this century has shown one thing, it is that politics cannot be reduced to economics: differences in values and ideologies must be taken seriously and not simply regarded as foils for class interest. Fascism, in other words, was more than just another form of capitalism.

Precisely because the Nazi utopia of a dynamic, racially purified German empire required a war for its fulfilment, and because that utopia was also a nightmarish revelation of the destructive potential in European civilization—turning imperialism on its head and treating Europeans as Africans—the experience of fascism's New Order (and its short-lived allure) was forgotten as quickly as possible after 1945. The city council of Bologna melted down its bronze statue of Mussolini on horseback and recast it as a noble pair of partisans; France canonized the memory of a united opposition to Vichy, while Austria shamelessly milked its status as Hitler's first victim and erected memorials to its anti-Nazi "fighters for Austrian freedom." These were the foundation myths of a Europe liberated from history; they expunged awkward memories and asserted the inevitability of freedom's triumph.

Keeping intact a sense of European civilizational superiority also involved an endless redrawing of mental boundaries. The so-called "European Community" implicitly ignored half the continent: post-

war Europe became equated with the West. Dismayed East Europeans talked themselves into "central Europe" to distance themselves from the barbarians. The habit persists today: a leading British historian recently described the war in Bosnia as "a primitive, tribal conflict only anthropologists can understand," preferring to see Yugoslavia as part of the barbaric Third World than to accept that contemporary Europe itself might be tainted. Not even the murderous record of the twentieth century has yet, it seems, diminished Europeans' capacity for self-delusion.[5]

My own geographical conception of Europe and its limits is basically a pragmatic one. This is a book about events and struggles within Europe rather than about Europe's place in the world. But of course it is not possible to consider Hitler's continental ambitions without seeing them in the context of European imperialism overseas, nor to describe the Cold War without reference to the United States. The Soviet Union—as the great Eurasian power—stands both inside and outside European history at different times. Hence this is a Europe whose boundaries—as in reality—are porous and adaptable. Eastern Europe is no less a part of the story than the West, the Balkans no less than Scandinavia.

As ever, issues of geography disguise arguments about politics, religion and culture, and those who are keen to establish Europe's unity will find my agnosticism deeply unsatisfying. Yet this merely corresponds to the uncertainty which now surrounds the concept of Europe itself. Fascism, after all, was the most Eurocentric of the three major ideologies, far more so than either communism or liberal democracy: a creed which was both anti-American and anti-Bolshevik at least had the virtue of clarity. What Europe means for us today after the end of the Cold War is far vaguer—is it part of the "West" (itself a notion with an antiquated edge), a western outcrop of "Eurasia," both or neither? The "Europe" of the European Union may be a promise or a delusion, but it is not a reality. Taking the divisions and uncertainties of this continent seriously—as I have tried to do here—implies abandoning metaphysics, renouncing the search for some mysterious and essential "Europe," and exploring instead the constant contest to define what it should mean.

Ultimately it is the question of values which lies at the heart of this

history—the values which drove people to act, which shaped and transformed institutions, guided state policy and underpinned communities, families and individuals. "Every social order is one of the possible solutions to a problem that is not scientific but human, the problem of community life," wrote the French scholar Raymond Aron in 1954. "Are Europeans still capable of practising the subtle art required by liberal communities? Have they retained their own system of values?" The "problem of community life" which Aron raises is perhaps the central theme of this book. Against Aron, however, one must ask: what was Europe's "own system of values"? Liberalism was but one of them, and there were others. Europe's twentieth century is the story of their conflict.[6] conflict b/w liberalism, fascism + communism [illegible]

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