

# THE FUTURE OF EUROPE

[In the Living Age of November 25 we published a German, a British, and an Italian view of the future of Europe. We continue this discussion with a French, a Russian, and a Spanish contribution to the same theme. André Gide — not to be confused with Charles Gide, the economist — is a distinguished novelist and critic. Dmitri Merezhkovskii is one of Russia's foremost modern writers, philosophers, and poets. His greatest prose-work is the historical trilogy dealing with Julian the Apostate, Leonardo da Vinci, and Peter the Great. His book, *The Coming Brute*, written before the World War, contains views similar to those expressed in his present article. Miguel de Unamuno is a critic and philosopher, two of whose works, — *El Sentimiento Trágico de la Vida* and *Don Quijote en la Tragicomedia Contemporánea*, — recently translated into French, have a European reputation and deal in a general way with the themes he discusses in this article.]

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## I. A FRENCH VIEW

BY ANDRÉ GIDE

IF I were teaching geography to a child, I should begin, like Rousseau, with a plan of our garden, with what he could see with his own eyes, and later invite his attention to things that lie beyond his immediate physical vision.

But I should take pains to avoid overemphasizing our little garden's importance in the child's mind. I should carefully teach him from the first what a tiny fraction of our neighborhood our little patch of beans and blossoms forms, how small our neighborhood is compared with France, and what a modest part of the terrestrial globe France herself occupies.

I should not hasten to point out to him what a tiny speck our globe is in the vast realm of space, for fear of discouraging him. I am sure I should not invite his mind to dwell on that subject until I had convinced him that mere questions of magnitude are, after all, of no importance in the matters of the spirit. I should not discourage the idea that possibly all this vast space, this universe of worlds, is designed to

balance our own globe in its orbit, to regulate its rhythm, to temper its climate, to time its tides, in order that we may exist and the powers of the spirit may be manifested through us.

Nor should I discourage the idea that the distribution of land and water on our globe, and its climatic phenomena, have peculiarly singled out Europe as the most fortunate of continents. Ought I to permit him to think that in Europe France is the most blessed of countries? Possibly. But only for the purpose of impressing him with his own responsibilities. In describing Greece and Italy, I should not leave him in ignorance of the fact that our country was still wrapped in the night of barbarism when the ancient world was in the full noontide of its civilization. I should make clear to him that we are not the only heirs of modern enlightenment. I should teach him that the seats of civilization have slowly shifted in the course of history, and may change again; that the area of civilization has broadened, and that when we talk to-day of Western

civilization we do not refer to any single country, but to all Europe.

The civilization in which I grew up was parochial. I knew little of the outside world and prided myself, instead of blushing, at this ignorance. I was too easily persuaded that what lay beyond the boundaries of my knowledge was not worth knowing, and fancied this ignorance was a badge of superiority. It seems to me that the coming generation is more alert, that its interests range farther afield, that it does not fancy, as my generation fancied, that all that is good in the world will come to its door without seeking. It has taken to heart the lesson of Lot's wife, who was turned to a pillar of salt for looking too exclusively behind her. The value of the past for the present generation is the incentive it affords for the future.

To be sure, I am not perfectly certain that our coming generation is just as I describe it. But at least I hope it is. I think it a grave error to imagine that we can know our own land better for knowing other lands less. Personally, I can see that I understand France better and I love her more because I have observed her from afar. We cannot form true images without perspective. We must withdraw from ourselves to know ourselves.

Wishing to apply this procedure to all Europe, and not being able just then to visit China, I thought that an opinion of us coming from that country would be instructive. Therefore I accepted with enthusiasm an opportunity, two years ago, to dine with a distinguished Chinaman, a former cabinet-officer, who had been traveling in Europe for several months to acquire information, and who was doubtless intent in turn upon getting a long-distance view of his own country.

Though the dinner was given in his honor, the guest arrived very late. I

discovered the reason for this when I observed that he merely tasted, out of politeness, the different courses, pretending to eat but really eating nothing. Evidently he distrusted our European cuisine, and had taken the precaution to dine in advance. Though he was fairly familiar with our Western civilization, he did not speak French and so was accompanied by another Chinaman who served as his interpreter. This companion looked less than twenty years old, but may have been past forty; for men seem to grow old slowly in the Orient.

The ex-Minister wished to discuss French literature with me. That was why I was honored with an invitation to the dinner and was seated between the two Oriental guests.

With the arrival of the soup the inquisition began. I was deeply embarrassed, for there was a large party present, and, since everyone was courteously silent in order to hear the Chinaman's questions, the guests were forced to listen also to my answers. At each new question I first turned toward the Minister who smilingly asked it, then to his interpreter who smilingly translated it. I do not know what I answered; but I always smiled first at the interpreter, and then at the Minister when my reply was transmitted in Chinese to him. Anyway, it was a very long and very tedious operation.

I tried to say nothing that could not easily be translated into Chinese, and therefore made most elementary answers. None the less, after each reply, and before asking a new question, the Minister invariably assured me that my subtlety charmed him. All of which added hugely to my embarrassment. I was told that China was waiting breathlessly to hear what I thought of the effect of the war upon Western poetry and art.

I saw that I was lost unless I took the offensive. Therefore, abruptly interrupting the questioning, I requested the interpreter to say to our guest that I was exceedingly anxious to visit China. That was quite true. China has always attracted me. The interpreter translated what I said. The Minister smiled more sweetly than ever, and made a brief remark which the interpreter rendered: 'Hurry up!'

By this time the other guests were tired of listening to us, and began to converse among themselves. I think this put the Minister more at his ease, as it certainly did me. We really began to say something.

Our distinguished guest remarked that China was changing rapidly since the Revolution; that in a very short time a traveler would not find there the things that give his people their real worth and interest.

I wished to know if the Revolution had been preceded, accompanied, or followed by religious changes. The Minister apologized for not understanding. He said the Chinese observe a moral code, but never have possessed, properly speaking, a religion. They are a people conscious of no mystical cravings.

I asked: 'Was the Revolution a spontaneous popular movement, or due to foreign influences?'

'Most certainly the latter,' the Minister replied. 'Young China, which is agitating, revolting, and breaking away from the past, has been infected with Western ideas.'

I said I regretted it, but since I noticed that our guest continued to smile I fancied for an instant that he rejoiced in his country's awakening.

However, he speedily corrected this misconception by saying, 'I am not one of those who wished this. In my opinion nothing can compensate us for the

China that is disappearing. But what can we do? What does it profit us to mourn? Your Western world has scattered all sorts of ferments among our people. Three of your authors in particular have had a profound effect upon us: Dostoevskii, Ibsen, and Shaw.'

I was astonished. Dostoevskii still seems to us Westerners pretty nearly an Asiatic. But Ibsen? And as to Bernard Shaw — what he rebels against and attacks are expressly our Western institutions. How can he interest the Chinese?

I was told that it made no difference what he sought to destroy. The important thing was that he was an iconoclast. The quality that young China revered in him was his irreverence.

I asked the gentleman what had most impressed him during his travels. He said that everywhere in Europe he had remarked on men's faces an expression of fatigue, sadness, and care. It seemed to him that we knew every science except the science of happiness. I admired his tranquil smile as he said this. His eyes shone with a serene kindness that I recall having seen only in the eyes of certain monks whom I used to know at Monte Cassino. His face, his body, his movements betrayed no signs of age.

Our guest then observed: 'Mankind can waste itself with progress, or conserve itself by sacrificing progress. Until recently, at least, China, like ancient Egypt, strove to escape the clutches of time.' He then described to me the dreamy, anæsthetic happiness in which China slumbered for centuries behind the protection of her Great Wall, untroubled by inventions, discoveries, cares, desires, or exorbitant ambitions; seeking happiness in moderation; each person trying to differ as little as possible from his

neighbors, each day contrived to resemble as closely as possible the day that preceded. And he continued:—

‘What surprises me is not that you have preferred wide-awakeness to drowsiness and progress to stagnation. Your civilization has certainly lifted man to a higher material level than we ever dreamed he could attain, and you may think that this is well worth some wrinkles. But what surprises me is that your religion, at least the Christianity that you profess, teaches you the reverse of this. Did not Christ tell you that happiness consists in renouncing the very things in which you glory most and for which you labor hardest? To become little children, as He tells you you must, to draw immediate and constant joy from life, is the very doctrine that we Chinamen follow, which the people of your Western world refuse to recognize, although they call themselves Christians. . . .

‘Do you not think that Europe’s present suffering is due to her practising the precepts of a material civilization and preaching a religion that repudiates material things? How do you conciliate the two? To tell the truth, you do not conciliate them. You live by compromises. The Church is obliged to be indulgent lest she lose her hold upon her children. She must reconcile herself to the progress of the intellect, and thereby she departs increasingly from the pure spirit of the Evangel. But the moment Christianity resigns herself to relinquishing her moral mission, — which our great Sages of the East have taught us comes first, — the moment she imposes dogmas, exacts belief in dogmas, and bids man to subordinate reason to faith, she invites conflict. If reason is in conflict with dogma — and that seems to be the case, for otherwise why lay stress on faith when simple common sense and reason suffice — the Church

must make terms with reason. Lao-tse and Confucius avoided this in advance by founding their teaching on a pedestal that reason could not attack except as an outright enemy; by eliminating the supernatural from their doctrine, so that nothing might estrange morality from wisdom. The result is that in our country virtue and reason go hand in hand; and, thanks to that, the felicity that you postpone until you reach Heaven comes to us in this world.

‘I have traveled widely. I have seen Mohammedans and Buddhists. I have studied in many lands manners, institutions, forms of society, all of which reflect the beliefs of the peoples who possess them — except in case of Christians. I have observed that the religion that bids men take no thought of the morrow, to think not where they shall lay their heads, to help each other, to love each other, to seek not one added inch to their stature, to turn the right cheek to him who has struck the left, is precisely the religion whose followers are the most restless and self-seeking, the wealthiest, the best educated, the most civilized, the most industrious, the most ingenious, the shrewdest, the most rebellious and turbulent, the most eager for personal gain and aggrandizement, the most sensitive to what you call personal honor, the most unforgiving. Do you not agree with me that this suggests something strange, illogical, misleading — in a word, some discord I cannot exactly describe that causes you to fail?’

I ventured to reply: ‘I think that I see the real reason for the discord that strikes you so forcibly. We are so accustomed to it that it no longer surprises us. It is this: without intending to be so, the Christian religion is a school of individualism, perhaps the most efficient school of individualism

that man has hitherto invented.' I knew that I ought to explain more fully, but fortunately he did not leave me time.

'Yes,' he said in a conciliatory tone, 'that is precisely what characterizes you Europeans. Among us, on the other hand, the individual tends to lose himself in the mass. In your country all social forces coöperate to make you individualists.'

We were rising from the table. The Chinaman had refused coffee. I searched my mind for a saying that Montesquieu places in the mouth of Eucrates in his dialogue with Sulla: 'They cost too much to make.' Yes, that's about it. It costs too much — this sad comedy that our Western world is playing now, entitled: 'The Overcultivation of the Individual, or the Sacrifice of Happiness.'

This Chinaman hit the nail on the head. Our Western world is like those of whom the Scriptures say: 'Their heart is divided: now shall they be found faulty.' Our troubles arise from the fact that religion and civilization draw us in opposite directions, and divert us from a consistent course. Unable to do without either, we have made Europe a place of lying and of compromises. Modern civilization, though repudiated by Christian doctrine, has not been able to repudiate religion. Religion, while protesting against the evils of civilization, willingly accepts the benefits it brings. Instead of rendering to Cæsar the things that are Cæsar's and to God the things that are God's, as Christ told us to do, we wish to follow the banners of both. We now reap the fruit of this monstrous alliance. We have seen the nations of Europe slaughter each other in the name of God, in the name of the very Christ who said: 'Put up thy sword,' to the Apostle who had drawn his blade to defend him.

But I preferred not to confide these reflections to a Chinaman. So when he asked me what I thought of Europe I answered that I thought very well of it.

Now you ask me, dear editor, for a definite opinion as to Europe's future. I believe we are witnessing the end of a world, of a culture, of a civilization; that this is a day for questioning everything; that our Conservatives are deluding themselves if they think they can rehabilitate the institutions of the past, for that will be putting new wine in old bottles, and avail them nothing. But you insist: 'What will be the Europe of to-morrow?' You receive different answers from different sources. I think, however, that your correspondents will agree on certain points, particularly this: No nation of Europe will be able hereafter to make real progress by a policy of isolation and independently of its neighbors; politically, economically, industrially — from any point of view you look at it — Europe is courting utter ruin if every country in Europe insists on seeking only its individual ends.

But you have gathered only individual opinions from carefully selected contributors. In making your choice you may have unconsciously anticipated their replies. To tell the truth, Europe's future is not a matter of preoccupation with many people. Consciousness of common interest is only awakened in times of common danger; and hitherto the feeling of danger has only urged the peoples of Europe to fight each other. That has become a habit so firmly fixed that it is almost impossible now for us to see that we may all be ruined together.

The true spirit of Europe is opposed to this infatuation for national isolation. However, it is equally opposed to the abdication of personality represented by internationalism. By being ourselves we best serve the interest of

all. That is true of nations as well as of individuals. But this truth must be fortified by another truth: it is in self-surrender that we find ourselves. However, so long as politics dominate and subordinate ethics, we cannot see that this last truth applies equally to nations. To be candid, political questions interest me less and appear to me less important than social questions;

and social questions seem less important than moral questions. I believe that political problems lead us back to social problems, and social problems back to moral problems. The conditions that we deplore to-day will not be remedied so much by institutions as by reforming the individual — it is with him that betterment must begin.

## II. A RUSSIAN VIEW

BY DMITRI MEREZHKOVSKII

It is difficult to be a prophet, and I shall not venture to assume that rôle. But he who knows the actual state of Europe, who has fathomed her past, and who has felt the horror of these recent years, may conjecture whither she is bound, and what route she is likely to follow to that destination.

No nation can develop normally, attain even material well-being, or so much as survive, without a solid foundation of moral law. Peoples that possess the germ of progress cannot live without such a law, and those who have violated it have perished. This law, or rather this correlation of laws, invariably culminates in a religious principle.

Christianity created Europe. The river of European civilization has followed the channel traced by Christian teaching. There is not an ideal or an act in all the history of Europe that has not sprung from Christian doctrine, that has not some relation with that doctrine. Christianity has fructified art and modern science. It has suggested the revolts, the salutary tempests of revolution. From it has sprung, not atheistic socialism, but the social problem, which is an essentially religious craving for justice and universal fraternity.

However, when we seek to incor-

porate ideals and aspirations in physical forms, we involuntarily and inevitably mutilate them. But these distortions are not dangerous so long as the people are loyal to the sovereign law of their collective conscience, which guides their life and invariably leads them back to an appointed course. There is only one fatal danger that can threaten our civilization: that is to lose its vital flame — its moral and religious law.

Human society is a living body. The moment it loses its vital spark, it decays, returns to brute matter, primordial chaos. Now I ask: Is Europe consistently loyal to her sovereign moral law? Does she still realize, even instinctively, that the most important thing of all is to be faithful to the inner voice of her conscience, the divine law not written by the hand of man, but terrible, inflexible none the less — the eternal fountain of all the codes that have ever been written in the course of ages? The sails that the ship of Europe spreads to the winds are broad, but is her helm intact?

I do not affirm anything. I only ask the question. Upon its answer depends the destiny of Europe.

We are surrounded by threatening signs. What was the World War? Never in history has there been a war more frightful or more foolish; for