

DAVID ARMITAGE

The Long Road to Maastricht

The Pursuit of Europe: A History

By Anthony Pagden

(Oxford University Press 417pp £25)

The camera pans across the Alps. The place: the St Gotthard Pass. The time: the winter of 1871 – February, to be precise. Trim sleighs skim through the snows, each holding two bundled-up passengers. The travellers break their winter journey at an inn along the way, mingling over drinks before a warming fire. Two characters come into shot: a precocious German classicist, agonising about his academic future, and a charismatic elder statesman, forty years his senior and travelling incognito. The younger man will later proclaim the need to be a ‘good European’ by rising above the nationalisms of the age; the older is the era’s most gifted entrepreneur of nationalism. No one has yet made a film of this encounter between Friedrich Nietzsche and Giuseppe Mazzini. When they do, Anthony Pagden will be the ideal historical adviser.

This Alpine scene is one among a host of telling and aptly chosen vignettes in Pagden’s bold new book, *The Pursuit of Europe*. Pagden inclines more towards Nietzsche’s approach than Mazzini’s. Erudite and polyglot, raised in Chile and educated in Spain and at Oxford, he is a citizen of the world and has had a distinguished academic career on both sides of the Atlantic. From his current perch in Los Angeles, he surveys Europe from a sceptical distance and with deep, affectionate familiarity. His many works have traced the fate of empires, the consequences of encounters, the clash of ‘civilisations’ and the enduring importance of the Enlightenment, among other topics. Readers of Pagden’s earlier books will recognise in *The Pursuit of Europe* the characteristic grand sweeps, sparkling prose and mission to use the past to shed light on the present. They will also find a blind spot that clouds his cosmopolitanism.

The Pursuit of Europe tells the ‘story of an ambition, of a dream, of, some would say, an illusion’. That ambitious or illusory dream is the vision of Europe as a community above nations, what Edward Gibbon in that fateful year 1776 called

‘a great republic’. The book analyses that dream and tracks the various political projects to ‘together, unite, unite, Europe!’ in the immortal words of the 1990 Eurovision Song Contest winner, Toto Cutugno. Pagden finds blueprints for that project as far back as the 17th century, but the bulk of his argument covers the two hundred years from the Congress of Vienna of 1814–15 to the Brexit referendum of 2016. He meticulously reconstructs the arguments of both nationalists and supranationalists – the Mazzinians and the Nietzscheans – in their speculative moments and through their practical plans, up to the present day. Familiar friends from his previous books reappear: Rousseau and Voltaire, Simón Bolívar and Benjamin Constant, Kant and Habermas. But only the most learned of Europhiles will know every character Pagden brings on stage, among them Aristide Briand, Gaston Riou, Georges Scelle and the fascinating Austrian-Japanese aristocrat Richard von Coudenhove-Kalergi. Pagden expounds their plans and speeches sympathetically and in rich detail. The result is the most comprehensive and compelling history of modern ideas of Europe available in English.

Pagden does not shoehorn complex arguments into easy categories. Not for him the crude tub-thumping of Boris Johnson, who, in 2016, blustered that the European Union had revived earlier attempts at empire: ‘Napoleon, Hitler, various people tried this out, and it ends tragically.’ Gritting his teeth, Pagden finds a grain of truth in such sadly persistent notions: anti-federalists from the late 19th century, he argues, correctly saw that the European age of nation-states would be brief and was already passing, leading to a menagerie of new political forms. The future would lie with supranational entities, whether empires or anti-empires. To their enemies, plans of European union were plots to squelch individuality, but to their promoters they

promised diversity within unity, providing security without denying identity. *The Pursuit of Europe* even-handedly chronicles the back and forth of such views. Napoleon and Carl Schmitt get as much of Pagden’s attention as Winston Churchill and the EU’s founding fathers. Yet he evidently agrees with the Nietzsche of *Human, All Too Human*, who provides his epigraph: ‘one should not be afraid to proclaim oneself simply a good European and actively work towards the amalgamation of all nations.’

Pagden’s instinctive inclusiveness falls short in his treatment of Islam. One of his earlier books, *Worlds at War: The 2,500-Year Struggle between East and West* (2008), attracted criticism for pitting a reified ‘West’ (Christendom, good) and ‘East’ (Islam, bad) against each other in eternal enmity. At the time, this seemed to reflect some of the post-9/11 paranoia about Islam in the United States. Now that moment is far in the rear-view mirror, it is curious, to put it mildly, that he maintains this dichotomy in his vision of Europe’s future, laid out in the book’s final chapter. He rightly notes that the contemporary EU has striven mightily to expunge openly Christian symbols from its official documents and common coinage, for instance. Yet he still asserts that ‘Islam, whatever else it might be, is certainly not “a European religion” because the EU’s fundamental values – tolerance, respect for rights, the capacity for self-criticism – derive from an Enlightenment which was ‘obviously and exclusively a European phenomenon’ and ‘could never have arisen except in a broadly Christian world’. Important recent books by younger scholars – I’m thinking here of Alexander Bevilacqua’s *The Republic of Arabic Letters: Islam and the European Enlightenment* (2018) and Emily Greble’s *Muslims and the Making of Modern Europe* (2021) – have knocked this view on the head by revealing the dialogue that existed between Enlightenment and Islamic cultures and the formative influence on modern Europe of millions of Muslims living there. Quite why Pagden cleaves to what might be called a ‘Europe of the cathedrals’ model when there is so much evidence discrediting it is baffling. It certainly casts a shadow over an otherwise consistently illuminating book.

To think of the European Union as a ‘Christian club’, as some of its early critics did, noting the common Catholicism

of many of its founders, subverts the tradition of tolerance Pagden celebrates as characteristically European. Likewise, to argue for excluding Turkey on the grounds that it is a 'predominantly Muslim society', rather than because of its record on human rights or Erdoğan's creeping authoritarianism, is also hardly consistent with those alleged

'European' ideals. The fact that the likes of the philosopher Karl Jaspers and the former French president Nicolas Sarkozy presumed that Turkey was not part of Europe and never could be should not determine any conception of what Europe is or Turkey's place within it. Pagden believes firmly that the past is essential to understanding

the present, hence his commitment to such wide, deep historical writing. But his readers will know that, though the past has formed the present, it cannot determine the future. A cosmopolitan confidence in the openness of that future and a desire to improve on the past may yet inform the projects Europeans pursue.

EDWARD VALLANCE

There's None So Drunk as a Puritan

The Restless Republic: Britain without a Crown

By Anna Keay

(William Collins 480pp £25)

After our present queen, Richard Cromwell is Britain's longest-lived head of state, dying in 1712 at the ripe old age of eighty-five. In his last years, the elderly former Lord Protector was known for subjecting new guests at his Cheshunt home to a curious after-dinner entertainment. 'After an hour or two in conversation, and drinking,' the 18th-century antiquary Mark Noble reported, Cromwell, carrying glasses, a fresh bottle and a candle, would lead guests 'up to a dirty garret, in which was nothing but a little round hair trunk'. He would then pull the trunk into the middle of the room and instruct all the guests to charge their glasses and drink a toast to the prosperity of 'old England' while each in turn straddled it. The newer guests were told to take care while they did so, for 'they had no less than the lives and fortunes of all the good people of England' under them. At this point, to the mirth of the initiated, the trunk would be opened to reveal the dozens of loyal addresses sent to Cromwell on his accession, in which the English people pledged their 'lives and fortunes' to protecting a ruler whose reign would ultimately last a matter of months.

The Interregnum has long occupied the 'attic space' of the English historical imagination. The 1650s have often been seen as an intermission in which a number of constitutional experiments were tried before the course of English history reverted to its natural, monarchical path. Anna Keay argues powerfully, however,

that we should not see the period as one defined only by the absence of something. Instead, the 1650s were years of remarkable, even bewildering, intellectual ferment.

Keay skilfully navigates the reader through the complex history of the 1650s via a series of individual stories. Her choice of characters is astute, combining those who will be familiar to general readers, such as Oliver Cromwell, with those whose lives are less well known, such as the prophetess Anna Trapnel. These case studies are grounded in Keay's extensive research among original sources, ensuring that the pen portraits delivered are full of fresh insights. John Bradshaw, the president of the High Court of Justice which tried Charles I, for example, is often depicted in

popular works as a minor Cheshire lawyer, plucked from his work in the legal backwaters only because no judge of any stature could be persuaded to participate in the regicide. As Keay demonstrates, however, by the late 1640s he had not only risen to be chief justice of Chester but also acted in celebrated legal cases on behalf of victims of Charles I's perceived tyranny, such as the future Leveller John Lilburne. Yet while Bradshaw was a committed Parliamentarian, he had also established a reputation for treating Royalists with fairness.

By 1648 Bradshaw had nonetheless become convinced that Charles was England's Nero and that, through Parliament's victories in the Civil Wars, God had judged against him. For 17th-century English Puritans, the signs of God's providence were everywhere: Edward Burghall, Bradshaw's contemporary at grammar school, recorded the collapse of a church wall on some spectators at a village ale bear-baiting as an example of the Almighty's speedy judgement of sinners. While the execution of the king was generally met with horror and dismay, for a small number of radicals, such as the Digger Gerrard Winstanley, it was the greatest sign that the second coming of Christ and the rule of his saints were imminent. For Winstanley, the second coming would usher in a communal utopia in which the earth would become a 'common treasury' for all. As much as his vision was ecstatic and prophetic, it was also intensely practical, growing out of the material hardships of the Civil Wars. The communes established by Winstanley on St George's Hill and then Little Heath, Cobham, met with opposition from local landowners protective of their grazing rights on common land and discomforted by the Diggers' rejection of social distinctions. Attempts to secure the new Commonwealth's support



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