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EUROPE'S PAST AND THE GLOBAL FUTURE

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When Edmund Burke declared in his Reflections on the Revolution in France, "the glory of Europe is extinguished for ever," his obitural note gave very little hint that Europe was, right at that time - in the eighteenth century - ushering in a transformative phase in world history. The European Enlightenment not only changed the institutional structures governing societies and states, it was a gigantic influence in establishing the basic understanding that public reasoning is essential for making societies better. Social improvement through systematic reasoning was a prominent component of the intellectual animation of the European Enlightenment. I will argue that the role of Europe in our troubled world today can be more sure-footed as well as more constructive if greater use is made of that heritage. What emerged firmly in eighteenth century Europe, riding on the back of the European Renaissance earlier, remains deeply relevant and constructive today.

I can imagine that the people here today who have come to this seminar hoping to hear about the future may be a little discouraged by the fact that I want to take you back a few centuries. There is, however, quite a strong connection between the past and the present. I begin, however, by first discussing some of the standard issues that tend to get aired when the challenges of the contemporary world are discussed. Let me separate out four large problems that demand global attention.

First, the world is going through what clearly is a large economic crisis, which may have erupted suddenly two years ago, but which is not likely to disappear quite so suddenly. The downward spiral leading to a headlong dive of the global economy may now have been halted

and mildly reversed, but levels of unemployment are exceptionally high across the world, including most countries in Europe and America.

Second, while the economic crisis of recent origin gets much attention in Europe and America, the old problems of poverty and deprivation remain strong and extensive in parts of Asia and much of Africa. Even though poverty removal is on various global agenda, and there has been some progress (Netherlands has been one of the leaders in this field), deprivation in the global scale is still distressingly large.

Third, organized conflict and terrorism, fed by instigating propaganda about some alleged need for penalizing other groups of people, which burst into the world only a few years ago remains powerful and unvanquished. And this in its turn has generated very gross and counterproductive responses, particularly in Europe and America, helping to further alienate different groups of people, rather than trying to unite them.

Fourth, we live in a precarious world surrounded by fragile nature, threatening the durability of the environment and our lives based on it. Even though it appears that much of the problem arises from our own actions and our procedures, which should be within our power to restrain and reverse, such course correction has proved to be oddly difficult.

Europe is recognised, across the world, to be one of the most influential and powerful segments of the global population. The European empires may have declined and disappeared, and Europe may no longer contain the most powerful nation in the world (that place is now occupied by America), nor does it include the emerging economic superpower (China must surely be that). But Europe still is a conglomeration of mighty and prosperous nations, which can together have a huge impact on the way the world goes. So it is natural to ask what can Europe do for the global future?

I have tried to argue in my writings, including in my last book, The Idea of Justice, and in an earlier monograph, Identity and Violence: The Illusion of Destiny, that the nature and reach of

public reasoning are among the most important influences on the way the world can change and how the global world can respond to informed scrutiny. The role of public reasoning got the recognition it needed in a definitive way in the intellectual developments of the European Enlightenment. How does that historical recognition, which the Enlightenment generated, relate to the ways and means of tackling problems in the contemporary world? How can it help in dealing with the identified problems of global economic crisis, widespread persistent poverty, terrorism-related insecurity, and our environmental hazards and vulnerabilities?

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Before I proceed to pursue the connection arising from the special role of the European Enlightenment in the development of contemporary modernity and in making the world understand the crucial role and reach of public reasoning, I want to note and emphasize three disclaimers, to avoid any misunderstanding of what I am trying to say. First, it is not my claim that the European Enlightenment was animated only by the celebration of reason. There were many other forces at work in Europe in the eighteenth century, including violently divisive political currents, which led among other things to the so-called "reign of terror" that so badly damaged the demands for "liberty, equality and fraternity" in the French Revolution. It is also true, as Isaiah Berlin has shown, that there were different kinds of counter-rational strands running during the "age of Enlightenment." But certainly a strong - and somewhat self-conscious - reliance on reason was one of the major departures of Enlightenment thought from the traditions prevailing earlier.

The second elucidation I want to make is to clarify that I am not arguing that Europe has been, in any sense, unique in celebrating reason. Reason has received its due recognition in different cultures across the world in different periods of history. For example, in my own country, India, reason has had its vigorous champions at least from the sixth century B.C. -

indeed Gautama Buddha emerged from this sceptical and scrutinizing tradition. Even though forces of unreason have often overwhelmed private and public life in India, the cultivation of reason has been a recurrent and persistent trend in the intellectual history of India. Similar things can be said about other cultures in the world, from the Chinese, Japanese and Korean, to the middle eastern and African.

Europe has not been unique in attending to reason. And yet, it is during the momentous intellectual revolution of the European Enlightenment that the central role of public reasoning got firmly established, and its priority got reflected through a multitude of institutions. For example, even the International Court of Justice here in The Hague draws on many influences, but its roots can be traced to the intellectual forces that the Enlightenment unleashed, which found many reflections in cross-border legal arguments and in reasoned international settlements, such as the so-called Jay Treaty between Britain and the United States in 1794. The place that public debates, including cross-border reasoning, has come to occupy, or has been aimed at occupying, in our contentious world is, to a great extent, a product of the intellectual and institutional transformation that was led by the European Enlightenment.

Third, I also want to clarify that I am not arguing that intellectual transformation of Europe during the Enlightenment was a regionally self-contained and autonomous development. Reasoning has a close relation to science, engineering, mathematics and the development of literature and the humanities. The European Enlightenment, following the European Renaissance, drew on a variety of knowledge and analysis coming from non-Western societies. For example, science and engineering emerging in China, algebra, trigonometry and other kinds of mathematics coming from India and the Arab world, and other global influences, combined with Europe's own ancestry going back all the way to Greece and Rome, profoundly changed the intellectual base on which the European Enlightenment could draw. In some ways, Europe served as a kind of cauldron in which the richly diverse comprehension of the nature of the world

and of the reach of analysis and scrutiny got productively "cooked" together. Part of my point in this talk is that this European product, drawing as it does on a world heritage (and not just on some parochial European tradition), can do much more constructive work in our own time. Indeed, the fact that Europe drew on so many sources - distant as well as near - enhances its power and reach.

Europe's role in the future of the world derives not just from its economic and political strength and its military might, but also from its intellectual background. This is not to deny that the European Enlightenment is now a world heritage, and Europe has no monopoly over its utilization. And yet the nature of European institutions and conventions have been more directly in line with its own history, and there is, in many ways, a facility there on which Europe can draw.

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Has Europe been playing its part in bringing more public reasoning into the global political arena? Sometimes, certainly, but there have also been, I would argue, rather large failures, which we must analyze. Consider what happened in the invasion of Iraq by what was called "the coalition of the willing." This thoroughly counterproductive invasion produced a huge loss of life and the maiming of a great many people, and it also put back the battle against terrorism quite badly, especially by reducing the priority of dealing with Al Quaida in Afghanistan. The arguments for the war misidentified the source of the barbarity of 9/11, against which the Iraq invasion was seen as a retaliation. As it happens, the attackers did not come from, nor reared in, Iraq. Indeed, contrary to claims emanating from Washington and London, Al Quaida was not even significantly present in Iraq. In fact, Al Quaida has become a substantial influence in Iraq only after - and largely due to - the military invasion. The weapons of mass destruction that were there according the war coalition were never found. Nor was there any good ground to expect that keeping law and order in Iraq would be an easy job once Iraq had been conquered - and it has not proved to

be so. And, to touch on a related matter, while Iraq had a regime that was indeed tyrannical and vindictive, it did not restrain the freedom of women in a systematic way that has now become standard in Iraq after the victory of the American-led coalition.

I am not, of course, blaming Europe for starting the war in Iraq. That initiative certainly came from America. But European countries could have very likely prevented that belligerent move if they had been united in their opposition to the military invasion. Instead, a very divided Europe allowed the misdiagnosed reading and misreasoned policy for war to go ahead. Indeed, a number of European countries became active partners in this badly reasoned invasion.

What's the point of my going over these past events, since - as Agathon and Aristotle had noted - that even God could not change the past. There are indeed very good reasons for not crying over what can be described as spilt milk. But there is some argument for asking why and how that unfortunate outcome came about, so that we do not go on spilling milk too frequently. The primary responsibility for ham-handed global action over the Bush years may not be Europe's, but often enough Europe's secondary responsibilities have been substantial. And these connections are worth examining to avoid similar problems arising in the future - obviously not exactly in the same form, but involving less than vigorous use of public reasoning.

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Is there any ground for thinking that Europe has any advantage over the USA in the pursuit of public reasoning? Surely, the European origin of the Enlightenment cannot make a difference here - can it? I think Europe does actually have some advantages, in having a general climate of public opinion and an institutional structure that is largely favourable to reasoned public discourse. Indeed, it is much harder to swamp Europe with concocted untruths specially devised for a specific political purpose. In the hard days preceding the Iraq invasion, the limitations of the American media became extremely disabling for a clear understanding and

scrutiny of available news and for reasoned analyses of conclusions to be drawn, on the basis of all the available information, including the scepticism of Hans Blix, who was charged to examine the presence of weapons of mass destruction in Iraq. There was - and this is true today as well - more plurality of serious news in many European countries, and certainly in the European union as a whole. Drawing on the huge presence of plural institutional features, the European media allow more room for scepticism and rejection of concocted tales. For example, the kind of systematic lying that the business lobbies and tea parties in America managed to generate about healthcare reform proposed by President Obama would have been much harder to foster in Europe.

As far as the Iraq invasion is concerned, the policy could be sold to the American public on the basis of creating systematic misconceptions about what was happening in Iraq and elsewhere in the Middle East. This did not happen in a comparable way in Europe, but I fear it is not to the credit of the European countries that many of them smoothly joined the United States in the Iraqi invasion, even though the European public was much better informed through more open media coverage and more balanced political commentary. The institutional advantage of better - and generally more informed - public reasoning got somehow drowned by the political pressure to join in that thoroughly counterproductive game-changing military policy. If having vigorous public reasoning is a virtue, neglecting the lessons emerging from such reasoning cannot but be a fairly serious vice. If there is need for more resolve in Europe to make fuller use of public reasoning, this is surely one good illustration.

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The European Enlightenment brought out prominently the role of critical reasoning in general and open public reasoning in particular in morality and politics. The celebration - and I hope some extension - of that achievement has been the one of the subjects of my last book, The

Idea of Justice. But going beyond moral and political philosophy, the Enlightenment brought out - through arguments as well as examples - the huge effectiveness of public reasoning in changing the world in which we live.

We do not, of course, have a global government, not to mention a global democracy. But various means of greater integration can certainly be entertained as a long-run possibility. There is a glowing message - even if it is often ignored - in the commitment of Europeans to traverse national boundaries, after two extraordinarily bloody wars that ravaged the continent. The European Union is a significant pointer to the direction in which the global world could go, given suitable political conditions, which demand cultivation and nurturing - and some championing.

There is, however, a hugely constructive role for global public reasoning that is not parasitic on having a global government. Global debates and discussions are productive right now even though the world is divided into individual countries and a multitude of political and economic conglomerations. No less important than political union is the unity of dialogue that the global community already listens to, with varying degrees of attention. The Marquis de Condorcet's reasoning about, for example, the importance of basic education in general and women's education in particular, or Adam Smith's analysis of removing counterproductive trade policies achieved the effectiveness that they did through influencing the nature of public reasoning in the eighteenth-century world. It is that connection - the efficacy of public reasoning - that I am trying to invoke here, in the national as well as global context. Arguments presented in the global arena still have their influences through a variety of routes, including their impact on what comes to be listened to in the committee of nations. Here too the Enlightenment pointed to routes that have become more powerful since then.

How can public reasoning help in facing the four challenges that were identified earlier? Let me comment on each of them briefly here. First, the global economic crisis had many different factors behind it, but certainly one big causal influence was a series of policy failures resulting from the fact that the Western world in general and the United States in particular had convinced itself that markets were self-regulating processes, did not need the regulatory hand of the state, and needed little supplementation from public action. This was not only against all the accumulated wisdom of experience of successful market economies, which all worked in tandem with state activities, but it also sharply departed from the penetrating analysis of Adam Smith on why we needed both the state and the market. Smith saw the task of political economy as the pursuit of "two distinct objects": "first, to provide a plentiful revenue or subsistence for the people, or more properly to enable them to provide such a revenue or subsistence for themselves; and secondly, to supply the state or commonwealth with a revenue sufficient for the public services." Smith explained how the role of the state included adequate provision of public services, including providing free education for all, and arranging for poverty relief.

If America was the main culprit in initiating the global economic crisis, Europe's response to the crisis has been far from reasoned. The present craze for cutting public deficit down drastically and instantly, led by Britain and endorsed strongly by the OECD, seems to ignore the huge lessons of the past that public indebtedness can be most easily handled through economic growth. A breathless imposition of draconian measures may make the leaders of the state feel good, but they can easily add to the problem by endangering the goose of economic growth that lays the golden egg of deficit reduction. The mountains of debt at the end of the Second World War, and at the beginning of the Clinton presidency in the United States, melted away quickly thanks to rapid economic growth. The public deficits have to be reduced, certainly, but the serious issues of policy making are when and how.

I am aware that my analysis of what is going on would be resisted by some analysts, and for the purpose of tonight's seminar, I do not have to engage in the battle of convincing them. But the point on which we can all agree is that we need more discussion and public debates on these policy issues rather than precipitate jumps into unknown territories with well-known dangers. I am arguing in this talk for the use of public reasoning, rather than for any particular thesis, but the reasoning has to make room for considering heterodox analyses, even if they may sound discordant to the promoters of instant action. George Bernard Shaw has argued that the English never feel moral unless they are uncomfortable, and I can see that many governments are ready to provide the kind of English austere morality without taking note of lessons from the past that does not put human well-being and economic correctness on a kind of collision course. The old Enlightenment remedy of subjecting each proposed policy to the scrutiny of public reasoning is very important here.

Second, what about persistent poverty? Netherlands did a lot in the past, along with the Scandinavian countries, in keeping this subject on the global agenda. Jan Tinbergen is still my personal hero on this subject. The issue remains active and there has been some progress in recent years. But there are huge gaps that demand closer reasoning and the attention of global policy makers. The fact that the newly powerful body G-20 includes some newly growing economies, like China, India, Brazil and South Africa, is welcome, but there is need for greater voice for those poorer economies that are not yet enjoying the benefits of economic growth, including the bulk of Africa. I do not doubt that Adam Smith's wonderful device of invoking "the impartial spectator" would point its finger very much in the direction of Africa today. Global public reasoning does demand that level of detachment to which both Smith and Immanuel Kant pointed.

Third, what about alienation and terrorism? Since the instigators of extremist violence appeal to ethnicity and religion (such as Islam), this in its turn has led, in many countries in the

West, to mindless counter-instigation against all members of that religion (for example all Muslims), thereby making the instigators' dream come true. Religious extremists love the further alienation that comes from retaliation not against the perpetrators of violence, but against all members of the same religion, since this helps to expand the number of people who could be recruited in the anti-Western cause. Dialectics can be a funny business, but its consequences can be quite seriously unfunny.

The reduction of human beings into one dimension only, tends, often enough, to generate a sense of distance and resentment, which can be the basis of cultivation of hatred. This can be countered only through extensive social reasoning that yields the recognition of the multiplicity of identities and can restrain the exploitation of aggressive uses of one particular contrast of identities. I have tried to discuss this issue fairly extensively in my book Identity and Violence, and will not further pursue this question here.

Finally, the environment. Many activists, especially from Europe, were disappointed that no contract emerged at the Copenhagen meeting. But could it have, given the very limited public discussion that preceded it? There are serious issues of conflict, involving, for example, the keenness of the old polluters in the world to restrain everybody now (after doing their bit of polluting over a very long time) and the anxiety of the new polluters to be allowed to industrialize to remove domestic poverty. A balance between these two competing concerns can be found only through extensive public reasoning on how much room each country may have. It would have been magic if there was an implementable contract that did not follow from extensive public reasoning on these issues, and in the event no magic occurred in Copenhagen.

We do need much more public discussion on these and related environmental issues. I must say here that I am not persuaded that the global group of G-20 is an adequate forum for this discussion, since it has little representation of those poor countries which has not yet entered the phase of globalized expansion. Just as China and India may have much to complain

today about the way Europe and America have come to occupy so much of the global commons, at some future date much of Africa may have reason to complain about how China and India, along with Europe and America, make the room left for Africa in the global commons that much more precarious. I think again of Adam Smith's "impartial spectator," who is needed not only to get our morality straight, but also to make global political action feasible and sustainable.

Can Europe rise to these demands? I don't know, but it could be doing itself a great service as well as helping the world if it did. The European Enlightenment was, as I have already argued, much more than a merely European movement. The wisdom that it provided can help us to enhance the future of both Europe and the rest of the world.