Beyond the Market: Who Are We Now?

Keynote Lecture by Professor Nicholas Boyle,

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Introduction

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Nicholas Boyle (FBA) is the Emeritus Schröder Professor of German in the University of Cambridge and a Fellow of Magdalene College. He is best known for his biography of Goethe, still in progress (*Goethe: The Poet and the Age: Volume I: The Poetry of Desire (1749-1790*, OUP 1991, and *Goethe: The Poet and the Age: Volume II: Revolution and Renunciation, 1790-1803*, OUP 2000). He is also the author of *Who Are We Now?: Christian Humanism and the Global Market from Hegel to Heaney* (1998), a volume of essays on the contemporary world, and *Sacred and Secular Scriptures: a Catholic approach to literature* (2004). His most recent books are *German Literature. A Very Short Introduction* (2008) and a further study of globalization: *2014. How to Survive the Next World Crisis* (2010). He was the General Editor of *The Impact of Idealism. The Legacy of Post-Kantian German Thought* (4 vols., 2013). He is a Fellow of the British Academy, a Corresponding Fellow of the Göttingen Academy, and holds an honorary degree from Georgetown University. In 2000 he received the Goethe medal of the Goethe Institute and in 2106 the Gold Medal of the International Goethe Society.

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The title of our workshop rather obviously raises two questions. What lies beyond the market, that is, what more is there to national and international life than economic processes? And what – on earth – is culture? In answer to the first of these questions I shall argue that what lies beyond the market is the state (if you can build one) – that beyond economic life lies political life. The second question I shall spend less time on since I have elsewhere discussed the origin of the concept of 'cultures' in late nineteenth-century Germany and do not wish to repeat that discussion today. I shall however be making much use of an early nineteenth-century German thinker who contributes significantly to our understanding of both questions, Hegel (though in his anniversary year Marx will also get a brief look-in). Hegel takes much more seriously than Marx the relation between economics and politics, and on the way to the construction of his theory of the state he also locates in a rather interesting place what we now call 'culture'. What makes him especially relevant however to the contemporary discussion of Europe is that the unifying factor in his account of all these elements of social life is the question of identity: who are we? I shall modify the Hegelian question by the addition of a single word: who are we *now*? For if we are to draw on Hegel's political thinking to understand our present circumstances we have to acknowledge the profound economic changes that have taken place since his time and have to modify our application of his ideas accordingly.

In this talk, therefore I shall first outline the process by which in Hegel's theory the economic structure that is the market gives rise to the political structure that is the state, a process, as he understands it, of growing freedom as we learn ever more comprehensively to determine for ourselves who we are. I shall also note where in this process he locates the phenomenon of culture. Second, I shall argue that as a theory of the unified nation state Hegel's theory has lost its applicability to the contemporary world thanks to the great acceleration in the mid-C19 of the process we now call globalization. However, Hegel's thoughts about identity in relation to the market remain as relevant as ever: he accurately describes both the structures characteristic of the modern economy and the problems that derive from them, even though these are global phenomena now, not merely national. Thirdly I shall suggest a parallel between the European empires of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and the EU, as attempts to derive a political order, and so a more than economic identity, from the global market, the empires operating by force, the EU by consent. Fourth and finally, I shall consider the position of Ireland, suggesting that, like other nations of Europe, including the UK, it can aspire now only to a cultural, not to a political, identity, and that its most distinctive cultural contribution to the EU is, currently at least, the border between North and South.

I. *Hegel on civil society and the state*

The guiding principle in Hegel's *Philosophy of Right*, from what he says about the family to what he says about the history of the world, is what he calls growth in the consciousness of freedom. That phrase is deliberately ambiguous, but I shall concentrate on the sense in which it could be called a principle of identity. In this sense growth in the consciousness of

freedom means becoming more aware, both individually and collectively, of the ways in which we ourselves determine who we are.

However, there is for Hegel no such thing as a pre-social, individual human identity. Individuals are what they are in virtue of the contexts in which they belong, the relationships which they inhabit. According to Hegel, the notion that collective institutions come into existence through the consent of pre-existing individuals in a social contract, a notion which underlies the many forms of what is misleadingly called 'libertarian' thinking, fundamentally misunderstands the nature of identity, and so of freedom. 'Individuals', he says 'are not real persons outside their relationship to other persons'. Only when they become citizens of a state do they become individuals in the full sense, freely determining, and fulfilling, not impoverishing, their own identity. 'Christians recognize', says Pope Francis, and Hegel after all claimed to be a Christian, 'that their identity is primarily relational'.[1]

Within society the sense of freedom, of determining for oneself who one is, is generated for Hegel not by a single formal device such as the vote, but by something much more substantial, permanent, and encompassing: the institutions of which one is an active part. Those institutions, in the broadest sense of the term, start with the family, in which one is both formed and forming, continue with the work one does as an economic agent, grow into the possibilities for becoming a person of standing in the structures of civil society and culminate in the administrative, representative, and constitutionally defined divisions of the state which, taken together and through their interrelationship, express and carry out the general will. At that ultimate level the identity the individual has achieved as child, as parent, as worker and consumer, as socially recognized person of standing, culminates in an identity as politically active citizen of the state – as voter, as soldier, as taxpayer, as representative to the rest of the world of the state of which he or she is a citizen. That fully achieved identity is what for Hegel is meant by freedom.

For Hegel then there are three levels of social organization: at one end the family, at the other end the state, and between them the area of civil society. It is on the second, intermediate, level, that of civil society, that we must focus in order to clarify what for Hegel lies beyond the market.

The economic realm, what Hegel calls the system of needs and their satisfaction, is the concrete basis of civil society: in this system, by means of the work of human beings acting as producers, goods are provided to satisfy the material needs of those same human beings, now in the role of consumers. The economic interactions of production and consumption however create their own problems and conflicts, and these in turn create new structures to deal with them. Civil society consists not only of working and trading and consuming: it needs regulation, infrastructure, guardians of public order – and, even more unwelcome, it needs taxation to pay for these services. If the individual human does not feel these constraints as his or her choice, as part of what he or she is, but only as alien intrusions that chafe and irritate – if he or she doesn't 'own' them as the current term has it – the individual human will not feel him or herself as part of the system, as part of a whole, and both the individual and the system will suffer, possibly break down completely. For 'it is the defining purpose of individuals to lead a universal life' – to know themselves as the realization of a purpose shared by everyone. The economic system, the system of needs and their satisfaction, therefore gives rise to collective institutions, what Hegel calls 'corporations', which make the

[1] *Address to the Commission of the Bishops' Conferences of the European Community 28 October 2017*

constraints of civil society into the acceptable and accepted conditions for fulfilling a common purpose. Hegel is thinking initially of associations such as craft guilds, but his term 'corporation' has a much more general application: professional bodies that charter their members, for example, any large and organized private body, charities, universities, churches, trade unions, and what we still call corporations, large firms with their own ethos, imposing rules to achieve the common purpose, anything that creates standards of its own for its members to live and work by and feel as a result that membership gives them identity and social standing – I'm a doctor, I'm a shop steward, I'm a scoutmaster, I'm a Trinity man or a Goldman Sachs woman. There are, Hegel says 'innumerable respects in which in civil society individuals are mutually dependent on one another', and so innumerable ways of knowing who you are.

However, even the sense of identity provided by a corporation does not fulfil completely, or for everyone, the 'defining purpose of individuals, to lead a universal life'. It doesn't fulfil the purpose completely *because* it doesn't fulfil it for everyone: not everyone in my civil society is a member of my corporation, or indeed of any corporation; and it doesn't fulfil it for everyone because civil society itself, as the economic system of needs and their satisfaction, is subject to a remorseless internal logic which dictates that as some become richer others become poorer, inequality grows, and an underclass of the very poor develops who drop out of civil society, out of organized interaction with others, even out of the process of selling labour and buying goods, and who will eventually in desperation overthrow the system altogether (as Hegel believed had happened from time to time in the ancient world and most recently in the French Revolution). Unless, that is, they are enabled to find their collective identity in a greater whole than civil society provides, a collectivity that is genuinely universal, a totality that is, in Hegel's phrase, 'the essence, purpose, and product of [the individual's] activity'. That totality, that shared collective existence which, regardless of economic circumstance, gives the individual selfhood, a sense of identity thanks to a sense of belonging, is called by Hegel 'the state'.

The defining formal feature of the state for Hegel is that it has sovereignty, both internally, in relation to its citizens, and externally, in relation to other states. Another name for sovereignty might be 'the general will', for sovereignty is the legal expression of the will of the citizens to constitute a state. The assertion and acceptance of that sovereignty by the citizens gives them what Hegel calls the 'ethos', the 'Gesinnung', of patriotism – a sense that their individual identity is so bound up with the identity of their state that they are willing to lay down their lives to defend it in war, for in defending it they are defending themselves. Hegel's association of state sovereignty with the right to require death anticipates Max Weber's famous definition of the state as the entity which enjoys the monopoly of legitimate force over a particular territory. However, useful though Weber's modification of Hegel is in describing the mechanics of government, Hegel's focus on the collective consciousness of individuals has a broader relevance. For Hegel's individuals, their state is a totality to which the family and civil society that have formed them already belong and so it is what makes them possible as individuals in the first place, as nodes at which all the levels of social organization interact. Because we belong to a particular totality, a particular collective that includes us all, let us say, Germany (a totality which did not exist in Hegel's time), we know what it is to be a German family, to live a German life, and to behave towards each other in a German way – and for 'German' read 'Irish' or 'Chinese' as the case may be.

It is here that Hegel locates what we now call culture, though he does not use this term. He calls it 'Volksgeist', the spirit of the nation, or more abstractly, 'particularity'. Our particularity, our being German or Irish or Chinese, is given us, according to Hegel, when we emerge from our family into civil society – into the civil society of a particular nation, belonging to a particular space in the world and a particular time in history. Particularity, however, 'culture', does not provide us with identity, for it is a gift of nature, time, and space, not of our deliberate, sovereign will. I share my culture with others of my nation because I cannot help sharing in our general destiny. I share my membership of the totality of which I am a citizen because I share in the general will, and it is only as a citizen of my state that I am deliberately willing my identity and so am, in Hegel's terms, free. Only if you are a citizen of a sovereign state for which you are prepared if necessary to die are you, for Hegel, a complete individual, knowing fully who you are.

II. *Civil society, the state, and globalization*

Hegel's theory of the relation between individual identity, the economic system, and the state was drawn up in his *Philosophy of Right* in 1820. How well does it map on to our situation nearly 200 years later? In one respect the coincidence is uncannily close. What Hegel says about the sovereignty of the state and the ethos of patriotism, expressing itself in the sacrifices of war, fits very well with the rhetorical appeals to the sovereignty of the nation-state and to the hallowed dead of past military conflicts that were heard in the UK in the approach to the referendum on membership of the EU and indeed at the same time, though with rather more embarrassment, in Ireland's relatively subdued celebration of the centenary of the Easter Rising in 1916. In the contemporary world, and often, though not exclusively, in relation to the EU, such concepts as state sovereignty or patriotism or a national ethos or even the cleansing effects of war are as alive as they ever were. Had the neo-nationalists read their Hegel, however, they would have discovered that the state they believe in has in Hegelian terms one decisive defect: it lacks an economic foundation. Hegel's model assumes that the state can encompass the totality of 'the innumerable respects in which in civil society individuals are dependent on one another' and that as a result the identity individuals derive from their membership of civil society can be perfected in the state: in the state, he said, individuals could find 'the essence, purpose, and product of their activity' and so could fulfil 'their defining purpose, to lead a universal life'. In the circumstances of 1820 that may have seemed a plausible assessment of the relation between the 'system of needs', which underlies civil society, and the state, whether in general theory or in the case of particular states. But even by 1848 it was obvious to Hegel's disciple, Karl Marx, that a global market, a 'Weltmarkt', was being created that was destroying 'long-standing national industries' and 'giving a cosmopolitan shape to production and consumption in every country'. 'Globalization', as we now call it, has a long history but in the later nineteenth century it underwent an unprecedented acceleration and, somewhat decelerated by the 75 Years' War from 1914 to 1989, the process has continued to the present, surging once again between 1989 and 2016. Even though Hegel's analysis of the relation between the individual, the economy, and the political order still seems to me valid, the final step in his argument, into the totality that is the state, has become much more difficult to imagine in practice than it was in his own time. Indeed, thanks to the globalization of the world economy, the overwhelming majority of what call themselves states are scarcely recognisable as states in his sense. A state that can encompass, let alone regulate and direct

and exercise full sovereignty over, the civil society of which its citizens are members scarcely exists now outside North Korea.

The system of needs and their satisfaction to which most human beings belong is already larger than even the largest states. The annual turnover in the world's foreign exchange markets, which can serve as a rough indicator of the size of the global system, is 100 times greater than the annual GDP of the USA. No state, not even China or the USA under Trump, is economically self-sufficient these days, except perhaps in a short-term situation of emergency. Many of the institutions, the civil society, built on that near-global system of needs, embrace individually more human activity than many states. In 2017 the net revenues of Apple (at $215bn) were as large as the entire GDP of Vietnam, larger in fact than the GDP of 145 of the world's 191 so-called states. Amazon by this measure is larger than 134 such states; even SAB Miller is only slightly smaller than Estonia and Iceland. Facebook, with a third of the world's population as active users, is an institution of civil society larger even than China and India put together. The conflicts we see in such matters as taxation or censorship, or investor-state litigation between political institutions claiming sovereignty and civil institutions operating outside anybody's sovereign framework, are an indication that the self-contained totality which in Hegel's analysis is the nation-state is extinct. What are now called states do not possess internal sovereignty, as Hegel requires, in relation to the civil society to which their citizens belong, and even their external sovereignty in relation to other so-called states is fading, in so far as state-on-state declared wars have disappeared, and instead undeclared wars proliferate on territories which may be claimed by one state-like power but on which other state-like powers feel free to intervene, operate, and conflict. Even war is not what it used to be.

What however remains directly relevant to our contemporary situation is Hegel's analysis of the problem of identity. What he says about the relation between the individual and civil society directly correlates with the circumstances of an age in which the system of needs and their satisfaction has become global. In Hegel's terms, we have now a global civil society without a global state. What call themselves states in the modern world conform more exactly to Hegel's definition of corporations. As we have just seen, there are numerous and very important organizations at work in our world that in his terms – and not only in his terms – are indubitably corporations and yet are larger than the majority of so-called states. Equally the so-called states are losing the distinguishing feature of sovereignty that marks them off from the corporations of civil society, as Hegel calls them, which are essentially voluntary. This point perhaps needs to be explained in a little more detail.

The sovereignty of the state, according to Hegel, expresses for us, puts our own name on, the element of necessity in our lives, the things about our life that we cannot imagine away without ceasing to be who we are. That element of necessity may be an unconscious sense of security when we walk the streets of our own country, or a conscious resignation to the inevitable when we fill in our tax returns, or it may be the sense 'I can do no other' with which a patriot puts his life at risk in war. In all these cases the sovereignty of the state is identical with the will of its citizens to be who they are. For them there is no alternative to life being this way – these necessities of their existence are inseparable from their identity and are therefore felt by them as conditions of their freedom. By contrast, the corporations of civil society do not embrace the totality of the existence of their members: simply to be a part of civil society is not necessarily to be a member of one or any of them and it is a matter of

choice whether you embark on membership of a profession, join a church or Facebook, or seek employment with Coca-Cola.

Hegel is emphatic about this distinction. 'If the state is confused with civil society ... it follows ... that it is a matter of personal choice to be a member of the state.' That however is precisely the situation in which the world now finds itself. Numerous states, some as respectable as Malta or Cyprus, permit the purchase of citizenship for cash, the UK has only slightly more indirect means of achieving the same result, though the rates are somewhat higher. People, whether wooed as 'investors' or execrated as 'economic migrants', join states now for the very purposes which Hegel sees as peculiar to corporations: furthering 'the interests of individuals as individuals' and 'protecting their property'. It would seem that, just as corporations have become indistinguishable from states, so states have become indistinguishable from corporations. The state *is* now confused with civil society, which is as much as to say that states no longer are totalities that are 'the essence, purpose, and product of [the individual's] activity', enabling the individuals to fulfil 'their defining purpose, to lead a universal life'.

Now that civil society has become global, however, the conflicts and problems characteristic, according to Hegel, of that stage of social organization re-emerge at the global level. First of all, individuals necessarily suffer a crisis of identity (a virtually universal theme in modern art, literature, and social commentary). The fundamental reason for the crisis is that the 'innumerable respects in which in civil society individuals are dependent on one another' now have a global reach and the individuals' need to give a universal dimension to their lives, to feel themselves as having a purpose in which everyone is involved, can no longer be satisfied within the economic (and so also cultural) life of a single territory or nation ('Volk' in Hegel's terminology). Modern individuals are citizens of nowhere because the global capital that determines their lives is situated nowhere. More brutally than in individual minds this crisis of identity is felt in individual bodies. The human bodies, the instruments of labour, in which both needs and their satisfaction originate, seek the same freedom from state boundaries and restrictions that global capital enjoys and attempt to migrate to wherever for the moment they can be most productive, if necessary by breaking down physical walls and fences. In Hegel's account civil society is not *necessarily* inclusive, not *necessarily* for everyone, but the state has by definition sovereignty over everyone and so a role for everyone too. When civil society has become global, when states have themselves become little more than corporations, of which membership is voluntary, there will as a consequence be large, and probably increasing, numbers who are not included anywhere, members of nothing, and with no role acknowledged by a sovereign authority. Abandoned equally by state and by civil society, only their membership of a family tells migrating individuals who they are, both when they are reunited and when they are torn apart.

For the corporations that still go by the name of states the non-citizens knocking at their doors as refugees are as ominous a reminder of their obsolescence as their difficulty in raising taxes from the multinational commercial corporations that are now their rivals. A second consequence of the globalization of civil society is that the growth of inequality and so of relative poverty, which according to Hegel threatens to create an underclass willing to overthrow the entire system, also becomes global. The essence and purpose of the Hegelian state is to provide the 'universal interest', the common purpose, that holds together and reconciles all the 'particular interests' of civil society. It is not difficult to see that when that

universal interest is missing, when exclusion and poverty become general, civil society is at risk of collapsing into civil war.

III. *Empires and the EU*

Hegel's historical position then has its limitations. He understood the dynamic that, through crises of over-production, drives civil society to go beyond itself, seeking new markets, but he did not yet see, as Marx and Engels did, that this process must lead eventually to the establishment of a global market. In the 1820s the process had simply not gone far enough for its destination to be apparent. Not until the 1880s did the global function of the new European imperial structures founded after Hegel's death become manifest: they were not simply colonial extensions of discrete individual states but first attempts to give political coherence to an economic system that now encompassed the world, and they used the most basic political instrument to do so: physical force. Simplifying greatly, we could say that each of them sought to construct a largely closed economic system of primary producers at the periphery and industrial processors at the metropolitan centre, given the political appearance of statehood by a common military, a common administration, a common freedom of movement, a common sovereign, and at least an assertion of a common culture – in language, education, religion, sport, and cuisine. They were attempts to create a global state for a global civil society. But as political structures the empires failed, not simply because of the fissiparous local tendencies, the independence movements, that undermined them from within, but because in relation to the world outside them they were not global enough. They failed to recognize that the economic interrelations that had formed them in the first place were driving them into a global market in which they would have to relate politically with one another or risk a catastrophic collision. Unintended and unguided, that collision began in 1914 and worked itself out, at a huge cost in human life, wealth, and happiness, over the next 75 years. Faced with the challenge of creating a global political order to match the nascent global economy, the empires retreated first into themselves, in pursuit of autarky, and then into an unwinnable and destructive struggle for supremacy.

The EU is a product of the last phase of that struggle, the period from 1945 to 1989, known as the Cold War, during which the victorious continental empires of the USA and the USSR divided between them the global system of needs that the maritime empires had failed to unify politically. The peculiar circumstances which enabled the EU to emerge also gave it the peculiar, even paradoxical, character which makes it, as an institution, so appropriate to the world order, or disorder, that established itself after the Cold War ended. Because the USA, in its confrontation with the Soviet Union, provided, through NATO, a separate and credible defence policy for the whole of Western Europe, it was not necessary to raise in relation to the developing EU the awkward question of sovereignty: was it a state in the full Hegelian sense of a body that could define its identity by going to war with other such bodies? Such a question would have raised hackles in many quarters, not least in France, which during this period withdrew from NATO, and in the USA, which had no interest in breeding up a military rival. Precisely because the European Community was plainly not a sovereign state, since it lacked a defence capability of its own, it was able to grow more state-like functions than any previous or comparable body – a parliament, a supreme court, and a civil service – without arousing the resentment and hostility of other, more established, powers, including its own members. Instead it developed into a structure with a strong resemblance to the empires that had in a previous generation attempted to give political shape to a globalized economy,

but with a crucial difference: membership of this new empire was not compelled by force of arms.

On the contrary. According to Hegel a sovereign state is constituted by the will of a particular nation, or 'Volk', to constitute it, and the particularity of that nation is determined by its location on the earth, its place in what he calls the 'geographical basis of world history'. More tersely, Weber simply says that a state exercises its authority of force over a particular territory. However, the modern political order, at least in Europe west of the Crimea, fits completely into neither Weber's scheme nor Hegel's. A principal reason for founding the EU was to put an end to arguments about territory that had made European history a history of wars, which is why the first step towards founding it was setting up the Coal and Steel Community in order to draw the sting from the dispute between France and Germany over the ownership of Alsace and Lorraine. War between states becomes less likely as the claim of states over territory becomes less significant. Alsace and Lorraine are no longer a bone of contention in European politics because the identity of France and Germany as opposing claimants to that territory is no longer as defining of their citizens' identity as it would be if France and Germany were the independent totalities which Hegel imagines states to be, and as it was before the process of European economic union began.

IV. *Ireland, culture, and the border*

The current perplexity over the future of the border between Ireland and Northern Ireland is not merely an incidental complication in the British plan to withdraw from the EU. Arlene Foster was both right and wrong to complain recently that EU negotiators with the British government were paying insufficient attention to the unionist culture of Northern Ireland. She was right to suggest that Northern Irish unionism is a matter of culture – she was wrong to suggest that it therefore possessed the sort of political significance to which EU negotiators should pay attention. The Unionism that flourishes on the British side of the North-South border is indeed a culture – it is not a political consciousness capable of giving the Northern Irish people the identity of state citizens. It is true that the border is not just a place where people and goods might be held up, checks might be made, and charges might be levied. It is not just a market matter. Nor however is it simply the interface between two sovereign entities, two entities enjoying the monopoly of legitimate force over distinct but adjacent territories, even though that is apparently what Ms Foster would like it to be. Except during the Second World War it has never been purely and simply a political boundary – the freedom to travel and the freedom to vote have always qualified that status, as for many years did the currency union. The border to which the British negotiators have been struggling – I believe, hopelessly – to give a political form is in reality a cultural artefact, a particular historical and geographical construction by the nations it divides, and the EU negotiators are right to see its cultural status as outside their terms of reference.

Clearly it is time to say a bit more about culture. What is nowadays called culture, and what Hegel calls the spirit of a nation, is a matter not simply of art and music and literature and all the more modern forms of entertainment and communication, but equally also of religion and of the shared tropes of secular intercourse – shared memories, shared assumptions about behaviour and institutions, about food and drink, about what is obvious and decent, what is public or private, what is us, what is them. Although none of it in itself constitutes the general will that forms a state, although it all amounts to no more than the contingent particularity, as Hegel calls it, of a specific civil society, culture in this sense is permeated by

the strictly political features, and especially the history, of the state which makes the family and civil society possible in the first place. Whatever Irish and British cultures are, they are inseparable from the history of the attempts to build Irish and British states. The culture of Ireland is indelibly marked by its colonial relation with its larger neighbour, both in assimilation and in rejection; the culture of Britain is similarly inseparable from its imperial past, both what survives of it and what Britain chooses to forget. For a culture is a matter not only of what is collectively remembered and celebrated, but also of what is collectively ignored, of inattention, amnesia, and mental blanks. At the border between Ireland South and North the two national cultures meet in shared incomprehension, an incomprehension from which, I believe, only the EU can deliver them. The border is the point where people who can say 'I am Irish' meet people – some people, at any rate – who can say 'I am British', but the personal identities that meet here are not dependent on the border to establish their difference. Of course, the existence of the border has practical consequences – which hospital or police station you call in an emergency, what the price of petrol is, and so on – but these practical difficulties are just that, the practicalities of life that people negotiate, with no more meaning for their personal identity than the number of potholes in the roads on either side of a county boundary. The North-South border has indeed a greater significance than the merely practical, but it has a lesser significance than a truly political frontier would have. Only a narrow majority of the inhabitants of the six counties imagine it to have the political significance of a willed reality defining the state that makes their lives universal – and that political significance is imaginary because it is not universally shared by the other citizens of the state to which the six counties unionists think they belong, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland. On the contrary, the North-South Irish border plays no part in the sense of political identity of the majority of the citizens either of the United Kingdom or, I believe, of the Irish Republic. For both sides it is a historical accident, far less important in defining who they are than the Irish Constitution or the British Monarchy. Indeed, for both the Republic and the UK the border represents the same thing; it is a representation of unfinished business, the unfinished business of Ireland. The border is the place where the UK buries its memories of the long and largely disastrous story of English colonization of the other Atlantic island, of the failure to resolve the Home Rule crisis of the early twentieth century, of the resultant traumatic breakup of the previous kingdom, and of the brevity of its own existence (for it is still less than a hundred years old, younger than Norway, or even Italy). But the border is also a place of Irish amnesia, where questions about Ireland's past and future can be stored out of sight as if they were somebody else's problem: questions about past co-existence and collaboration with English colonialism across the whole island, about the territorial extent of the Republic (questions deliberately suppressed in 1999 in order to make the border and all it conceals invisible), and about the practicability of incorporating into a united Ireland three quarters of a million more or less recalcitrant and resentful former unionists. Both sides can avoid discussing, or even raising, these issues by instead discussing the border, and in that sense there is a shared Anglo-Irish culture, a shared amnesia, and a shared fetish that substitutes for the things both sides are too polite to mention, even to themselves. The border, in short, is a shared wound.

The border is also, therefore, the unique Anglo-Irish contribution to the culture of the European Union. If over the last nearly fifty years the shared wound has been healing, and it has been possible for the distinction between Derry and Donegal to become, as the UK Foreign Secretary recently reminded us it is, no more evident than the boundary between two London boroughs, that is the work of the EU. It is not even, as seems to be generally assumed, the work of the Good Friday Agreement of 1998. When the Troubles which that

agreement concluded first began, neither the UK nor Ireland was a member of the EEC and it was the subsequent process of ever closer union and the fact that in 1998 both guarantor powers were members of the EU that made the agreement possible. As a result of that shared membership a range of rights and of judicial mechanisms for their enforcement were also shared by both sides and could be included as a guarantee of the stability of the pact and of the good faith of the participants. The Good Friday Agreement was predicated therefore on a prior elision of territorial difference, on a reduction in the significance of state membership and on the substitution for it of a new kind of solidarity beyond the economic.

The re-introduction of a border, whether hard or soft, between the Republic and the North, matters, therefore, not because of any risk it may represent to the future of the Good Friday Agreement, even though it is in those terms that both the UK and the EU choose to raise the issue. The decision of the UK government to withdraw from the EU matters because it is an attempt to return the understanding of the border itself, and of the state-like bodies which it divides, to a past era, to the pre-global era described by Hegel, in which market, civil society and state coincide within a material world, and economically and territorially distinct states, and their citizens with their particular distinct identities, are prepared to go to war with each other. (And if you are not prepared to go to war for it, your assertion of statehood is a meaningless gesture.) That is the imaginative and imaginary world still inhabited by those in the UK, and not only in Northern Ireland, who voted to leave the EU. In the real, modern, world, however, a nation is defined not by its statehood but by its culture. Both Britain and, to a lesser extent, Ireland have aspirations to statehood that cannot be realised. Britain embraces the illusions of Brexit, Ireland remains troubled by the dream of a political unification of the whole island. The unmanageable border between these two John O'Dreams reveals and represents that impasse. Within the EU however both the impasse and the border that symbolizes it are drained of political significance and dissolve away as the aspiration to statehood is recognised for the illusion it has become in a union where sovereignty is possessed only in so far as it is pooled. The national spirit, the 'Volksgeist', survives within the union, but as a national culture, not as a national state. The fading border in Ireland between North and South is a shared reminder to both Ireland and the UK, and indeed to everyone else, of the change which has overtaken the world since Hegel lectured on the philosophy of right: the extension of a system of needs and their satisfaction far beyond the territorial boundaries of any existing state that has gradually reduced those states to the level of mere corporations.

The global market has created a global civil society, and global civil society requires, and to some extent presupposes, a global state. The institutions of the EU are the nascent and partial institutions of such a global state, as is indicated by their forming in part the model on which the WTO, a truly global legal entity, is based. The internationalization of economic life since 1945 has had its effects at the political level, and so at the level also of personal identity: the individual identity provided by citizenship of a particular state no longer corresponds to the real, material life of participants in the global market for capital and labour, and in looking beyond that market to determine who they are they cannot be satisfied with those now obsolete answers. Self-determination as a citizen of a particular discrete state is no longer available to us: too much of the material substrate of our lives, the food we eat and the things we use, too much of our physical and mental activity involves us in interaction with citizens of other state-like bodies all over the world, for us to belong unambiguously to one territory and one jurisdiction. Instead we have to make do with a more ambiguous identity, caught between a national past and a global future, as *future*, not

yet actual, citizens of the world. That more ambiguous identity is well symbolized by an Irish border, heavy with past national meaning, but impossible to elevate into a frontier defining distinct and sovereign states, and transformed by the EU into a harmless expression of cultural diversity within a greater political union. The EU in turn sustains and expresses our more ambiguous identity on a larger scale through its similarly ambiguous, supranational but not yet global institutions, themselves state-like but not a super-state. That too is progress in the consciousness of freedom. From the thought of such freedom some will recoil in fear and will construct for themselves an unreal identity by wrapping themselves in fading flags and following, as TS Eliot put it, an antique drum. Most, let us hope, at least outside the UK, will know that the only alternative to a rerun of the great collisions of 1914 and 1916 is the advance along the path of international state-building that began with the Treaties of Rome in 1957, and with the preamble that committed the signatories to an 'ever closer union'.

Further information

Dr Mel Farrell

Director, Irish Humanities Alliance,

19 Dawson Street, Dublin 2.

M.Farrell@ria.ie

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