



# A CONVERSATION WITH PHILIPPE FABRY

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*This month we are very pleased to present this conversation with Philippe Fabry, a lawyer and a theorist of history. His approach, which he calls "historionomy," endeavors to identify the cyclical patterns of history. He is the author of [Rome, From Libertarianism to Socialism](#), [A History of the Century to Come](#), and [The Structure of History](#). His personal website is: <https://www.historionomie.net>. This interview was conducted by Grégoire Canlorbe.*

**Grégoire Canlorbe (GC):** You have never hesitated to challenge the usual discourse, which liberals (libertarians, classical-liberals, anarcho-capitalists, free-marketists) have never shunned, even the most conservative among them, by claiming France to be an artificial construction, from its establishment to becoming a unifying state – it is a political work, whose foundation is no more geography than ethnicity or blood. Far from having formed differently from other European nations, France has, according to you, been built around an ethnic and territorial reality, and globally follows the same trajectory in its history. Could you elaborate on that subject?



**Philippe Fabry (PF):** Yes, it is indeed a common place in the commentary on the history of France to say that it was the state which made the nation; while among our neighbors it would be the nation which made the state. I cannot say if historians believe it, because it is just not the kind of questions that they ask themselves these days. But it is the kind of ready-made thinking that is prized by journalists and politicians who pride themselves on diagnosing the "French trouble." But, in truth, that dichotomy opposing France to the rest of Europe, if not the world, is fallacious, in two respects. First, all nation-states are constituted according to a standard model (in reality two models, with France using the most frequent one; I will come back to this), where the state does not have a more determinant role than territorial and ethnic factors.

There are two models for the emergence of nation-states. The most common model, the most immediate, primary one, is that of the long-term gathering – around six centuries – of territories and people under one single state authority. The other model is the one that I would call, "secondary," with the nation-states born by secession, during an independence revolution: That is the case of Rome *vis-à-vis* the [Etruscans](#); the separated [United Provinces](#), formerly Spanish possessions; and the United States of America. These are formed when a population, geographically and culturally too distant from the state base of a "primary" nation-state, is yet under its control for various reasons.

France belongs, like all major European states, to the first category. The model is as follows. In a populated territorial area, more or less ethnically and linguistically homogeneous, but where there is no state, either because none has ever emerged (for example, [Germania](#) of the early Middle Ages), or because it is a former imperial state that has withdrawn (such as, [Gaul](#) during Late Antiquity and the early Middle Ages, or Britain [after the ebb of the Danes](#) in the 10th-century). The primitive regime is feudalism and therefore extreme political fragmentation.

In the absence of a large-scale exogenous event, generally the invasion by an imperial power, a feudal lord more powerful than the others appears over time, who is logically the one who controls the economic dynamics of the territorial area. This economic dynamic, say, a fertile agricultural region, is very easily identified by looking at a relief map: It is a large plain, the largest in the territorial area.

For example, the [Paris Basin](#) in France, the [North German Plain](#) for Germany, the [Guadalquivir Plain](#) for Spain, the [London Basin](#) for Britain. The seigniorial power which relies on this economic dynamic has a decisive advantage in resources and can extend over all the space that is naturally peripheral to it; that is to say, both culturally close, and belonging to a geographically well-defined territorial area: The whole of Gaul for the [Paris Basin](#), including the Breton peninsula; the [Massif Central](#) and the smaller plains of [Aquitaine](#) and [Languedoc](#); the entire island of Britain for the London Basin, winning over Cornwall, and hilly Wales and Scotland; all of southern Germany for the northern plain, including mountainous Bavaria.

Of course, these centers of power do not stop at sharp boundaries, which for centuries have engendered conflicts over the exact boundaries of the areas of influence. Such conflict zones are generally distinguished by a hybrid character, allowing them to be associated with several groups. Thus, from an ethnic point of view, Britain may be linked to France by way of England, language linked Alsace to Germany, while the largest geographic area of the Paris Basin made it lean towards France, and so on. It is rare that a border so clearly separates two territorial areas that it is never challenged; but we can say that this was the case of the Pyrenees between France and Spain – thus, [Roussillon](#), close to [Catalan culture](#), did not become French until the 18th-century.

In effect, dominant seigniorial power then builds the state, first by going beyond the feudal system and creating an assembly, representative of the orders: Urban bourgeoisie, nobility, clergy, to which the peasantry is added in the Nordic countries. Such assembly allows the dominant seigniorial power to give itself a higher stature than that of the rest of the nobility and to embody the first national

representation.

This new paradigm leads to the construction of an administration, which exercises regalian functions, more and more uniformly throughout the controlled territory. The population gathered under said authority gradually becomes a political community, becomes culturally uniform, and develops a national feeling. And it is when this national feeling is sufficiently present, and when some event occurs – say, a lost war which discredits the regime, that is, the “administrative monarchy” – then, what I call a movement of national revolution comes about, which is the final stage in the constitution of a nation-state, thus making the nation the true holder of sovereignty, and therefore of the power of the state, through a parliamentary regime. That revolutionary movement lasts about forty years and goes through various systematic stages: Collapse of the regime, radicalization of the revolutionary phenomenon, military dictatorship, partial restoration of the old regime, and final parliamentary change.

So it is always the state which makes the nation; but at the same time the nation which arouses the state. The geographic expansion of the state is constrained by cultural, demographic, linguistic and obviously purely geographic factors, but its emergence and consolidation are themselves the product of an ethno-geographic reality. It is a kind of feedback loop, and it is rare that a state absolutely corresponds to its natural ethnico-geographical zone: The competition of large states creates disputed zones, which are often resolved, either through an arbitrary delimitation, or through fragmentation and the appearance of multi-ethnic, multicultural, plurilingual buffer states like Belgium or Switzerland – which may end up developing their own identity, certainly, but one more accidental.

This determinism is not absolute and leaves the possibility of several combinations; but it is clear that it is the most “obvious” one which generally triumphs. Thus, in France, two nations could have been born, because there are two basins: The Parisian and the Aquitanian. For a long time, [Bordeaux](#) was the capital of that Aquitaine Basin, and Aquitaine dominated the [country of Oc](#); while the [country of Oil](#) depended more naturally on Paris.

The distinction between the two countries could have endured, since each had a certain linguistic and cultural unity: The [language of Oc](#) against the [language of Oil](#), a country of written law against a country of customary law. But first the Parisian Basin is much larger than the Bordeaux Basin, and second the “natural” territorial area was rather on the scale of the whole of the former territory of Gaul, whose settlement base had largely remained the same as during antiquity (the [Great Migrations](#) did not constitute a real demographic break). The Paris Basin therefore succeeded in its calling to dominate the

whole, which has created France.

Another example. Germany saw the development of two centers capable of unifying the German nation: Austria and Prussia. Prussia controlled the plain of North Germany, and Austria dominated the plain of Pannonia (Hungary). That resulted in a division of the Germanic space between the two centers until the Great War, and ultimately the impossibility of keeping them lastingly unified after the failure of the Third Reich – even though the Germany of the seven electors, appointed by the [Golden Bull](#) of 1356, covered all of those German-speaking territories.

I think political debate would gain a lot, if these invariants of the state and national construction are better known, because they say a lot about what can or cannot be a nation-state, and about the deleterious effects that, for example, a constituted mass immigration can have on a nation-state.

And as for liberals (libertarians, from classical-liberals to anarcho-capitalists), there is a remark that I like to make to them, and that they generally take badly, and it is this – that if the nation-state is built in such a systematic way, it is because it is the most efficient product on the public security market, so that if we were to recreate an anarchic society, in the long term, it would be towards the re-emergence of nation-states that the political and social order would tend.

**GC:** While Greco-Roman paganism (on that point, in phase with Judaism) breaks away from the veneration of Mother Nature (the pre-Indo-European gynecocratic spirit), the biblical conception of time as linear (and of cosmic and human history as endowed with a beginning, an end, and a progression) contrasts with the pagan motif of the eternal return of the same. You assert both your Catholic heritage and your cyclical conception of history. How is that duality reconciled within your intellectual life?

**PF:** It always seemed natural to me, faced with that kind of conceptual opposition, to think that the truth was more likely to be a mixture of the two. Cyclicity and linearity are not necessarily contradictory, if we consider that there are several scales to consider, several temporalities. And it seems obvious to me that the story is both cyclical and linear, which is not only proper to human history, but also to natural history.

Take the evolution of species: It is linear; there is no turning back. But it is based on a cyclical phenomenon, which is the life of living individuals: Their conception, their birth, their maturation, their

reproduction, their death. It is through that recurrence that nature, through mutations, which are then selected naturally, makes species evolve.

The same goes for humanity: It is subject to certain recurrences; but those recurrences end up drawing a linear pattern and a general progression – in the demographic mass of the species, the size of its political communities, its scientific and technical power, its artistic sophistication. Its destiny is linear; but its embodiment is recursive – which led me to suggest, and my work always leads me further in that direction, that human history can be modeled in the mathematical form of a cellular automaton, which is also a tool for modeling the appearance and development of life.

And I must also note that this double cyclical and linear conception places me in a situation which is a sort of *mise en abîme*: I thus notice, within the framework of the parallel that I draw between the history of modern Europe and that of ancient Greece, that the study of history itself goes through three great stages, more and more intellectually sophisticated.

First, there are the chroniclers, who are interested in events and great characters and who produce fairly simple narratives. That is the case of the Greeks before [Herodotus](#), with the poems of [Homer](#), in particular, and medieval chroniclers like [Einhard](#) or [Gregory of Tours](#).

Second, there are the historians more curious about fundamental movements, like [Thucydides](#) or [Voltaire](#), who analyze the economic and social foundations of history.

And, third, there are those who seek in history the recurrences, the laws, like [Polybius](#) (with his theory of [anacyclosis](#)), or [Plutarch](#) (with his [Parallel Lives](#)) in antiquity; and in modern times, [Marx](#), [Spengler](#), [Braudel](#), [Toynbee](#). It is in that last vein that my work falls; and I find it amusing, working on historical cyclicity, to note that those works themselves obey that cyclicity, that I am the logical product of my time. Feeling oneself to be the product of a certain determinism, when one studies precisely the role of determinism, is both very stimulating and the cause of a certain perplexity.

And it also makes you humble, which is precisely one of the fundamental values of the Christian faith. And since the cyclicity of life is not incompatible with that faith, the Church having besides recognized that evolution is “more than a theory;” there is no reason to think that it must be different for the evolution of human societies. On the contrary, it reinforces the idea of the cosmic order, which,



assuredly, is a concept as much prized by the ancient Greeks in their cyclical vision as by Christians in their linear vision.

**GC:** Applying the historionomic approach to the dynamism of political ideas, you present the Right and the Left, not as categories of an alternative, which dates back to the French Revolution, but as a pair of opposites, which crosses all societies and all ages. In that context, you make your own that distinction by historian [Fabrice Bouthillon](#) between two forms of centrism: Centrism through the addition of extremes on the chessboard of opinion, versus centrism through the exclusion of those extremes. What does historionomy, armed with such a framework, teach us?

**PF:** My work on this divide, which I am, in fact, taking up and systematizing into a book, allows me to deepen certain questions dealt with in *The Structure of History*, which was mainly devoted to the research of the underlying laws of history, likely to explain in particular the models of the nation-state's construction of which I spoke earlier.

One of the most interesting observations about those models is that not only is the same pattern observable in all major countries, but it takes place over an almost identical duration and at a similar rate – that is to say that within that overall duration, the major phases also always have a similar duration. So, it has something to do with the passing of generations and the circulation of ideas. However, it is precisely this aspect that the study of the issue of the divide provides some clarification: The ideas slide from Left to Right because these two camps bring together the population respectively favorable to change or conservation of an established order.

Since the established order slowly evolves, after a generation the one that the conservatives of the previous generation defended has largely disappeared, while the progressives of the previous generation have become for the most part conservative because the order now established is the one they wanted. The former conservatives are now becoming reactionary, that is to say supporters of the old order, and we are seeing new, more extreme ideas of change appear on the far Left, in the revolutionary fringe.

But reactionaries and revolutionaries have this in common – they are anti-conformists, that is to say, they consider the established order as illegitimate, while the conservatives and the progressives, that is to say the Right and the moderate Left, are conformists, and consider the established order as legitimate.

Most of the time, it is the Right-Left divide which governs political life: Conservatives join forces with reactionaries, and progressives with revolutionaries, to obtain majorities and govern. But in times of crises, there is often a conformist/anti-conformist tension, where those most moderate among the two sides join forces to defend the system in place, while those extreme among both sides find themselves together in the opposition to that order.

There are multiple examples of this: The [banking crisis of the 1880s](#), but also the [French referendum](#) on the European Constitution in 2005, or the crisis of the [Yellow Vests](#), for whom the power in place very quickly spoke of "red-browns." One can also cite the [Lega](#) and [Five Stars Movement coalition](#) in Italy, which temporarily succeeded in seizing power from moderates, without ever really being able to get along in the exercise of power, since the two groups had opposite views on numerous topics.

Usually, centrism through the addition of extremes only succeeds in taking power, if a charismatic or skillful figure embodies it and is able to arbitrate between the two sides. That is the case with many great dictators in recent history: Napoleon, Stalin, Hitler. Often, moreover, the analysis of their policy reveals numerous about-faces and a certain ideological flexibility, without which they would not be able to maintain themselves.

Such an analytical grid allows, in particular, to better understand the way things happen during revolutionary periods, which quickly see the two divides alternate – but also to apprehend political developments over time, to understand by example that royalty in France was "on the Left" roughly until [Henry IV](#), and was conservative during the last two centuries of its existence. It makes it possible to understand that there is in reality a great historical continuity, that the French Revolution did not at all make a Right-Left divide suddenly "appear," which would not have existed before. And it also makes it possible to better model, as I said, the construction of the nation-state, since it is through such circulation of ideas, the effects on society, of the reforms it initiates that the political integration of the nation is brought about.

Indeed, the national construction largely consists of the progressive extension of the political body to the whole of the population. First, the political body of feudal society is composed only of the barons. Then it integrates the bourgeoisie of cities, then the peasantry, then the religious minorities (Protestants, Jews), then the workers, then the women – and today the immigrants. And, at all times, the main objective of the Left bloc is to integrate into the political body the class which is the most powerful among those who are still excluded from it. It is often said, too quickly, that the Left is the camp of



equality.

This is both true and false. It is true because, indeed, the heart of the discourse on the Left is always to want to grant equality to a category of population which is excluded from the game. But it is also false, because at the moment, only the ambition of one category counts and the others only serve as foils – yesterday, women only served as foils for the workers' movement; today sexual minorities, transgenders, and so on, alone serve as foils for the only truly powerful minority, that of non-European immigrants. And that is why the far Left never says a word about the persecution of sexual minorities by those very populations.

As long as the "priority" category is not integrated into the political body, the claims of other minorities are heard only if they are compatible with its own. And once that category is effectively integrated, it in turn becomes conservative and opposes extending rights to the next. To use a famous phrase, "the last to enter closes the door." And the next must force it open, in turn.

But in nation-states which categorically refuse immigration, for example, that phenomenon cannot continue, since there is no new class of population to integrate. That is the case, I think, with Japan, which is a country very hostile to any immigration and that, in fact, has practically had no far Left for fifty years, because there is no longer anyone to integrate into the political body.

In Europe, on the contrary, we have been for fifty years bringing to light a new class of the excluded – by importing it: This is the non-European, African and/or Muslim immigration. As such, it will become, and is already in the process of doing so, the class whose claims will be hegemonic on the Left. In the next twenty years, we will probably have an Indigenist/Islamist party which will win 20% of the vote. And the order in place should progressively integrate a certain number of values and realize a certain number of demands of those populations, as one did for working-class populations throughout the 20th-century, by establishing not exactly what they demanded at the beginning of the century, communism, but a compromise with the old order, which is our current order: Social democracy.

**GC:** Presenting Rome and America as twin civilizations, separated by an ocean of centuries, you foresee for the latter a trajectory similar to the fate of the first. Could you elaborate what justifies the establishment of such a comparison – instead of a parallel, for example, between multi-ethnic America and the fragmented Hellenistic empire of Alexander the Great? As concerns the equivalent of Carthage among the enemies of America, do you rather think of Russia, Turkey, or China to play that role?

**PF:** The comparison between America and Ptolemaic Egypt is actually made by David Cosandey, in his remarkable book, *[Le Secret de l'Occident](#)* (*The Secret of the West*), where he develops fundamental concepts that I am currently taking up in ongoing works, as they provide practically turnkey explanations that I only groped at before reading this book.

These are the concepts of articulated [thalassography](#), that is to say, the relationship between a geographical area and the length of its coasts – the lower it is, the more the coasts are important compared to the geographical surface, the more that area will be favorable to the development of an intense maritime trade. And, on the other hand, the concept of [mereuporia](#), which designates the stable and lasting political division, which is indirectly linked to the thalassography articulated in the sense that an area with very long coasts often goes hand-in-hand with a multitude of peninsulas and a quite jagged coastline, which form many natural borders and thus favor the emergence of national isolates.

Cosandey thus explains, by geography, the parallel that I have detailed elsewhere between ancient Greece and modern Europe. In the context of the contemporary world, one notices that it is the place with the most articulated thalassography, which has favored, more than elsewhere, both the emergence of nation-states (among the Greeks, [city-states](#)) thanks to borders relatively stable over time (as per the model that I outlined above), and on the other hand, a strong development of trade between those bordered communities. And that all of Asia, while devastated for long periods by [Mongol invasions](#) that considerably hampered the political development of this region, also had less access to maritime trade and its decisive advantages in terms of transport costs.

As well, one notes that the Mongol invasions of Europe, then the Turkish ones, stopped precisely at the border of Europe with a jagged geography, that is to say, between Vienna and the [Carpathians](#) – beyond, are the great plains, open to the four winds, the steppes, where it is very difficult to establish sustainable borders.

Yet Cosandey, who already mentioned the parallel between ancient Greece and modern Europe, noted that after the domination of both, power had passed to larger entities, and on that occasion compares the Seleucid Empire, Eastern and Continental, with Russia, and the Egypt of the Ptolemies with the United States of America. But if the parallel holds for the change of scale, the analogy does not hold in my opinion.

Indeed, what brings the United States of America and Rome together, besides the role of a maritime

power dominating the known world, is the internal political order and its history. These are two nations born of an independence revolution: In Rome, it was the Latins who hunted Etruscan kings (even [Greco-Etruscans](#), since one of the ancestors of the kings of Rome was [Demaratus](#), a nobleman from Corinth who immigrated to Italy), while the United States broke away from the British crown due to distance, and the length of time since the first waves of immigration, as well as the mix with populations of [Dutch origin](#), who did not feel much attachment to English kings.

The nations which are the product of an independentist revolution always have a legal-political system that emphasizes the political community and the rights of the citizen; and this is particularly marked in Rome, as in the United States which, once independent, quickly set up a political system whose main concern was the control of power, the rejection of the monarchy, and the guarantee of the rights of the people. In both cases this produced a constitutional system that tended to be more rough-hewn than a highly intellectualized system, but one that was extremely solid and durable.

And it was this political system which allowed progressive growth over a large area, through federation – the Roman domination over Italy was of such a nature – and the development of an imperial republican culture, which is of something other than the search for power of a dynasty. Rome, like the United States, was a liberal [libertarian] superpower, which could go to war when it encountered resistance, but after victory sought a lasting and profitable organization – for example, during the [liberation of Greece](#) from the Macedonian occupation. And above all, Rome also exported a model of society, which was precisely that of its law, of municipal organization, all things likely to seduce the elites, even the middle classes of the allied or defeated countries – and which one also finds in the American mode of domination.

All these things, the product of the internal political evolution in Rome, as in the United States, did not exist in the Hellenistic kingdoms, which resembled rather the autocracy of the Tsars of Russia until the beginning of the 20th-century. And besides, in fact, the good ancient parallel for Russia is Macedonia, that state on the borders of Greece, not really Greek but not really barbaric either, which established its domination over a large number of Greek cities after they had bled themselves in internal conflicts, in particular the [Peloponnesian War](#), and whose government was despotic, unlike the Greek cities in which the oligarcho-democratic model had spread widely.

The multiethnic aspect, in Rome as in the United States, is a late phenomenon, the consequence of the constitution of a world empire which then drains a population coming from the four corners of the

world, and which brings about a cosmopolitan evolution of the imperial core. That has little to do, conversely, with the [Hellenistic kingdoms](#) which, in fact, were actually Greek colonies, where the elites descended from the Greek and Macedonian invaders, and spoke Greek, but where the background of the population was indigenous: Persian, Egyptian, and so on.

As for [Carthage](#), everything depends exactly on the role attributed to it. There is not necessarily an exact parallel. One might be tempted to see Russia there, in its Soviet and then current form. But, as I said, Russia corresponds much more literally to Macedonia. Certainly, Macedonia was Carthage's ally against Rome during the [Second Punic War](#), and Rome definitively got rid of those two enemies in two simultaneous wars in 146 BC, but Russia never exactly had the same role as Carthage, which was rather the western enemy of Rome, the one which it faced far away from the ancient world, the world that counted, the Hellenistic world – the one which it seized control of, before turning to the most important half of that world, so to speak.

On that level, it is rather at the American wars in the Pacific that we must look, and in particular those against Japan, and against which the war was intense but brief. Since then, the enemy has been China, which is the only real threat to the American domination of the Pacific, and has been so since the defeat of Japan: China and America have clashed directly in Korea. So, for the geopolitical role of Carthage, perhaps, one should rather speak of Japan and China. But perhaps one should add above all that the [Spanish-American War](#) of 1898, which allowed the United States to get hold of Puerto Rico, Guam and the Philippines, and which constitutes an important stage insofar as this is the first time that the United States undertook imperialist behavior, annexing territories overseas.

As for Turkey, no parallel is possible with Carthage. But, depending on how it might develop in the coming years, it could find a role similar to that of the [Parthian Empire](#), that power in the inland, in the heart of the Eurasian island world, which was an enduring source of skirmishes for the [Imperial Republic](#). In particular, I think that this could be the case following a collapse of Russia, which would allow Turkey to extend its hegemony over the whole of the Turkish world, up to Xinjiang, by way of all the former Soviet republics with names ending in “-stan.”

It is also a classic scheme: Prussia achieved the unity of Germany only after the diminishing of France, which had, since Richelieu, worked for the fragmentation of the [Holy Empire](#) and for French hegemony in those regions. Russia brought about the unity of the Slavic world only after the collapse of the German and Austrian empires. Thus, Turkey will not be able to bring about the unity of the Turkish

world as long as the essential part of the latter is under Russian influence. A sort of pan-Turkish empire would make for a precise repetition of the Parthian Empire. And that is probably what will happen, if there is a military confrontation with Russia, because Turkey would be on the side of the victors, alongside NATO, and in the same position as Stalin in 1945.

**GC:** A common apprehension is that the Trump era is only a parenthesis in the sinking of contemporary America; and that with the return of Democrats, deemed inevitable in the decade to come, the march towards socialism and the geopolitical abdication will only resume in an amplified manner. You are rather confident as regards the fate of America in the 21st-century, projecting the evolution of its regime towards an authoritarian Right – and the instrumentalization of the United Nations for the purpose of establishing an American world state. Could you tell us more?

**PF:** In reality, my opinion is rather that America is indeed moving towards socialism, but that the latter will not be accompanied by a geopolitical abdication, quite the contrary. The first thing I see looming internally is a new American Civil War. Over the course of the year, I had been invited to the monthly luncheon of a major Parisian review, on the occasion of the release of my book, [\*Rome, From Libertarianism to Socialism\*](#). At one point the director of the review had gone around the table asking each guest (there were about thirty of us, economists, journalists, a European deputy) to talk a bit about what seemed to him most interesting in the news. Most of my counterparts mentioned Ukraine, since we were at the start of tensions with Russia after the [\*Maidan affair\*](#).

I was the only one to tackle a story that seemed, I think, anecdotal to most of my guests since, we quickly passed over it, without comment. This was the [\*case of the Bundy ranch\*](#), in the United States. It was an armed rebellion around the legal dispute opposing a local farmer, [\*Cliven Bundy\*](#), to the [\*Bureau of Land Management\*](#) (BLM) over land on which he was forbidden to graze his cattle, while he claimed he had been grazing his herds there for generations. The BLM had then tried to capture the cattle while they were grazing on the disputed ground, and, faced with the opposition of local militias rallied by Bundy, who were over-armed, as can only happen in American campaigns, they brought in federal troops, equally equipped, to fight Bundy and the militias.

My opinion at the time was that this matter was significant of what would eventually happen to the whole of Middle America when the gap between it and coastal, urban America only widened further. When I observed the hysterical reactions to the election of Donald Trump, and today when I see armed militias enter the Capitol of Michigan to protest against the confinement due to the coronavirus, I think

my intuition has not deceived me.

The fact is that the United States is made up of one part that is the rural, continental America and which represents three-quarters of the land-mass, and another part that is coastal (the Eastern and Western coastal strips). The first generally votes Republican; the second generally votes Democrat. The first has slow population growth and is generally poorer, and remains essentially white, little penetrated by immigration. The coastal states are more dynamic, and where immigration is also massing.

The gap between the two Americas has been widening for fifty years, while it hardly existed during the middle of the 20th-century. It seems less and less possible to reconcile those two mentalities politically. And this gap risks ending up causing a rupture of the American constitution. Let us remember that the election of the President of the United States, through the system of the greater voters, is a territorial as much as a demographic election: The vote by state balances the result in favor of the sparsely populated states, which mainly constitute white, rural and continental America.

In the election of Donald Trump, the "popular" vote, that is to say in number of votes, was won fairly widely by Hillary Clinton, with an advance of some three million votes. It is an argument that has been repeated many times by those who said – and still say – of Trump as, "Not my President." Those in favor of Trump, or even simply objective, nuance that position by recalling that the voting system induces a different campaign strategy, and that if the election had been through a direct suffrage, Donald Trump would undoubtedly have led a different campaign, in which case he might have won the popular vote. So that we cannot "invalidate," even in theory, the election of Trump, according to a democratic principle.

However, that discussion still says a lot about the growing fragility of the system, because it is in the political demagogic logic to focus on the simple mass, and the rapid demographic growth of coastal states, in particular through foreign immigration, mainly from Latin America, will increasingly benefit the Democrat camp in the number of votes.

But if Trump is re-elected and still does not win the popular vote, and in ten years, let us say after a Democratic alternation, a new elected Republican wins the presidency by lacking five, or ten million votes in the country, will that advance be concentrated in three or four very densely populated democratic states? One might think, of course, that there will be a risk of secession from those states.



But I do not think it would be the most likely scenario. Because the reality is that all the high places of power in the United States are in states that vote mainly Democrat. Rather than secession, the debate will therefore focus on the abrogation of the electoral college and the election of the President of the United States by direct universal suffrage, which also goes in the direction of the growing integration of the USA, by the magnification of the federal state, in the sense of a unitary state – which is a classic mode of development of a federation.

Of course, the political system will never result in a situation in which only the Democrats win and the Republicans never win an election again. Such a situation cannot exist for more than a few elections, for the ever-losing side adapts and adopts a line which brings the chances of success back to 50/50. It is the functioning of the political market. But this will also mean that the Republican Party should strongly converge on Democrat positions, and abandon a large part of the population of rural whites who love arms and the freedom to ignore the federal state.

I think that is where the political tipping point in the United States will be, perhaps with a hundred, a thousand insurrections like Bundy's, and probably more violent, which will serve to justify the ban on weapons. The direct election of the President of the United States will make the presidential election a plebiscite election, which will go in the direction of an imperial mutation. And that will probably go hand in hand with socialist development, the appearance of universal income in one form or another, and so on.

As for the international situation, my idea is indeed that the United States has been working, since the beginning of the 20th-century to build a world state, something that the British Empire, for example, had never done, for the latter always perceived itself as a nation among others, elevated in strategic rivalry within the European game, and saw its world empire as a necessary strategic depth, while confining itself in Europe to maintaining a balance.

But the United States has a vision of itself very close to that of Rome: It sees itself as the free nation, which should not depend on anyone. They first tried to do that by being isolated – which was the meaning of the Monroe doctrine – and after a century, having noticed that they could not just cut themselves off from the world, they realized that the only way to be free was to be the world's master, the universal suzerain. The United States, like Rome, does not accept equals. European countries have been accustomed, by a thousand years of history, to negotiate peer to peer, to make peace, to accept compromises. Americans at war are only looking for total victory – this was also the case with Rome.

This is part of the psychological paraphernalia of such nations. And in order to install their suzerainty, they end up developing institutions at the center of which are they, and which allow them to regulate the actions of other nations, including in peacetime. And the main institution they have set up for all this is the United Nations, which in fact has the role that representative assemblies have had in the building of nation-states – they serve, everywhere, to give superior legitimacy to the most powerful of feudal lords, and to go beyond that feudal order.

The UN, *de facto*, transforms the nation-states into subjects, and the United States, which has its seat, into the "Prince of the Nations." The Security Council resembles all of those councils of the Greats who continued to assemble around the monarch in the early days of the monarchy, before absolutism. The great feudal lords can make their voices heard, but deep down, the institution serves the prestige of the prince.

As for the assembly, it serves to bring to the power of the prince an additional legitimacy for certain actions, mainly actions of authority against powerful recalcitrant lords. When we speak of the reaction of the "international community," it is exactly that – it is about explaining that the action of the prince is in the common interest and for the ends of justice, and that it is not simply a coup de force of the strongest.

But we must be careful, here. I am not saying that the United States behaves like a bully. If the monarchy was chosen in preference to the feudal system everywhere, it is because most people found an advantage in it – pacification of relations, end of private wars (that is, interstate wars. This provided increased security and general enrichment, at first. But, in a second step, it also means centralization, uniformization. The multicultural model, the idea of a village-world, is both the cause and the effect of the progressive construction of a world state, which is only the repetition, on another scale, of the same process as the national scale. And the United States behaves *vis-à-vis* the United Nations as kings did *vis-à-vis* the Estates General – if the assembly supports the king, it is very good and that strengthens it; but if it opposes him, he reserves the right to override it, since it is he who holds true sovereignty.

But for the time being, there remain large powerful lords still capable of defying the king, such as the Montmorency or the Guise in France at the end of the 16th-century. Such are China and Russia. Their weakening is logically the last step before the imperial transformation of the American government – which is already underway, when one sees the increase in the use of American laws extraterritorially to exert pressures on foreign companies and governments. That makes you irrepressibly think of how

kings used their power of justice as the first instrument to impose their power on all of their provinces. Sometimes, the judiciary power was even enough to bring down great rivals of the King of France – such was the case of [Charles III](#) of Bourbon.

**GC:** A contemporary line of research consists in exploring the genetic foundations of the cycle of ascension and decline of civilizations, envisioned as biocultural systems (within which genes and the acquired culture permanently interact). Here, the ascent allegedly coincides with the exercise of selection pressures (from the social or natural environment) which increase “general intelligence” or lengthen “life history.” The decline looms as the dysgenic trends linked to the attenuation of the aforesaid selection pressures erodes the “biological capital.” Does such an approach shed clear and satisfactory light on the structure of the necessary events (as opposed to the contingent and random aspect of history)?

**PF:** That is a question that I have only known about for a few years, and I admit that I did not have time to study that subject in detail. Until about five years ago, I was ignorant of all the literature and research on that question of genetics, intelligence, modification of average intelligence, etc. Those are things that are very much ignored in France, almost clandestine. If I have learned a lot about those subjects in recent years, it is because I have had the chance to meet a friend who is well trained in this field, who knows the bibliography and the state of knowledge well. It quite quickly became evident to me, indeed, that those factors must have a very important role in the cyclical nature of history, and the mechanisms already described previously for the constitution of nation-states – that to certain stages of economic, social and political development also probably correspond the fluctuations of average intelligence.

For example, it is quite striking to note that the scientific peak in a country always occurs at the same time as its movement of national revolution. With England, it is in the second half of the 17th-century, at the time of [Newton](#). With France, it is at the end of the 18th-century, with [Lavoisier](#), [Sadi Carnot](#), [Condorcet](#). With Germany, at the start of the 20th-century, with [Planck](#), Einstein, [Haber](#). Of course, this does not exclude, in each of those countries, that there are also some big names before and after – but at that time they are clearly above the rest; they are the heart of the great scientific revolutions of their time.

At first glance, I therefore think that biocultural evolution, the feedback loop between social and economic construction and the genetic selection of individuals, must indeed have a considerable place in the deterministic part of history. But before I can better measure whether it is preponderant and that I

may better explain what are its driving forces, I will have to take the time to really study the literature on that subject, which I have not yet been able to do.

**GC:** Among the great tales that have structured European (and, by extension, Western) thought, there is the Hebrew perspective, according to which humanity is walking towards an era of peace and love, in which the people of Israel, not content with having put an end to their dispersion by gathering together on the soil of the Holy Land, will see their law and their god to be recognized among all the nations of the world.

We also should mention New Testament thought, where the final day of cosmic and human history will be that of the Last Judgment, during which Jesus, back in the earthly world, will judge all the deceased, resurrected on that occasion, and also the traditionalist thought that humanity has known since ancient times, of a "caste regression," of sacred leaders losing power to the warrior nobility; the nobility to merchants and serfs – which then ushers in its spiritual and moral degeneration, a degeneration whose final act is our egalitarian and utilitarian world (pending the start of the next cycle of degeneration).

With the hindsight that provides an overview of universal history, what do you think of those three narratives?

**PF:** Indeed, the traditionalist vision is seen, precisely, as a cyclical component, since, in fact, it is a movement that has already been accomplished several times: The ancients knew it; then the castes made their great return in the Middle Ages, and the regression of the castes started again, eventually resulting in social democracy. It is probable that after the fall of the American Empire, we will again enter a kind of Middle Ages, starting with the first stage.

As for the Jewish and Christian monotheistic narratives, it is difficult to adjudicate, since they have a linear vision in the very long term and are irrefutable: As long as there are human beings and thus history continues, one can always understand that there will be a coming/return of the Messiah. It is therefore a thought which is by nature outside of science.

On the other hand, what I can say as a historian is that monotheisms have a tendency to wear out, to get tired, in about a millennium and a half. They are very conquering in their first centuries, and bring about a kind of universal empire, which gradually falls apart. Then there is a millennialist revival, and

finally religion falters and shrivels up.

One saw it with Judaism, with the kingdom of David and Solomon, its division, the dispersion of the Jews, the great impulse of conversion in the Roman Empire and of fanaticism going as far as terrorism (the Zealots), the messianist uprisings, and finally the advent of rabbinic Judaism, turned in on the community, and no longer proselytic.

Likewise, with Christianity from Constantine on – the Christian Empire, its disintegration, the advent of the Reformation, and associated with a lot of fanatical outbursts, like Savonarola, the Hussites, the Anabaptists of Munster, and then a slow numbness in Europe.

The same thing is happening to Islam, which is currently in its millennialist phase: [Salafism](#) is Muslim Protestantism. One wrongly speaks of "Islam conservatism;" even while Salafism extols the step backwards, it is in the same mode as Luther and Calvin in the 16th-century. It is not conservatism, on the contrary. And so, I think that within a century or two, Islam will have become as harmless as Judaism and Christianity. But suddenly, there will be a void to fill and one will probably see something else appear.

**GC:** Insisting both on the internationalist doctrine of Islamic terrorist organizations and on the anti-capitalist nature of their discourse, you see contemporary militant Islam as the equivalent – within the Arab-Islamic world – of the Marxist-Leninist ideology. Should the nationalist and revolutionary Iran of the mullahs be envisaged as the equivalent of Stalinist Russia, which vilified "cosmopolitanism?" Regarding Xi Jinping's China, engaged in a standoff with Uighur and Kazakh Muslims, does its opening to a semi-planned capitalist model lie within the same structural pattern as the "new economic policy" of Lenin?

**PF:** Yes, Iran can be seen like that, but I do not believe in its ability to be effectively for the Muslim world what Stalin's USSR was for the communist world, because the fact that Iran is Shiite is a real hindrance to the penetration of Iranian power into the Arab world, which is Sunni. The Iranians tried to overcome that obstacle by making hatred of Israel the heart of their international propaganda, but it did not work very well.

I see [Erdogan's](#) Turkey much more capable of assuming the role of the Islamist USSR. Erdogan

enormously plays the card of pan-Islamism, even more so than that of pan-Turkism, and with a fluency all the greater than Ottoman history, which seems to give a form of legitimacy to Turkish ambitions. It has, in addition, very superior means: Turkish GDP is 50% higher than that of Iran; Turkey is better integrated in international trade; and the Turkish armed forces are much better equipped. Iran has likely reached the limits of its influence by somehow bringing together all of the Shiites under its control in Syria, Lebanon, Iraq and Yemen. It collides with a glass ceiling and is maintained only by way of Russian and Chinese support. And Iran's regime is starting to age, more than forty years after its establishment, while Erdogan's Islamism is, I think, more dynamic.

Regarding China, it has only a few Muslims in its Eastern markets, and the problem for it is thus less acute. One can effectively compare the ideological concessions made from [Deng Xiaoping](#) to the [NEP](#) of Lenin, but I must say that, in general and except for fanatic exceptions like the Khmer Rouge, I am very reluctant when it comes to the determining aspect of ideology in the history of communism. I think that Marxism-Leninism had only very briefly a decisive role, and that the rest of the time it was mainly a rationalization for much deeper political evolutions. For example, I think that there was a real communist will in Russia, precisely and only before the NEP. I think that the mass collectivization resumed under the leadership of Stalin in the late 1920s because he needed to accumulate capital to create an industry, but above all an army, in order to conquer Europe.

That was the underlying determinism that guided his action, since Stalin was a revolutionary nationalist leader like Napoleon and Hitler. He was not overwhelmingly driven by communism, rather by the Russian expansionist drive, like [French Jacobinism](#) and German National Socialism. In China, Mao's communism is the form taken by the Chinese equivalent of the [Meiji](#) imperial restoration in Japan – a very strong collective reaction to Western penetration, a nationalist will to rebuild and regain lost status. Structurally, is the Chinese Communist Party regime very far from the imperial regime and the administration of the [Mandarins](#)? I do not think so. In the end, the real change between the imperial regime before 1911 and that established under Mao, is that the earlier Mandarins were mainly [Manchu](#), while the Chinese are mainly [Hans](#), and that today the Chinese elites are mainly Han.

That is one of my main concerns throughout my works. I think that, for a century, we have given a causal role, which is also highly decisive, to ideologies, whereas they often only and ultimately embody much more primitive impulses. I should clarify. I do not believe, like Marxists, that the displayed motives are always untrue or hypocritical and that history is materialistic, and that the real causes of historical movements are economic. No, there are real fundamental reasons which are purely psychological, and



nationalism is one of them; it is a real collective impulse. But when we see that Napoleon, Hitler and Stalin did pretty much the same things and pursued the same goals, even though their overt ideologies were very different, we must methodically deduce that those ideologies had no determining role and only served as window-dressing to the real underlying motive, which is similar in all cases.

**GC:** Let us allow ourselves a bit of alternative history after historionomy. It is well known that 8th-century Europe almost fell under the yoke of the Umayyad Caliphate, and that Christianity then owed its triumph over the Islamic invader by way of various military victories, including the battle of Poitiers which stayed famous for Christian Europe.

A more overlooked fact is that the Hellenized Judaism of the time of Jesus had constituted itself as a universal religion, which was turned towards a peaceful and philosophical proselytism, notwithstanding the Zealot revolts, intended to precipitate the universal reign of peace and of the mosaic law by liberating Judea. And that Christianity and Judaism during the first centuries of the common era would be veritably in competition for the conquest of Pagan minds, most of the inhabitants of the empire (in default to actually converting) were "judaizing," in that they were assimilating Jewish practices such as Shabbat. From the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem to the abolition of the Jewish Patriarchate of Palestine, through the conversion of Constantine, Judaism would obviously be marginalized and discredited for the benefit of its own offspring.

Had it not been for the victory of Christianity under the Roman Empire. or the backflow of Islam in the 8th-century, would the fate of Europe have been significantly different today?

**PF:** Very precisely historionomy allows for the sorting of the possible and impossible alternative history scenarios; and I can therefore tell you the following things. First, Judaism could not compete with Christianity, for reasons that I have already mentioned on the fatigue of monotheisms. In the middle of the Second Century, Judaism had greatly exceeded the populations of the Roman Empire, by the excesses of its Zealots who nourished the same dreams as today the partisans of the Islamic State dream; and its rabbinical reform was not made to make it a religion very easy to disseminate – whereas, to the contrary, Christianity, from the [Council of Jerusalem](#), had evacuated a whole lot of Mosaic prohibitions, in particular on circumcision and food, which made the Christian faith much easier to diffuse.

Concerning the Islamic threat, I am not convinced that Europe was really threatened with conquest –

past the Pyrenees, the [Umayyads](#) were immediately stopped in [Toulouse in 721](#); and the expeditions which led the [Muslims to Tours](#) were not conquest operations, but rather raids. Furthermore, if Islam relatively easily progressed to the Pyrenees, it is because Spain and part of the [Maghreb](#) were of [Arian](#) faith, much more compatible with the idea of a further revelation of Muhammad than was the Orthodox Christianity which prevailed in the land under [Frankish domination](#). Let us recall that it was under the impetus of [Charlemagne](#) that the [Filioque](#) would be integrated into the creed. And, as well, this was already a century after the first impulse of Muslim conquest; and it is rare that serial conquests spread without petering out over more than a century.

The Mongol conquests extended between 1206 and 1279, the date when they reached their most distant Western point with penetration into the plains of Hungary. The essential part of the [Ottoman](#) conquests was made between 1430 and 1530. Even the entire empire of Rome outside Italy was conquered in one century and a half. So, even if the Umayyads had taken Toulouse or even Tours, it is unlikely that they would have managed to go further; and not long after their arrival they would have first needed to confront Frankish reconquest efforts, since the heart of Frankish power was in [Austrasia](#), between [Metz](#), [Tournai](#) and [Cologne](#).

It is hard to believe that those who built Charlemagne's empire in our understanding would not have been able to shake up Arab-[Berbers](#) enemies of Christ. And even if that had not been the case, it is the Vikings whom those Muslim invaders would have had to suffer under. In summary, progress beyond Aquitaine would have been very difficult, and installation in Aquitaine itself would have been complicated. So, I can accept a range of possibilities that went as far as taking Aquitaine, but not beyond that. Even less so since, when the Muslims were arrested in Aquitaine, the Reconquista had already started in Asturias.

But for the exercise, let us assume that by a remarkable accident the Muslims arrived in Saxony, seized all of Italy and converted all of Western Europe to Islam, all the way to Scotland. What would have happened?

Some events of relative magnitude would not have taken place – the Crusades against the Muslim world, in particular. But the crusades against the pagan world in the East would no doubt have taken place, and with even more vigor, under the banner of Islam.

The fact remains that Europe would have always benefited from its geographic advantages – the

articulated thalassography, a geography favoring the emergence of states with stable borders. When the Muslim Empire disintegrated into a multitude of political entities during the 9th-century, this would also have been the case in Europe, as it was the case with the disintegration of the [Carolingian Empire](#). No caliph would have succeeded in imposing his authority on Europe, given the distance of the [Abbasids](#); and especially when one bears in mind the stormy relations between the Papacy and the Empire. It is even likely that Europe would have given itself a competing [caliph](#).

The construction of European nation-states would therefore have been primed, as in our own time, with simply a practice of Islam – and still probably it would have been an altered practice, because it is difficult to conceive the prohibition of pork in countries where that meat has been part of the staple food since earliest antiquity. So, no, the fate of Europe would likely not have been very different. The Muslim world, if extended to Europe, would still have known a divide between the world to the north of the Pyrenees dominated by the German mentality since the Great Invasions, and the Mediterranean world – for we must not be mistaken, if Islam did not succeed in going North of the Pyrenees it is also because it was then entering another geographical, cultural, mental area, and those differences would not have been erased by religious conversion.

**GC:** Thank you for your time. Would you like to add a thing or two?

**PF:** We did not have time to talk about it, but [Phoenicia](#) was an aborted Greece, precisely because it did not benefit from a well-articulated thalassography and solid natural borders and was easily absorbed by Assyria. It is enough to look at a map of the colonization of the ancient Mediterranean to see that there was exactly the same movement of migration (Greek or Phoenician) on both sides. It is worth remembering that Phoenician culture was not less complex than Greek culture. But the Greeks benefited from being a very mountainous peninsula difficult to reach by the Persians for centuries, and therefore they were not absorbed.

*The [image](#) shows the wheel of fortune (rota fortunae), from a leaf of Josephus's *Judaean War*, Book VII, ca. 13th-century.*

