In the previous chapters we discussed the notion of classicism, arguing that it stands in keeping with the European tradition of humanism. In this chapter we further investigate the classicist ‘idea of Europe’ (§5.3). We also go into a number of related issues: the cosmopolitan attitude of classicism and its rejection of nationalism (§5.2), its attitude towards Germany and German culture (§5.4) and its ideas about the interactions between national culture and European culture (§5.5).

5.1 Perceptions of Europe

In his book on the history of the idea of Europe, Pim den Boer discusses the development of the various conceptions of Europe. According to den Boer, it is only in the fifteenth century that something like a general European awareness arose. The concept of Europe that had evolved by then was a Christian one. In subsequent centuries, due to the influences of Renaissance humanism and the Reformation, a political, non-religious concept of Europe arose as well. Here Europe was associated with certain political ideas, such as the coexistence of several nations with independent rulers and religions, depending on a balance of power for keeping peace. A third version of the idea of Europe developed with the Enlightenment, when Europe became associated with the concept of civilization: what united Europeans was a common culture de l’esprit, one of the main pillars of which was the heritage of Roman public law.

In the 19th and 20th centuries, different ideas of Europe coexisted. The ideas of ‘Europeana Christiana’ and the political balance of power remained, the latter being applied for instance by Realpolitiker. In the liberal vision, as argued for example by Guizot in his l’Histoire Civilization (1828), the separation between church and state was considered decisive for the course that European civilization had taken. In this view, the En-
lish Glorious Revolution and the Enlightenment were seen as further steps forward in a history of continuous progress. Finally, a democratic idea of Europe emerged in which the democracy of the city state of Athens was seen as the cradle of European civilization.

To summarize, by the beginning of the 20th century, there were several ideas of Europe in circulation: Christian, political, civilizational, liberal and democratic ones. Of course mixtures of these ideas could appear as well. The perception of Europa that is central to this study, the view that European culture can be interpreted in terms of its humanistic tradition, does not however figure in Den Boer. As we argued in our historical overview (§3.2), the Christian, liberal and democratic elements all share a basic humanistic orientation. In §5.3 we will discuss the classicist idea of Europe and see how it relates to the ideas summarized above.

5.2 The cosmopolitan and anti-nationalistic attitude of classicism

In Chapter 2 we introduced the European network of reviews and intellectuals that shared classicist convictions. We saw how men like Eliot, Babbitt, Benda, Valéry, Ortega, T. Mann, Curtius and Hofmannsthal, despite all the differences in their viewpoints, shared a common orientation, with cosmopolitanism as one of its hallmarks. Moreover, we saw how reviews like the Criterion, Nouvelle Revue Française, Neue deutsche Beiträge, Europäische Revue and Revista de Occidente shared a European scope that matched the cosmopolitanism of the men mentioned. In this section, we further go into the (Western) cosmopolitanism\(^2\) of classicism and its related rejection of nationalism.\(^3\)

\(^2\) See the note at the end of the introduction regarding cosmopolitanism.

\(^3\) We use the term ‘nationalism’ meaning the ideology claiming that a given human population has a natural solidarity based on a shared history and a common destiny, and that bases its political course on this conviction. The anti-nationalism of classicism did not necessarily imply a rejection of having separate countries or national boundaries. Most of our classicists merely stressed their belief that there is a natural solidarity between all humans.