

OUTSIDERS UNDER EMPIRE:
FUSION PHILOSOPHY AND THE BARBARIAN'S PATH FROM
SCOURGE TO SCULPTOR

Madalin Onu

Editor-in-Chief

Brolly. Journal of Social Sciences

London, UK

madalin.onu@lapub.co.uk

Abstract.

1. CHAOS AND SYNTHESIS. History makes it plain: at the turning of eras, when civilisations collide and empires fall, Barbarians assert their presence—undeniable, no longer tenable to ignore. Rising from the periphery, once unheard and unseen, they surface amidst upheaval with such force they reshape the world itself, marking the boundary between what was and what is to come.

Today, this pattern of volatile junctures takes on fresh significance and urgency. We find ourselves at what is arguably the most consequential threshold yet: the dawn of the digital and AI age. Propelled by the most powerful technological revolution ever recorded, unprecedented in its speed and scale. Boundaries of space and time blur. Real-time global communication, vast networks of video, data, and algorithmic flows unsettle the coherence of inherited structures—of knowledge, identity, and authority—by forces we are only beginning to understand. In this climate of uncertainty and extraordinary possibility, new centres of power emerge while older categories lose their hold.

Like the Barbarians of history. Who arrived not merely to disrupt but to reconfigure, and ultimately to reconcile. And just as in earlier times of civilisation, we are compelled to reorient, engage in new terms and develop modes of understanding equal to the intensity of the present. What we seek, therefore, is not a fixed doctrine but a mode of thinking; not consolation but a sense of orientation; one that acknowledges the rift rather than denying it, and works with contradictions toward reconciliation, instead of suppression.

2. SPARKS BETWEEN SHADOWS: THE DIALECTICS OF FUSION THOUGHT. It is on this ground Fusion Philosophy takes shape—a framework I am developing in response to these dynamics. A philosophy, in short, for the antinomies of our age, and a hermeneutic practice invested in making sense of contradictions. It seeks understanding through dialectics—not to suppress but to overcome and sublimate

them into pathways toward goodness, beauty, and freedom—unfoldings of God, the Absolute.

3. CASE STUDY. HERDER'S BARBARIAN. A TALE OF HISTORY'S UNLIKELY AGENTS: DESTRUCTION, TRANSITION, RECONCILIATION. To illustrate this, I turn to Johann Gottfried von Herder's concept of Barbarian—a model uniquely suited to the concerns of Fusion thought. In Herder's writings, the barbarian appears in three distinct forms, I'll call them the scourge who destroys, the wanderer who unsettles, and the sculptor who transforms. These figures are not just historical archetypes. They express philosophical structures—forms inherent within the evolution of human understanding. Instances of the dialectics between order and disruption, tradition and renewal, loss and possibility. Herder's barbarian becomes thus a symbolic agent of transformation, surfacing when old forms collapse and new ones have to take shape. Through this lens, a triad of disruption, transition, and reconciliation is uncovered—a model for both historical analysis and conceptual renewal.

4. CONCLUSIONS. BEYOND BINARY – THINKING IN THE AFTERGLOW OF CONTRADICTION. Drawing from Herder's theories on barbarisms, this case study highlights how Fusion Philosophy offers an interpretive and heuristic approach, not as a rigid system but as a means of encountering and synthesising. It recognises that thought, like history, progresses not in straight lines but through fusion and emergent forms. From Herder's barbarians to the disruptive forces of today's geopolitical map, this paper explores how thinking can evolve beyond mere oppositions towards an understanding that is both fluid and generative so as to seek sense amidst intellectual fragmentation, technological revolution and post-truth menaces.

J.G. von Herder set in motion a dialectics that extends far beyond its eighteenth-century origins among the *Sturm und Drang* literary and philosophical movement, exposing faults and untapped beneficial possibilities that surface whenever the world undergoes a fundamental reconfiguration—just as it's doing now.

Keywords: fusion philosophy, barbarian, barbarianism, Herder, dialectics, hermeneutics, philosophy of history

1. CHAOS AND SYNTHESIS

Underlying the grand narrative of history, patterns pulse—rhythms of transformation and rebirth etched into the very foundations of societal structures. Like living organisms, civilisations are born, flourish, then decay, making way for new paradigms.

This sense of recurrence has held a powerful sway for centuries. From the ancients of Greece and Rome to the scholars of the Renaissance, thinkers have considered historical cycles an essential tool for understanding the past. Building on this, Giambattista Vico's *Scienza Nuova* revealed a triadic mode, comprising: 1. The Age of Gods, where fear-bound refugees huddled beneath the strong, forging the first fragile states; 2. The Age of Heroes, marked by clashing castes and the domination of nobles against plebeians; and 3. The Age of Peoples, where democracy's roots took hold—I would add—ultimately to decay as the wheel turned anew. Each phase had its own mode of thinking, code of power, distinct language, laws, and customs, all caught into what Vico called *corsi e ricorsi*—the ebb and flow of collective life through progression and regression.

Herder too saw history as an organic procession—not of heroes, nobles and plebeians, but as seasonal maturation, which Hegel later reframed as the movement of World-Spirit (*Weltgeist*) towards freedom through self-recognition. Civilisations, just like living bodies, passed from childhood (the mystic East) to youth (Hellenic splendour), then adulthood (Roman rigour), before reaching the twilight wisdom of the Germanic world, where Hegel envisioned the state's best form.

These stages were not straight paths. They curved, collided, and doubled back. History showed it clearly: at these junctures, when the centre of power cannot hold and boundary lines blur, a powerful force stirs from the periphery. Once unseen, perhaps unheard or deliberately ignored, history's unlikely authors—the so-called Barbarians—emerge, with undeniable, world-altering influence. Are they merely agents of chaos, harbingers of destruction? Or might they be the unwitting sculptors of a necessary, albeit turbulent, reconfiguration?

The figure of the Barbarian compels a reckoning with contradiction, mirroring Hegel's dialectic of recognition. Just as the slave turns into the bearer of self-consciousness, history, in its cunning, advances through its others, not by excluding them. What

was once dismissed comes forth decisively. And barbarians, this negative, become the carriers of civilisation's next iteration. Romans, labelled as "barbarians" by Greeks, later codified empire. Germanic tribes, dismissed as "savage", laid the foundations of modern Europe.

Today, this dialectic strikes with new urgency. We stand amidst the early stirrings of the digital and AI age—a technological revolution destabilising inherited structures of knowledge, power, and selfhood at unprecedented speed. Boundaries dissolve in algorithmic flows and real-time data streams. New peripheries form whilst old orders are contested. In this shifting landscape, the Barbarian returns—not with sword, but with code, disruption, and systemic unintelligibility.

Navigating this moment demands more than fixed doctrines; it requires modes of thinking equal to the intensity of the present. We need orientation, not consolation—an approach that acknowledges the rift and seeks pathways toward reconciliation rather than suppression.

From these historical echoes and present-day collisions, sparks begin to fly, illuminating the shadows so a new synthesis might be forged. It is in this convergence that Fusion Philosophy resides.

2. SPARKS BETWEEN SHADOWS: THE DIALECTICS OF FUSION THOUGHT

This new framework I am advancing—and which I've named Fusion Philosophy—shall serve as a mode of encounter that is both hermeneutic and practical—a philosophy of antinomies, particularly those emerging in the digital age. The aim is to guide challenging passages towards richer forms of good, truth, aesthetic resonance and liberated existence, understood as unfoldings (gradual self-disclosures) of God, the Absolute.

The concept of "Fusion" draws its lineage from Hans-Georg Gadamer's *Horizontverschmelzung*—the fusion of horizons, more precisely of historical horizons in the act of interpreting texts of the

past (Gadamer 1987 & 2006). It is a hermeneutic concept meant to reject detached objectivity. Instead, understanding is viewed as dynamic, arising when the interpreter's historical horizon (present) merges with that of the object (past), forming a shared space of meaning. Enlightenment required objectivity, reason that eliminates prejudices and, finally, exhaustivity. Well, says Gadamer, eliminating prejudices is itself a prejudice.

As Heidegger's student and torchbearer of phenomenology, he conceived subjectivity in terms of historicity (Gadamer 2006, 321-355): the temporal embeddedness of understanding and text interpretation. Highlighting that the present horizon of the interpreter is itself marked by its past culture, history, prejudices, and worldviews. The same for the author. The act of interpreting is grounded in them and directed by present-day questions and future expectancies. A "hermeneutic circle", he called it (*See* Gadamer 2006, 305). Instead of trying to eliminate prejudices, we shall capitalise on them through this fusion process: preconceptions shaping interpretation while being reshaped in return. The meaning of a text does not settle at an endpoint, but unfolds persistently within this circular movement. In a masterful demonstration of his own principle, Gadamer fused Heidegger's phenomenology with Hegel's idealism, revealing the necessity of dialectical thinking in the act of comprehension, as a means of checking and correcting misinterpretations that this endeavour might produce, or the error of interpreting towards false infinity (*See* Gadamer 1987, *Neuere Philosophie*, Cap. I *Hegel*, 3-105).

Beyond this, Fusion Philosophy traces its deeper roots back to Kant's *Critique of Judgment*, which bridged subjective reflection and sensibility with universal principles through *judgment*, a faculty capable of producing intersubjective validity despite its subjective nature (*See* Kant 2007, 321-327).

Hegel radicalises this movement. In *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, knowledge is *Erfahrung*—the dialectical experience through which consciousness becomes aware of itself by recollecting and internalising all surpassed stages (*Erinnerung*) into richer self-

awareness. As such, *Bewußtsein* becomes *Bewußt-sein*—Heidegger’s interpretation (Heidegger 1963, 140-142; Heidegger 1970, 55-56): a state of being characterised by awareness (including self-awareness).

Fusion Philosophy inherits and expands this speculative dynamic: consciousness’s active journey as *Erfahrung*, *Erinnerung*, *Bewußt-sein*. While Gadamer focused on interpretation, it extends syntheses to broader contexts—technological disruptions, cultural collisions, and existential crises—where contradictions demand resolution without erasure. The goal is participation within *begriffene Geschichte*, *i.e.* history comprehended in its rational unfolding.

Briefly put, Fusion Philosophy builds on key principles such as:
Temporal fusion: the present reanimates the past while anticipating the future;
Intersubjective dialogue: meaning emerges through shared historical language;
Transformative praxis: understanding manifests through the subject’s altered relation to the object.

3. CASE STUDY: HERDER’S BARBARIAN

A TALE OF HISTORY’S UNLIKELY AGENTS: DISRUPTION, TRANSITION, RECONCILIATION

History is not a silent ledger of events but a living process of interpretation. Johann Gottfried von Herder, one of its most nuanced readers, offered an understanding of the past that refused the simplicity of judgment from afar. The study of universal history, he insisted, must consider the uniqueness of every age. In this sense, Herder did not simply write about history—he performed a hermeneutic fusion, enacting a reconciliation between past and present through the dynamic interplay of critique and empathy, distance and identification.

The barbarian first appears in Herder’s writings wearing the familiar mask of savage destroyer. In *Ideen*, he condemns the “weak and voluptuous barbarians” (Herder 1800, VIII, IV, 213), namely

those who lord over vanquished, burn widows, or devastate lands (“The barbarian dominates, the educated conqueror forms”—*Der Barbar beherrscht, der gebildete Überwinder bildet*, Herder 1800, XVI, VI, 489; Herder 1965: XVI, VI, 290). Neither Egyptians nor Romans escape this designation—their pyramids built through slave sacrifice (Herder 2002, 285); the arcs of triumph and gladiatorial arenas standing as monuments to savagery (Herder 1800: XIV, V, 430). The Byzantine Empire spread “corruption and barbarism” to neighbouring nations (Herder 1800, XVII, III, 513-514), while the Ottomans reduced “the finest lands of Europe to a desert” (Herder 1800, XVI, V, 486).

Herder’s genius lies in recognising that barbarism dwells not only in distant lands but within the most celebrated civilisations. “We carry upon us”, he writes, “the jingling decorations of the barbarism of our fathers” (Herder 1800, XVI, 468), though habituation renders them invisible (Herder 1800, IX, I, 229). In the struggle between Etruscans and Romans, who truly deserves the label “barbarian”, asks him? Roman “civilisation” itself was established through force and plunder, lastly requiring “rude barbarians” to revitalise it with “new people, new laws, new manners, and new courage” (Herder 1800, XIV, III, 411).

This recognition initiates a dialectic toward a second, this time a startlingly positive conception of the barbarian. Against Enlightenment’s reason, he champions, for instance, those whom the Spanish colonisers themselves were forced to call “los bravos”—peoples whose natural vital force remains undiminished by artificiality (Herder 1800, I, VI, 18). Unlike “civilised”, they possess healthy, natural morals reminiscent of humanity’s patriarchs.

In their poetry and folk songs, Herder found that kind of closeness to nature and raw passions that his world was missing: “The more savage [...], alive [...], sensual a nation is, the more lyrical must be their song” (Herder 1773, 11-12). Most provocatively, he declares the barbarian “a more real being” than the “civilised” ([...] *ein wahreres Wesen als jener gebildete Schatte*, Herder 1800: VIII, V, 222;

Herder, 1965, VIII, V, 330), who is merely “enraptured with the love of the shades of his whole species”.

On this second stage resides Herder’s main insight: the barbarian as agent of historical transformation. Meaning, Divine Providence—later echoed in Hegel’s “cunning of reason”—works through these unaware outsiders to reawaken history when civilised forms decay.

In the organic evolution of history, moments arise when active reasoning guiding figures like Pericles or Caesar exit the stage. On the “civilised” side, it degenerates into mere formalism; on the “barbarian”, it exists only as potential. Civilisations follow a dialectical cycle: peak (when passions and reason achieve perfect equilibrium), downfall (as contradictions intensify), and replacement. Precisely at these junctures, when the cultural centre undergoes self-destruction, devoid of both healthy reason and vital forces, the barbarian enters as agent.

The model resembles Leibniz’s monadology—cultures interact independently yet contribute to the whole. The barbarian overthrows empires not through arbitrary destruction but by embodying history’s rational direction when reason has abandoned the world stage. An unlikely shadow whose vital force restores light to a world grown dim through its own success. Destroyer becoming creator, outsider becoming centre, in the eternal dance of disruption, transition, and reconciliation.

4. CONCLUSIONS

BEYOND BINARY – THINKING IN THE AFTERGLOW OF CONTRADICTION

At the dawn of the digital age, echoes of past upheavals resound. Like the Industrial Revolution, today’s tech surge yields radical reconfigurations—yet faster and at a truly global level. Power is redistributed, influence redrawn, igniting economic realignments often accompanied—history cautions us—by violence and wars.

Sometimes through the forceful hand of conquest, sometimes by negotiated concession, at times intentionally, at others through unforeseen consequences, the coherence of inherited borders—political, cultural, epistemic—starts to erode, or blurs.

In this shifting terrain, the figure of the barbarian reappears. No longer as a sword-bearing invader, but a marginalised voice. Long excluded, ignored, or subjected to modern colonisation, now amplified through bandwidth and algorithms, leveraging digital tools and AI. Each with their unique culture, they innovate from the edges, from historical wounds, offering alternatives born of injustice and resilience, capable of reshaping identity and narrative to enrich the world.

Their presence calls for a **FUSION OF HISTORY AND PRESENT**: not by petrifying memory or replaying past wounds, but fusing historical insight with contemporary challenges, transforming lessons gleaned into responses. Foremost is addressing the human violence these changes entail. Drawing upon historical precedents, we must proactively prevent its recurrence. The purpose is to meet violence not with reaction, but with active strategies that reduce hatred, promote goodness, enable dialogue across fractured lines and produce new forms of solidarity.

This also means a **FUSION OF TECHNOLOGY AND HUMAN POTENTIAL**. Channelling the creative power of long excluded communities, whether in Eastern Europe, Africa, Asia, or from Islamic societies, requires dismantling pejorative labels and reimagine the “barbarian” as a sculptor of possibility, not as the “Scourge of All Lands”, as Attila was called during the 5th–6th century, or the “Scourge of God”, as 14th–15th century Hungarian chronicles glorified him. But as a wanderer whose presence demands new syntheses. The same digital and AI technology that threatens also offers unprecedented opportunities for this transformation, resisting dehumanisation, offering avenues for enhanced communication, education, empathy, and meaningful dialogue.

Simultaneously, we also face the **FUSION OF LEFT AND RIGHT**. We need to properly grasp such movements and defend against the nascent tide of manipulation, as has happened time and again in history. Ideological poles dissolve, with both sides exhibiting traits previously associated with the other. Capitalism adopts state control; liberalism masks a privileged class; and both borrow from populism. This marks a first form of fusion. Think of Karl Popper, defending liberalism but cautioning against unchecked monopolies and inhumane capitalism long before. Some of today's right factions, once defenders against communism, head towards what Marx termed the "red bourgeoisie"—now neo, an advantaged wealth-bearing tier of unchecked capitalism, with neo-Stalinist ways cloaked in liberal rhetoric.

FUSION OF POSITIVE AND NEGATIVE CONNOTATIONS. The proliferation of post-truth narratives—Oxford Dictionaries' "Word of the Year" in 2016—reflects this dangerous shift. It refers to manipulation driven by emotion and projected onto future actions, where objective facts carry less weight than emotional appeals and personal beliefs. Once confined to leftist propaganda behind the Berlin Wall, now permeates both sides of the spectrum.

Similarly twisted, terms like "globalism", once hopeful, evoking cooperation and interconnectedness, are now entwined with loss, deracination, domination of profit over people, national interests and identity. Post-truth became their prerogative.

Dialectically, as left and right coalesce, place remain free for something else—their negative. The more entrenched false discourses, the more free space is produced, so the "barbarian" rises as a challenger and bearer of the new. And, who knows, maybe Emil Cioran was right: Eastern Europe may still become a new pole of influence.

Fusion Philosophy offers an interpretive and heuristic approach to navigate this. It reads history through fracture and seeks reconciliation, not erasure. Understanding these contradictions emerges gradually, shaped by the triangulation of past inheritances, present questions, and future hopes—all expressed in an authentic,

unmanipulated language. The praxis is not to collapse them, but to think in their afterglow. Not to reiterate tragedy, but to move beyond it toward healing, synthesis, and projection. Which deepens care and orients so rupture becomes relation, and marginality becomes generative.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This article reproduces in full the keynote speech given at “V.N. Karazin” Kharkiv National University, School of Foreign Languages, for the 17th International Conference “Methodological and Psychological Issues of Teaching Foreign Languages: Reaching for School and University Integration” (25 April 2025, Kharkiv, Ukraine).

INTRO

I began my last year lecture here at Kharkiv National University by addressing the tragic backdrop of war and expressing my deep admiration for your efforts to sustain education and academic dialogue under the constant threat of Russian missiles. Since then, the political landscape has shifted, but the long-awaited ceasefire has not yet arrived. Instead, the conflict appears protracted, and the attacks continue.

In this painful context—with hundreds of drones haunting the skies over Kharkiv and the Eastern Region, destroying lives, casting fear and uncertainty—I reiterate my heartfelt appreciation to our hosts and organisers, the Dean of the School of Foreign Languages, Svitlana Virotschenko; Hanna Guseva, the Head of the Department of Foreign Languages for Professional Purposes; and Julia Shamaieva, the deputy head of the organising committee of this conference and a valued member of the Advisory Board of *Brolly. Journal of Social Sciences* since its beginning, eight years ago.

Not least of all, my admiration and compliments extend to all participants in this important international symposium. The struggle continues—but so does the courage to think, teach, and communicate openly.

This ongoing global negotiation process is a dialectical one, where contradictions shall move toward synthesis, reconciliation, and a sustainable model that ensures peace. Yet, all of these unfold amidst a vast technological revolution reshaping the epoch. Fault lines and peripheries are most affected, as main powers reassert their dominance, sometimes using war itself to secure their interests and gain advantages.

Out of today’s tensions, this talk turns to once-marginalised outsiders to explore how crisis can turn into a moment of synthesis and renewal.

OUTRO

Outsiders under Empire traced how history often regenerates from the tensions between centre and periphery, civilisation and so-called “barbarism”. This framework takes on renewed meaning in the context of the Russian-Ukrainian war, where violence persists, and negotiations unfold under pressure, delay, and strategic ambiguity. It is at such volatile junctures the marginalised—Herder’s “barbarians” understood in their deeper, positive dialectical sense—step forward as agents of transformation, forcing new syntheses out of chaos.

The figures along today’s geopolitical fault lines may well be the nations or perspectives of Eastern Europe, whose resilience and innovation are capable of sculpting a new equilibrium, challenging entrenched power centres.

Amidst this potential reshaping, let’s hope the current negotiations do not lose sight of a moral compass guided by reason and fundamental human values—dignity, freedom, and respect for life.

May dialogue prevail over armed confrontation, leading to sustainable solutions that allow people to return to normalcy, rebuild, and heal. And may wisdom and empathy illuminate the path toward lasting peace and reconciliation in Ukraine, Eastern Europe and all conflicting regions. If new forms of understanding are to be shaped, let it be through engaging with the afterglow of contradiction, rather than its suppression.

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