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DERRIDA AND THE HEIDEGGER CONTROVERSY:

GLOBAL FRIENDSHIP AGAINST RACISM

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## ABSTRACT

This essay explores the ethical import of deconstruction through a reading of Derrida on Heidegger. In Of Spirit, Derrida traces through Heidegger's writings the interplay of "spirit" and spirit. Spirit denotes an involvement with the question of Being, and in thus pointing towards a positive content, it embodies a metaphysical gesture in which a spiritual mission becomes the human essence. In Heidegger's entanglement with National Socialism, he tied this spiritual mission to German self-assertion. "Spirit" is a concept under erasure that calls our attention to the absent Other. It reminds us of an ethical responsibility that is prior to ontology; it sets up a "cosmopolitanism" that precedes all particular identifications and so avoids spiritual racism. Derridean "cosmopolitanism" differs importantly from liberal universalism. From a Derridean perspective, liberal universalism remains insufficiently attune to the Other; it retains a metaphysical gesture, and so imperialistic and exclusionary tendency, akin to that found in Heidegger.

## DERRIDA AND THE HEIDEGGER CONTROVERSY:

### GLOBAL FRIENDSHIP AGAINST RACISM

Mark Bevir

In 1989 Victor Farias's Heidegger and Nazism appeared in English translation thereby bringing to prominence over here what has become known as the Heidegger controversy. Martin Heidegger joined the National Socialist Party on 1 May 1933, remained a paying member throughout the war, and at times seemed to express enthusiastic support for the Nazis. Farias went on to argue that his involvement with Nazism was profound, deep, and lasting. Although some scholars applauded Farias's work, others, including Jacques Derrida, denounced it as excessive and distorted. Of great concern was the apparently unforgivable silence of Heidegger after the war: not once did he condemn without equivocation the Holocaust. In one article Derrida interprets this silence as "an honest" admission by Heidegger that he could not respond adequately to what had happened (Derrida, 1990, p.148). Derrida's interpretation can seem appallingly generous given that the silence was over a moral condemnation of Auschwitz not a philosophical problem. Some commentators even suggested that this appalling generosity indicated a sort of complicity in Nazism on the part of deconstruction.

Elsewhere, however, Derrida has treated Heidegger's politics at much greater length. In Of Spirit: Heidegger and the Question, first published in French in 1987, Derrida, with the insight and rigour characteristic of his deconstructive practice, follows the place of "spirit" and spirit in Heidegger's work. "Could it be," he asks, that from 1927 to 1953 Heidegger "forgot to avoid?" (Derrida, 1989, p.2).<sup>1</sup> Did Heidegger avow a metaphysical concept of spirit that implicated his philosophy in

Nazism? Derrida's reflections on "Heidegger and the Question" open up numerous avenues of inquiry. I want to follow an avenue that will lead us to the ethics of deconstruction. More particularly, I hope to highlight a "cosmopolitan" moment within deconstruction, a moment that can be obscured by the prominence given therein to identity, difference, and alterity. If we forget to avoid metaphysics, we are in danger of following Heidegger in reifying nations, cultures, or groups in a way which entails a spiritual racism, a hostility to the Other. To avoid the particularism of spiritual racism, we need a non-metaphysical "cosmopolitanism" that supports a suitable openness to alterity. A non-metaphysical "cosmopolitanism" differs from the liberal universalism that underlines most contemporary defences of global norms. It should be understood as an ethical stance of friendship to the Other rather than an agreed set of principles or rights.

Derrida's reading of Heidegger highlights the presence within our response to Nazism of a philosophical problem as well as a need for moral condemnation. He draws out uncomfortable overlaps between the biological racism of the Nazis, the spiritual racism of Heidegger, and the metaphysical thinking informing much of our universalism. By doing so, he returns us to our "cosmopolitan" responsibilities.

### "Spirit" and Spirit

Heidegger set out initially to use phenomenology to explore the nature of Being (Heidegger, 1962). Like Edmund Husserl, he wanted to break out of a dichotomy of subject and object so as to return to an original experience. Unlike Husserl, however, he identified this original experience with our being in the world, not our consciousness. For Heidegger, our lived experience provided the route to Being because we alone can experience Being as a question. By holding ourselves

open to this question, to our being, we can approach Being itself. In Heidegger's later writings, usually understood to commence with the "Letter on Humanism", he turned from this phenomenological analysis of lived experience to an attempt to recover Being by escaping metaphysics through studies of language and history (Heidegger, 1978, pp.189-242). We do not find Being in our own existence: rather, Being reveals itself to us through language - we should listen to language to hear what Being has to tell us. Throughout Heidegger's life, he sought to make Being once again a question for us. Spirit represented for him "the determined resolve to the essence of Being, a resolve that is attuned to origins and knowing" (Heidegger, 1993a, p.33). Spirit is the posing of the question of Being whether through our lived experience or through language, history, and the overcoming of metaphysics.

In Of Spirit Derrida seeks "to recognise in" Heidegger's understanding of spirit (Geist) an "equivocation or indecision, the edging or dividing path which ought, according to Heidegger, to pass between a Greek or Christian - even onto-theological - determination of pneuma or spiritus, and a thinking of Geist which would be other and more originary" (Derrida, 1989, p.82). In Being and Time Heidegger defines spirit principally as what it is not, not a substance, not the thing in itself. He argues that if we understand spirit in terms of the presence of our being, we get caught up in questions of the cogito, and so fail once again to raise the question of Being. Heidegger thus opens up a distinction between spirit defined positively in relation to the cogito or our being, a concept he rejects, and "spirit" defined negatively in relation to the question of Being, a concept he endorses. As Derrida comments, Heidegger introduces spirit as something to be avoided, whilst endorsing "spirit" almost as if he were borrowing the former word for other uses. "Spirit" is said to contain the truth of Being but in many ways it seems to act more as a mark of the absence of spirit. What

is Derrida pointing to here? At the risk of making the relevant issues and distinctions too simple and clear-cut, we might contrast two interpretations or uses of "spirit". If "spirit" becomes the site of a positive truth, it is reified; it becomes a metaphysical or onto-theological concept akin to spirit - perhaps it even becomes a postulated answer to the question. Alternatively we might think of "spirit" as a radical absence, a concept placed under erasure as are so many of the terms in Derrida's lexicon. If we did this, "spirit" would point to just those forms of non-metaphysical thinking that have preoccupied Derrida and also Heidegger in his later writings.

Derrida, in a characteristic deconstructive gesture, attempts less to resolve these two interpretations of Heidegger's use of "spirit" than to show how they coexist in tension. For Derrida one of the features of reading Heidegger is that in doing so we are "aware of both these vibrations at the same time" (Derrida, 1989, p.68).<sup>2</sup> Nonetheless, it would not be wildly inaccurate to say that Derrida reads the metaphysical concept of "spirit" as dominant in Heidegger's Rectoral Address of 1933 and his An Introduction to Metaphysics of 1935, with the non-metaphysical one appearing most prominently in his later writings, notably the essay on Georg Trakl, "Language in the Poem" (Heidegger, 1993a, 1959, & 1971). Although we should not reduce complex shifts in Heidegger's politics to equally complex ones in his philosophy, the implication is clear: Heidegger's involvement with the National Socialist Party coincided with his reliance on a concept of "spirit" that forgets to avoid metaphysics.

### Spirit and Racism

Heidegger's use of spirit to convey the truth of Being leads - if not inexorably then with a certain force - to a metaphysical entanglement with a concept of the Volk

that is dangerously close to that of the National Socialists. Derrida traces this process in Heidegger's infamous Rectoral Address of 1933, "The Self-assertion of the German University". It is in this text that we find the definition of spirit already given: spirit is "the determined resolve to the essence of Being." According to Derrida, the Rectoral Address derives its momentum from this positive concept of spirit. Self-assertion requires, even consists of, a more or less conscious affirmation of the spiritual mission. To be fully human, we have to embrace spirit. Fully to assert our human being, we have to pose the question of Being. Heidegger then associates the particular German character of the University with such an affirmation of the spiritual mission. A Volk, he argues, has a spiritual world, where the power of this world reflects the strength of its embrace of spirit, that is, the language and history through which its people approach Being. The ideal, developed, spiritual world thus "comes from preserving at the most profound level the forces that are rooted in the soil and blood of a Volk, the power to arouse most inwardly and to shake most extensively the Volk's existence" (Heidegger, 1993a, pp.33-4). For Heidegger, such "a spiritual world alone will guarantee our Volk greatness" (Heidegger, 1993a, p.34).

Derrida traces the same approach to spirit in Heidegger's Introduction to Metaphysics. Here Heidegger explicitly stands back from any particular politics in order to stress the importance of Being-resolute. What really matters, he implies, is that we should hold ourselves correctly; we should open ourselves to Being; we should affirm the spiritual mission. The particular direction of our being is of little moment compared to such Being-resolute. In addition, Heidegger expresses regret at what he sees as a decadence of spirit. He calls vigorously for greater resoluteness, a renewed focus on the spiritual mission, a return to the question of Being. Once again,



moreover, Heidegger equates such a renewal with a strengthening of the particular spiritual world of the German people.

According to Derrida, Heidegger is guilty in these texts of "both evils"; namely, "the sanctioning of Nazism, and the gesture that is still metaphysical" (Derrida, 1989, p.40). Heidegger adopted a positive concept of spirit, not an absent "spirit", and so an equally positive ideal of the spiritual mission which then underlay his relationship with the Nazis. On the one hand, Heidegger committed himself to the National Socialist Party on the grounds that it embodied an aspiration towards a powerful spiritual Volk. On the other hand, he tried to overcome what he saw as shortcomings in National Socialism by "spiritualising" the movement and thus turning it's ideology from a biology of race to the question of Being (Derrida, 1989, p.39).

Heidegger himself later tried to distinguish sharply between his evocation of a spiritual world and the Nazi's biologism of race. As he explained to the Rector of Freiberg University in a letter dated 4 November 1945: "it sufficed for me to express my fundamental philosophical positions against the dogmatism and primitivism of Rosenberg's biologism"; "I sought to show that language was not the biological-racial essence of man, but conversely, that the essence of man was based in language as a basic reality of spirit" (Heidegger, 1993b, p.64). Derrida spends considerable time in Of Spirit questioning the force of this distinction. He suggests that Heidegger's entanglement with metaphysics does not overcome racism so much as displace it from biology to spirit. Heidegger ascribes the responsibility for the spiritual mission to the German people. He argues, as Derrida explains, that to "awaken spirit", to call "it back to the care of the question of Being", is "the historical mission of our people" (Derrida, 1989, p.67). In particular, Heidegger ties the fate of spirit to that of the German language. The German people and their language alone can produce Being

out of our being.<sup>3</sup> Surely however this spiritual elevation of a particular people contains a racial gesture? As Derrida pertinently remarks, “the German character of this university is not a secondary or contingent predicate, it cannot be dissociated from this affirmation of spirit” (Derrida, 1989, p.33). Surely therefore Heidegger like the Nazis proclaimed the greatness of the German Volk, albeit that he did so by moving from spirit to race and even biology rather than from biology to race and even spirit. Yet, as Derrida pertinently asks: "by thus inverting the direction of determination, is Heidegger alleviating or aggravating this 'thought of race'? Is a metaphysics of race more or less serious than a naturalism or a biologism of race?" (Derrida, 1989, p.74).

Derrida finds a link between Heidegger's spiritual racism and his forgetting to put spirit under erasure. Heidegger constantly strove to avoid metaphysics in both his early and later writings. Yet from 1934 to 1945 he in some sense forgot to hold himself open to Being and perhaps therefore became entangled in both metaphysics and National Socialism. To follow Derrida this far is to raise at least two sets of questions. The first concerns the dangers of metaphysics. What is it about a metaphysical concept of spirit that raises the spectre of racism? What does Derrida's reading of Heidegger tell us we should be wary of? The second set of questions concerns the possibility of avoiding not only the biological racism of the Nazis but also the spiritual racism of Heidegger. Did Heidegger have to take a metaphysical turn to oppose the extreme horrors of Nazism? Is there a non-metaphysical thinking that avoids spiritual as well as biological racism?

### Racism and Cosmopolitanism

What is it about a metaphysical concept of spirit that raises the spectre of racism? I believe that Derrida highlights the danger of postulating any fixed identity,

no matter how loosely defined, as the basis of a group, nation, or race. We need always to question, and thus deconstruct, any such fixed identity. We must not follow Heidegger in evoking a spiritual mission or any other positive content as the basis of any group whatsoever. Instead we always must remain open and responsible to the Other. In Of Spirit Derrida highlights these things by insisting that language is prior to the question of Being. Heidegger, at least from 1934 to 1945, seems to have begun with the question of Being as the basis for a metaphysical concept of spirit. The priority of the question of Being enabled him to define a positive spiritual mission in terms of an engagement with this question so that the acceptance of this mission then could become a possible basis for the self-assertion of the German people. Derrida, in contrast, insists that there is "language always, before any question" (Derrida, 1989, p.94). Language stands here for "the promise" that "has already taken place wherever language comes" - "a sort of promise of originary alliance to which we must have in some sense already acquiesced, already said yes, given a pledge" (Derrida, 1989, pp. 94 & 129). A promise of alliance, a responsibility to the Other, an openness to alterity; all of these things come before any positive concept of spirit, even one based on a question. As Derrida explains elsewhere, "to respond" is to be "caught, surprised (pris, surpris) in a certain responsibility"; "we are invested with an undeniable responsibility at the moment we begin to signify something," where "this responsibility assigns us our freedom" - "it is assigned to us by the Other" (Derrida, 1988a, p.634). Before all things, we have a moral responsibility that puts us in a relationship to the Other. Before any allegiance to a particular group, we belong to a cosmopolitan community.

Derrida's critique of Heidegger's concept of spirit points to a distinction between two ways of evoking the other. On the one hand, Heidegger introduces an

existential concept of the other as a positive presence in the individual's life. The other stands for those with whom we build an inherently shared life-world. It stands for people with whom we share an identity, or perhaps people with whom we are engaged in a common enterprise. On the other hand, Derrida's work introduces an ethical concept of the Other as the logical possibility of someone, even something, absent from the individual's life. The Other stands for those who might stand beyond our life-world. It reminds us of people who do not share a particular identity, who are not engaged in a particular enterprise, but to whom we still have a moral responsibility. It evokes "a we which is perhaps not given" (Derrida, 1989, p.107).

According to Heidegger, we cannot know ourselves or address the question of Being except in relation to others defined as those with whom we share a world. "Knowing oneself is grounded in Being-with," he tells us; "it operates proximally in accordance with the kind of Being which is closest to us - Being-in-the-world as Being-with; and it does so by an acquaintance with that which Dasein, along with the Others, comes across in its environmental circumspection" (Heidegger, 1962, p.161). Others are conceived here in terms of their proximity to our being. They are those who through their relations with us help to create our world, our Being-there. For Heidegger, moreover, our ethical relationship with these others arises out of just this proximity. "The Other is proximally disclosed," he explains, "in concerned solicitude" since "solicitous concern is understood in terms of what we are concerned with" (Heidegger, 1962, p.161).

Derrida suggests that because Heidegger's existential concept of the other relies on proximity, it embodies a particular identity or enterprise in a way that raises the spectre of racism. According to Derrida, our concept of the Other should exceed that found in Heidegger. Although we have our being only in common with those

others with whom we share a life-world, there is an Other that comes "before" our existential relationship to these others. In a move typical of deconstruction, Derrida argues that the presence of Heideggerian others always entails an absent Other. Even as we recognise the importance of others in constructing our life-world, so we inevitably open the space of the Other understood as that which remains outside of the shared life-world we thus evoke. To forget this Other is to adopt a metaphysical standpoint that raises the spectre of racism. We have to exhibit a cosmopolitan openness to the Other as well as a solicitous concern for others.

The concept of the Other sets up a cosmopolitan responsibility prior to any commitment to a shared identity or common enterprise. Hence Derrida has often insisted that there is "no ethics without the presence of the other" (Derrida, 1977, pp.139-40). Several features of his thought stand for cosmopolitanism against the particularism represented here by Heidegger's focus on others at the expense of the Other. Derrida's attacks on the idea of a finite, stable individual reflect a belief that our being is always a being with others. Yet his insistence on the importance of difference - of recognising how any present is bound up with an absent - entails a stress on the inherent limitations of all attempts to postulate a particular culture as that which binds us to the relevant others. Consider, for example, the notion that the self is constituted by a particular culture or community; perhaps religion is integral to the identity of Muslims, or maybe gender defines interests shared by all women, or perhaps Native Americans acquire certain beliefs and practises from their race. Derrida's emphasis on difference undermines such particularism: it points to the possibility of deconstructing such reified identities to recover the multiple, complex, even indeterminate identities adopted by Muslims, women, and Native Americans. Consider also the notion that a culture or community is defined by certain beliefs and

practises; perhaps people are Christians only if they act in a required fashion, or maybe true men have to be heterosexual, or perhaps the German Volk is defined by its unique relationship to the spiritual mission. Derrida's emphasis on difference again undermines such particularism: it points to the possibility of deconstructing such reified cultures to reveal the multiple, complex, even indeterminate beliefs and practises adopted by Christians, men, or Germans.

For Derrida, any attempt to reify a culture as that which binds us to others involves the sort of metaphysics and racism he finds in much of Heidegger's work. To reify a culture is to set up an apparently simple presence without recognising the place of what is absent; it is to force the fact of difference into a myth of sameness; it is to collapse the ethical Other into existential others. To avoid the particularism associated with such a reification of groups or cultures, we must adopt a cosmopolitanism that remains open to the ethical Other. We must respect singularity in a way that asks of us an openness to alterity. We must acknowledge an ethical relationship prior to our membership of any particular group, a relationship that does not depend upon the other holding certain beliefs, recognising given authorities, performing a set of actions, belonging to a particular race, living in a certain neighbourhood, or speaking a given language. To avoid metaphysical thinking and spiritual racism, we have constantly to remember our ethical responsibility to the Other.

### Cosmopolitanism and "Spirit"

Is there a non-metaphysical thinking that avoids spiritual as well as biological racism? Derrida suggests that Heidegger's metaphysical use of spirit was intimately connected with his spiritual racism. Yet within Heidegger's writings, he argues, we

also find a non-metaphysical concept of "spirit". "Spirit" clearly stands here for the non-metaphysical type of thinking that Derrida has tried to reveal through his practice of deconstruction. His study of the place of "spirit" in Heidegger's thought thus runs parallel to his more general concern to avoid the logocentrism he finds throughout the western philosophical tradition.

After 1945 Heidegger moved away from the metaphysical concept of spirit towards that of "spirit". Even in his Introduction to Metaphysics, he had argued that the question had to be prior to any metaphysics since a metaphysical position would constitute not only an orientation towards the question but also a posing of a question. This argument suggests that there might be a notion of spirit as an original "yes" which comes before even the question of Being. There might be a moment of ethical freedom or obligation underlying the very possibility of questioning. At the time, however, Heidegger's entanglement with a metaphysical concept of spirit led him to a spiritual racism rather than a pursuit of this moment of obligation. Many of Heidegger's later works, such as "The Question Concerning Technology", also seem to prioritise questioning or thinking over an original "yes". Yet Derrida highlights a subtle shift, particularly in the 1953 study of Trakl, "Language in the Poem", which takes Heidegger from questioning to listening to the promise of language (Heidegger 1977 & 1971).

For the later Heidegger, spirit, the pursuit of the question of Being, is not first; it is not something that falls into or governs space and time. Rather, the posing of the question of Being now presupposes that language has already been given to us. Thus Heidegger comes to emphasise the importance of listening to the pledge of language. All questioning relies on the fact that language already has been given to us. Crucially, Derrida adds, this means that an ethical space opens up in relation to

language, an ethical space that is prior to the question of Being. The possibility of the question, of ontology, of philosophy, all these possibilities occur within the space of language, that is, of a responsibility to the Other within a cosmopolitan community. The question "answers in advance" to a "pledge"; "it is engaged by it [this pledge] in a responsibility it has not chosen and which assigns it even its liberty" (Derrida, 1989, p.130). Ethics enters into our thinking at the very moment that thinking begins.

According to Derrida, when Heidegger thus placed ethics before ontology, he moved away from a logocentrism found not only in his own earlier work but also in "the whole European and Christian-metaphysical discourse which holds to the word geistig instead of thinking the geistliche in the sense supposedly given it by Trakl" (Derrida, 1989, p.101). Heidegger's recognition of an original "yes" enables us to begin a more appropriate non-metaphysical thinking of "spirit". One of the ways in which Derrida approaches this non-metaphysical concept of "spirit" is through an imaginary dialogue between Heidegger and some Christian theologians. The theologians press Heidegger on the similarities between his originary understanding of "spirit" and a radical Christian metaphysics. In what surely must be a key passage in Of Spirit, Heidegger replies: "Geist is not first of all this, that, or the other." Rather:

It is indeed not a new content. But access to thought, the thinking access to the possibility of metaphysics or pneumato-spiritualist religions opens onto something quite other than what the possibility makes possible. It opens on to what remains origin-heterogeneous. What you represent as a simply ontological and transcendental replica is quite other. This is why, without opposing myself to that of which I am trying to think the most matutinal possibility, without even using words other than those of the tradition, I follow the path of a repetition which crosses the path of the entirely other. The



entirely other announces itself in the most rigorous repetition. And this repetition is also the most vertiginous and the most abyssal (Derrida, 1989, pp.112-3).<sup>4</sup>

"Spirit" is first of all the mark of an absent heterogeneity that is problematically forced to become a homogenous presence within metaphysical thinking. Heidegger wants to insist on the importance of remaining open to this heterogeneity even as one becomes embroiled in the terminology of traditional metaphysics. Although he continues to use the word spirit, he does so whilst recognising a responsibility to the entirely Other who would fall beyond any simple ontological designation of the word spirit, a responsibility one might denote by placing scare-quotes around the word, thus "spirit". Interestingly Derrida has the Christian theologians agree with Heidegger. "Yes," they say, "that's just what we're saying" (Derrida, 1989, p.113). Their metaphysics contains within it the possibility of approaching an anti-metaphysical recognition of the original pledge. Similarly, Heidegger's non-metaphysical thinking does not totally avoid traditional metaphysics so much as carry within it traces of such metaphysics. "Spirit" cannot avoid spirit. It stands not as a discrete alternative to tradition so much as a reminder of heterogeneity. It does not evoke an alternative positive content, but rather a responsibility to the Other.

I want to pause here to highlight some key moments of Derrida's non-metaphysical thinking as they appear in his reading of Heidegger. The first moment of Derridean thought is its embodiment of an ethical demand. Deconstruction has been portrayed as a form of nihilism celebrating the free play of signifiers and texts without offering any criteria of judgement. In contrast, we have found that deconstruction insists on the priority of ethics over ontology. It introduces the notion of an original responsibility to the Other. The second moment of Derridean thought is

a critique of traditional metaphysics for failing to recognise this responsibility. Derrida's detailed works of deconstruction neither follow random chains of signifiers nor unpack insignificant marginal contradictions within texts. They highlight those places where authors, texts, philosophy, the tradition, and disciplines all fail to allow for alterity and so become exclusionary and imperialistic. The third moment of Derridean thought is an acceptance of the impossibility of our standing outside of metaphysics. As soon as we pose a question, we enter a realm of speech or thought in which we necessarily impose a certain homogeneity upon difference. Deconstruction does not seek to transcend such a realm, but rather to work within it so as to prevent our forgetting that we are responding to an original promise and to remind us of the responsibility this promise entails. The final moment of Derridean thought is the way concepts are put under erasure or placed within scare-quotes. This way of treating concepts highlights both the fact that metaphysical thinking always carries within it the traces of a forgotten absence and the fact that non-metaphysical thinking can not avoid setting up homogenous categories.

### “Spirit” and “Cosmopolitanism”

Derridean thought is characterised by its persistent return to an ethical demand prior to ontology. Heidegger's writings exhibited a spiritual racism precisely because he forgot to respect alterity when he adopted a metaphysical concept of spirit. Suitably to remember the Other is to adopt a cosmopolitanism free from the particularism that characterises spiritual as well as biological racism. Yet Derrida constantly emphasises that our responsibility to the Other entails a non-metaphysical form of thinking in which concepts are put under erasure. Perhaps, therefore, we should evoke a "cosmopolitanism" rather than cosmopolitanism. By doing so, we

would highlight the differences between the non-metaphysical "cosmopolitanism" found in Derrida's work and the metaphysical universalism that is so common among liberals. Derrida, as I have read him, has much in common with liberal universalists: he highlights the instability of cultures and so the problems of individuating them; he reveals the dangers inherent in the reification of cultures; and he consequently calls for a global openness in which the different individual, not the different culture, is the unit of concern. Nonetheless, from a Derridean perspective liberal universalism remains unacceptably wedded to a metaphysics of presence. Derrida's "cosmopolitan" concern with our responsibility to the Other stands apart from a liberal concern with rules and rights in that it rigorously seeks to avoid a logic of the same, a logic perilously close to the metaphysical concept of spirit associated with Heidegger's racism.

In contrasting a Derridean "cosmopolitanism" with a liberal universalism, I am likely to open myself to the criticism that I rely on a simplistic account of the liberal position. Liberals might argue that their position does not necessarily entail a logic of the same, a metaphysics of presence, a commitment to neutrality, or a particular notion of reasonableness. To some extent such criticisms and arguments would be about words alone with nothing of substance being at stake: if two people agreed, what would it matter whether they saw themselves as liberals or Derrideans? Nonetheless, it is worth briefly considering these criticisms and arguments since liberal attempts to accommodate a Derridean position would be likely to exemplify precisely that ethos that distinguishes their universalism from "cosmopolitanism". So, on the one hand, perhaps I will offer a caricature of liberalism - undoubtedly I will ignore the subtleties, complexities, and vacillations found in the work of many liberals. On the other hand, I will do so partly in opposition to the imperialistic nature

of a liberalism that often seeks to define a consensus such that its critics are represented as liberals and so pressurised to accept certain terms of debate. Such an imperialistic liberalism characteristically remains unaware of, let alone apologetic for, the way in which it thereby excludes or belittles important aspects of the identity of the critics it claims to accommodate.

Much liberalism remains wedded to individualism.<sup>5</sup> The individual is conceived as being autonomous, that is, as being at least capable of standing in splendid isolation outside of society. Derrida, in contrast, is well-known for his opposition to the "fantasmatic organisation" of the "finite individual" (Derrida, 1984, p.118). Like Heidegger, Derrida always insists that our being is a being with others. At the very least he insists that we can have a relation to self only where we have relations to others, and often he also suggests that even then we cannot have any real relation to self. Just as Heidegger argues that the presence of the other provides the necessary context for questioning, so Derrida relies on the presence of the Other to establish the ethical moment that comes before ontology. The responsibility and freedom of this ethical moment are "assigned to us by the Other, from the Other, before any hope of reappropriation permits us to assume this responsibility in the space of what could be called autonomy" (Derrida, 1988a, p.634). In this sense, we share with others an "absolute past" that brings us "together in a sort of minimal community" (Derrida, 1988a, p.636). Where Derrida differs from Heidegger is in his denial that a particular identity, shared mission, or any other presence, can act as the basis of this community. Because any "we" "tries its luck" within a culture or tradition that is not "homogenous", "our principal concern will be to recognise the major marks of a tension within it, perhaps even ruptures, in any case, scissions" (Derrida, 1988a, p.634-5). Derrida rejects Heidegger's particularism, with its spiritual

racism, for an open "cosmopolitanism" that deliberately avoids even implicitly setting up any criteria by which we might demarcate members of the community.

Because liberals generally are wedded to individualism, they tend to adopt a universalism based on a vision of how individuals should come together. They postulate a set of rights that individuals, or perhaps cultures, acquire by virtue of entering global society. Or they explore the global norms on which all individuals, or perhaps cultures, can agree. Liberal universalism concerns the rights of individuals and groups within global society conceived as an organisation, that is, as a collectivity formed by individuals or groups in pursuit of a specific end, such as peace, order, or social justice. Derridean "cosmopolitanism", in contrast, begins with a recognition of the fact that individuals have their being only in relation to one another. It does not consist of agreed norms or a set of rights so much as a reminder of the ethical stance or responsibility to others that follows from this fact of community. This responsibility moves us from an artificial, even imperialistic, construction of consensus, or agreed norms, to an openness to alterity. It moves us from a duty of respecting the rights of others to a gift of friendship to the Other.

Liberal universalism typically poses as a neutral position, one upon which all reasonable people can agree. In doing so, however, it reifies the cosmopolitan community in much the same way as Heidegger did the Volk. Liberal universalism bases the cosmopolitan community on a fixed identity defined by this neutral position. From a Derridean perspective, therefore, liberal universalism is insufficiently attune to difference. It does not allow for people who do not share the allegedly neutral position upon which it is based. Either liberal universalism is imperialistic in that it includes the Other in a consensus to which it does not belong. Or it is exclusionary in that it dismisses the Other as unreasonable. The scare quotes around

"cosmopolitanism", in contrast, serve to make explicit an acceptance of an undecidable moment in the ethic we affirm. "Cosmopolitanism" admits to non-neutrality. Although we should respect "cosmopolitanism", and although, in a gesture that is neither wholly strategic nor yet essential, we must at any moment give positive content to this "cosmopolitanism", we always should respect the element of chance, "the strange violence", that inevitably is embedded in this positive content (Derrida, 1988a, p.634). "Cosmopolitanism" is defiantly provisional and perpetually haunted by the ghost of the very metaphysics of spirit that it seeks to avoid. It welcomes the call constantly to interrogate our norms in the name of the Other.

Because liberals do not adequately recognise the undecided nature of cosmopolitanism, they are too quick to tie it down to a particular content. Typically this content consists of a particular set of rights acquired by individuals or cultures as they enter global society. "Cosmopolitanism", in contrast, evokes, in Derrida's words, a minimal community that is located in an absolute past conceived as "pure passivity preceding liberty" and so comes before legal obligations and rights (Derrida, 1988a, p.636). It requires of us less an acceptance of moral rules than a certain type of ethical conduct. It calls us to a practice of friendship within which people would open themselves to one another in an attempt to grant to the others those things that are deemed essential for flourishing. The practice of friendship requires a "respect of the Other" that "maintains the absolute singularity of the Other" even as it "passes through the universality of the law"; thus, we can ask not only "Does not my relation to the singularity of the Other as Other pass through the law?" but also "Does not the law command me to recognise the transcendent alterity of the Other who can only ever be heterogeneous and singular, hence resistant to the very generality of the law?" (Derrida, 1988a, pp.640-1). We should offer a generous hospitality to that Other

whom liberals so often dismiss as unreasonable; and we should keep a place open for that Other whom liberals so often dismiss as absent.

### “Cosmopolitanism” and Deconstruction

Farias's exploration of Heidegger's relationship to Nazism occurred at much the same time as the discovery of Paul de Man's connections with National Socialism (de Man, 1988 & Wiener, 1991).<sup>6</sup> Several commentators used this conjunction as an excuse to challenge the ethical credentials of the philosophy and textual practice of deconstruction. Jurgen Habermas denounced deconstruction as an irrationalist anti-modernism that belonged alongside the German conservatism of the 1920s and 1930s (Habermas, 1987 & 1989). This tradition of irrationalist conservatism had been broken after the Third Reich but Derrida's work is providing a temptation, even an excuse, to resurrect it. Deconstruction stood charged at best with being apolitical, inspiring quietism or even nihilism, and at worse with being intimately connected with fascism. Before long, several voices came to Derrida's defence. Simon Critchley in particular emphasised the relationship between Derrida's work and that of Emmanuel Levinas so as to demonstrate the ethical responsibilities demanded by deconstruction (Critchley, 1992). Clearly one purpose of my arguments has been to reinforce Critchley's position. The philosophy of deconstruction points to an ethical moment of responsibility to the Other that is prior to ontology, and this moment informs the type of non-metaphysical thinking found in Derrida's textual practice. In addition, I have tried to unpack this ethical moment, somewhat differently from Critchley, as a "cosmopolitanism" predicated on a minimal community and an openness to alterity.

Yet the debate on the ethics of deconstruction did not end there. The year after the appearance of Critchley's defence of deconstruction, Richard Wolin published a

scathing attack on Derrida's response to the Heidegger controversy (Wolin, 1993). Wolin was angered by Derrida's refusal to allow his article, "Philosophers' Hell", to be reprinted in further editions of a selection of essays edited by Wolin even though it already had appeared in the first edition. Wolin interpreted this refusal as "an act of self-criticism"; that is, an attempt by Derrida to distance himself from "a quasi-exoneration of Heidegger's philosophically overdetermined commitment to National Socialism" (Wolin, 1993, p.xii). Perhaps some of Derrida's comments did not do sufficient justice to the horrors of Nazism. Surely though any intemperance in Derrida's tone is more than matched by Wolin's description of this as a "quasi-exoneration" of a commitment to Nazism? Putting such intemperance to one side, however, we should recognise that Wolin raises an important issue. He says, "what is especially troubling about Derrida's text (and one might make the same observations about his book on the subject, Of Spirit: Heidegger and the Question) is that the 'foundational' deconstructive gesture of overturning and reinscription ends up by threatening to efface many of the essential differences between Nazism and non-Nazism" (Wolin, 1993, p.xiii).

Of course we should denounce National Socialism clearly and unequivocally. Derrida certainly does so: "I have always condemned Nazism" (Derrida, 1984, p.8). We can do this, however, with or without insisting on an absolute break between National Socialism and all other forms of thinking. Derrida's reading of Heidegger does indeed draw our attention to similarities between biological racism and spiritual racism and between spiritual racism and metaphysical thinking. He suggests that Heidegger's metaphysics of the spirit does not totally avoid racism but rather displaces the question of race from biology to spirit. Wolin raises the question: is Derrida right to relate Heidegger's Nazism to a politics of spirit that even today people wish to



deploy against the inhuman? Much of my discussion has been designed to show why Derrida does just this. Derrida alerts us to the place of racism, or a lack of recognition of Otherness, throughout our philosophical tradition. Properly to understand the appeal of Nazism to Heidegger is also to be sensitive to certain moral dangers that we confront. The practice of deconstruction prompts us to remember and to avoid these dangers.

Ultimately what is at stake in Derrida's critique of Heidegger is whether or not we can dismiss National Socialism as a mere irrational aberration. The issue is not whether we should condemn fascism - of course we should - but whether we should wholeheartedly embrace the legacy of the Enlightenment. Liberal universalists such as Habermas and Wolin think that we can: Nazism embodied a biological racism entirely alien to the universalist spirit of the Enlightenment. Derrida suggests that we cannot: biological racism has uncomfortable similarities with a spiritual racism associated with a form of metaphysical thinking found not only in Heidegger but also in liberal universalism. While we are still compelled to defend a "cosmopolitan" position, we should be careful all the while to remember, always to remember, our responsibility to the Other.

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<sup>1</sup> In many ways, Of Spirit continues Derrida's recurring exploration of the place of spirit in modern idealism, and especially Hegel (Derrida, 1986a).

<sup>2</sup> Derrida briefly lists places in Heidegger's work where "signs and markers" of the later non-metaphysical concept of "spirit" might be traced (Derrida, 1989, p.133).

<sup>3</sup> Derrida unpacks Heidegger's position thus: "German is . . . the only language, at the end of the day, at the end of the race, to be able to name this maximal or superlative [spirit]" (Derrida, 1989, p.71).

<sup>4</sup> Earlier Derrida unpacks this vital notion of the origin-heterogeneous: "Origin-heterogeneous: this is to be understood at once, all at once in three senses: (1) heterogeneous from the origin, originally heterogeneous; (2) heterogeneous with respect to what is called the origin, other than the origin and irreducible to it; (3) heterogeneous and or insofar as at the origin, origin-heterogeneous because at the origin of the origin" (Derrida, 1989, pp.107-8).

<sup>5</sup> Much of what follows runs parallel to the dispute between liberals and communitarians (Mulhall & Swift, 1992). Derrida shares the communitarian critique of the thin, liberal self, whilst refusing to follow them, as well as Heidegger, in postulating a fixed identity as the basis of a discrete community.

<sup>6</sup> Derrida has responded to the de Man affair (Derrida, 1988b & 1986b).