

Introduction

One of Jacques Derrida's later works on the thought of Emmanuel Levinas, a long lecture written a year after Levinas's death called "A Word of Welcome" ("Un mot d'accueil") and included in the book *Adieu to Emmanuel Levinas*, begins with a consideration of Levinas's thought of opening (*ouverture*), welcome (*accueil*), and hospitality. Derrida proposes to look at hospitality "in the name of Levinas, . . . by speaking, not in his place and in his name, but along with him, speaking with him as well, first by listening to him today, by coming to places where, in order to recall their names to them, he renamed, made renowned, Sinai and the face, 'Sinai' and 'face.'" Derrida asks: "These names were brought together for the sake of this gathering, but do we know how to hear them? In what language? As common or proper nouns? As translated from another language? From the past of a holy writing or from an idiom to come?" (*Adieu*, 44/19). With these lines, Derrida indicates first that it is not possible to conceptualize something like hospitality in general without recourse to particular names or outside of a particular idiom. But these lines also suggest that with such names we are immediately in a bind of translatability: What do they carry with them? What needs to be abstracted from them in order for them to communicate generality, to function as common nouns?

This dual thought about naming the general is developed in a conversation of sorts between Emmanuel Levinas and Jacques Derrida—an ongoing conversation whose first volley was Derrida's 1964 essay "Violence and

Metaphysics” (which is both a relatively early work within Derrida’s oeuvre and the very earliest systematic treatment of Levinas’s thought by anyone). Here, as in the past, Derrida builds and comments on Levinas’s own efforts to take account of the tension and relationship between the biblical and the Greek-philosophical traditions—the relationship between fundamental insights into the ethical (Levinas being known as the thinker of an ethics of the “face-to-face”) and their articulation in biblical “names” (“Sinai”). But the issue of translatability and philosophical language cannot simply be described as an abstract philosophical problem. What makes Derrida’s presentation effective is that it does not itself take recourse to a philosophical language that purports to articulate generalities in an abstract way. Rather, by presenting the problem as one of *names*, as one of interpreting hospitality “*in the name* of Levinas”—and thus in the name of the names to which Levinas refers his readers—Derrida conveys that the problem of translatability and philosophical language is one that we inhabit, as philosophers.

This book is in part a study of the philosophy of Jacques Derrida in view of the tension articulated in these lines in *Adieu* between philosophy as an enterprise of conveying the general and the challenges posed by particulars of various kinds: proper names, particular languages, and national discourses. My aim is to trace a question that runs throughout Derrida’s oeuvre, beginning from his earliest studies of Husserl’s phenomenology: How may we account for the possibility of philosophy, of universalism in thinking, without denying that all thinking is also idiomatic and particular?

In order to trace this thread, I have centered my study of Derrida on the “philosophical nationality” project that was the focus of his teaching, and of many of his public lectures and publications, from 1984 into the early 1990s. This project pursued the insight that philosophy is challenged in a special way by its particular, “national” instantiations and that conversely, no nationalism, no discourse invoking a nationality, is without an element of philosophical ambition, a claim to universal validity. I shall seek to show how the work on “philosophical nationality” carries forward Derrida’s early discoveries, through his work on Husserl, regarding questions of history, language, and “exemplarity.”

A core figure that emerges in Derrida’s explorations of exemplarity is that of chosenness—the biblical idea of a people elected by God for a particular purpose. The idea of election poses philosophical problems akin to that of nationality: how is the elevation of a particular people reconcilable with a

universal God? The writings of the preeminent modern thinker of Jewish chosenness, Franz Rosenzweig—who is one of the authors Derrida read closely in his “philosophical nationality” seminar—provide the ideal resource for exploring this question for our times. I have thus paired my study of Derrida with a study of the philosophy of Franz Rosenzweig, in which I trace how this German-Jewish thinker who has had such a great impact on contemporary thought arrived at his core insights about chosenness as constitutive both of human individuality and of Jewish existence.

Let me indicate some of the questions and principles that have guided my readings of Derrida and Rosenzweig, respectively—though, to be sure, these overlap to some extent, as my readings of the two figures are often conjoined.

Derrida

Derrida’s “philosophical nationality” writings explore what he terms the “exemplary” structure of discourses of national affirmation—their quality of asserting the most universal, “philosophical” values in the name of the most particular national, cultural, or linguistic entities. They thus form a body of work in which his thinking about particularity and universality in philosophy comes to a head. My purpose in this book is in part to situate these writings in the development of Derrida’s oeuvre as a whole and to thereby show that one of his ongoing concerns, from his earliest essays to his most recent works, is how to account for philosophy’s cultural determinations without giving up on its universalist aims—that is, without succumbing to a cultural relativism.

It is a significant feature of Derrida’s work that questions are pursued, to take up the formulation from *Adieu*, “in the name of” other thinkers who have also been engaged or pursued by them. In this book, my intention is to approach Derrida’s work in a way that does justice to the idea that, as Derrida recognizes and demonstrates, the problem of particularity and universality in philosophy cannot be approached except by reflecting this problem in the very way one proceeds to present it. For Derrida, this means letting the problem articulate itself through readings of individual philosophical texts, readings that are meant to perform or demonstrate, each time in a singular way, general insights through, or in view of, the most particular names or idioms. Consequently, I have found it necessary to trace Derrida’s insights as they are developed, each time in particular ways, in his readings; it would

in my view be neither possible nor desirable to “abstract” from Derrida’s writings summary arguments or conclusions without regard for the ways in which the particularities of a text, context, or thinker are negotiated with the general themes that are at issue.

In focusing from the outset on the problem of history as it is articulated in Derrida’s reading of Husserl’s “The Origin of Geometry” and trying to trace a concern about historical and cultural relativism through Derrida’s early writings through to the writings of the 1980s and 1990s, this book aims to break with the prevailing habit among readers of the early Derrida of focusing primarily on problems of language. Here I am in part following Geoffrey Bennington’s important insight that questions of language are not at the center of Derrida’s philosophy—at least not in the sense of specialized questions, belonging to a special domain of something like the “philosophy of language.” This is because the way Derrida asks about language implicates all of the most fundamental or “general” philosophical questions. It should thus be possible to read Derrida’s oeuvre in a way that focuses on its importance for any number of classic philosophical questions. For the present study, I have found Derrida’s early attention to history crucial for understanding the overall trajectory of his thought, and I show how this attention to history, and to the associated questions of cultural particularity and philosophical universality, continues even in the works in which language is foregrounded. Besides finding history to be an important concern in the early work, one of the results of rereading Derrida’s oeuvre with special attention to the question of history is that the important continuities between the earlier works and the later writings that have come to be known as “ethico-political” become far more visible.

With this in mind, it is in particular noteworthy that, besides offering an analysis of discourses of national or cultural affirmation, the “philosophical nationality” writings are also motivated by an ethico-political concern: These writings highlight the paradoxes of exemplarism—that national affirmations are neither simply particularistic, since they take place in the name of universal-philosophical values, nor simply universalist, since they make their claims in the names of cultural particulars. In thus calling into question monolithic conceptions of identity, Derrida’s works challenge philosophy, as an exemplary universalist discourse, to continually renew itself and perpetually open itself to what lies outside and beyond its culturally specific heritages. His writings thus lead beyond

the paradox that the more we assert a particular identity such as Europeaness or Jewishness, the more we are forced to do so in the name of the universal values and aims that this identity represents, and, consequently, the more we must deny its very particularity. For in this paradox is contained the ethical injunction to open ourselves—our national or cultural communities as well as philosophy itself—to what is to come: to what is other than, or is excluded from, such communities and to future lines of inquiry. This openness to the future is, indeed, what makes philosophy an ongoing, viable pursuit, what gives it its unity and identity.

Rosenzweig

The writings of Franz Rosenzweig (which were of course a central influence on the philosophy of Levinas) combine a systematic critique of the Western philosophical tradition with an insistence on the importance of Jewish chosenness, on the Jews' role in a universal human history. Like Derrida's questions about national and linguistic particularisms, Rosenzweig's questions about Jewish existence begin from a concern about the possibility of a universal history, or what one might call a transcendental historicity. For Rosenzweig, to ask these questions goes hand in hand with a charge against traditional philosophy that it is unable to take account of concrete human individuals. Derrida had developed his key questions about historicity explicitly out of his early readings of Husserl. I shall suggest that Rosenzweig's analyses of both human singularity and Jewish uniqueness also owe a great deal to the philosophy of one of his principal teachers, Hermann Cohen. In particular, I shall show how Rosenzweig's core views can be brought out more clearly when seen in conjunction with Cohen's logic of origin and philosophy of Judaism.

Rosenzweig's analyses of Jewish existence are an illuminating counterpart to Derrida's analyses of the paradoxes of exemplarism: the Jews emerge as an enigmatic figure whose identity, always "in retreat," is originarily constituted through, and as translation from, the foreign. This theory of Judaism is thus essentially linked to a theory of translation as a constitutive linguistic operation—and I show how both Rosenzweig, especially in writings surrounding his own translation practice, and Derrida, particularly in the "philosophical nationality" seminars, are concerned with understanding translation, especially the translatability of sacred language, in a radically new way.

Far from viewing Rosenzweig as an "ahistorical" thinker, as is often

done, I find that the concern with history and time is ongoing in Rosenzweig's philosophy. In order to capture human existence, Rosenzweig developed a "messianic epistemology," a method of "narration" in place of what he viewed as static philosophical theorizing. As we will see, this went along with a view of Judaism and Christianity as two modes of "wresting eternity from time," and of Judaism in particular as inhabiting a unique time of "already-being-at-the-end" of history, a time of foreclosure. On one level, this is a typical "chosen people" narrative in that it includes a dimension of a redemptive or messianic future: if a people is asserted as unique, this is not only by virtue of its past, but also because of the promise it holds for the future. Thus, for Rosenzweig, the uniqueness of the Jewish people lies in the role it plays in universal redemption. However, when viewed in conjunction with Derrida's evocations of the "messianic" as a radical openness to the future, Rosenzweig's analysis of Judaism as a temporal-historical experience shows us the possibility of a continual enactment in the present of a messianic hope—a hope that is essentially linked to everyday forms of human temporal existence.

Derrida and Rosenzweig

We might say that in Rosenzweig's schema the Jewish people are an "exemplar" in that their very status as a particular people, as "the one people," founds a new idea of universality. In a sense, then, I am proposing Rosenzweig's writings as a further example of an inquiry into the structure of exemplarity Derrida was trying to bring out (and indeed, Rosenzweig is among the German-Jewish authors Derrida studies as part of the "philosophical nationality" project, just as the concept of Jewish election is one to which Derrida returns often in the course of that project), a thinker who is preoccupied with some of the same problems of particularity and universality that Derrida confronts. But my pairing of these two philosophers under the heading of "Exemplarity and Chosenness" has a further purpose: Since, as I am suggesting, Derrida's way of proceeding—by means of individual readings of particular texts or "names"—is part and parcel of what he is trying to accomplish, and since, as I maintain, no "argument" can be extracted from his texts without reference to the singular reading strategies he develops, I have found it fruitful to juxtapose a consideration of Derrida's procedure with a study of how Rosenzweig comes to conceive of Judaism in terms of election in view of a heightened sense of both Jewish particularity and

universality. In doing so, my aim is first to illuminate a philosophico-historical context—one represented not only by Rosenzweig, but also by Cohen and Levinas—that is of central importance to the “philosophical nationality” project and to Derrida’s ongoing confrontations. But beyond this, my “double” presentation of the thought of Derrida and Rosenzweig approaches them as two “exemplary” thinkers of exemplarity and as standing in an exemplary relation to one another. For something to be exemplary, it must be more than an example among others, and so I mean to present Derrida and Rosenzweig not as two instances of thinkers who engage with the philosophical problem of particularity and universality—as if this problem could be named in a way that makes it each time the same, as if such an attempt to name it would not itself be beset by what Derrida calls the paradoxes of exemplarism. Rather, the “double” reading or juxtaposition I offer of their writings may be seen as evoking the problematic of exemplarity as it affects and complicates any attempt to understand what it means to assert what is most universal in the name of what is most singular—and thus to conceive of the universalizing operations that are at the heart of the philosophical enterprise. I propose the Derrida-Rosenzweig pair as an exemplary pair—a pair that stands also for a larger cluster of related thinkers, including Husserl, Cohen, Heidegger, and Levinas—in order to explore how Derrida’s investigations into “philosophical nationality” can be illuminated in an exemplary way by Rosenzweig’s theory of chosenness, as well as how Rosenzweig’s writings on Judaism are in turn exemplarily illuminated by Derrida’s writing about particularity and universality.

To think about particularity and universality requires a reflection on individuality and individuation. Accordingly, Part I, Chapter 1 presents Rosenzweig’s philosophy as growing out of his fundamental concern to preserve a notion of the concrete human individual against generalization by means of concepts, as well as a first look at his understanding of Jewish uniqueness in terms of election. I show that Rosenzweig’s ideas on both of these questions are crucially informed by his reception of Hermann Cohen’s philosophy—both acknowledged and unacknowledged.

Part II introduces the reader to Derrida’s concern, in his early writings, with particularity, universality, and exemplarity—the theme that I am identifying as central to his thought and that culminates in his later work surrounding “philosophical nationality.” Here I propose that from Derrida’s earliest works, he has been concerned with the tension between

the universality of philosophical concepts and the cultural or idiomatic particularity of philosophical texts. Chapter 2 begins by looking at Derrida's earliest publication, his 1963 "Introduction" to the translation he published of Husserl's short text known under the title "The Origin of Geometry." My interest here is especially in Derrida's focus on the "exemplary consciousness" that allows Husserl to evoke a European ideal in a way that is not particularist. I follow this with a discussion of Derrida's 1971 essay "The Supplement of Copula," where I find him to be pursuing a similar concern with respect to Heidegger's privileging of Greek as the language of philosophy. I view Derrida as following Heidegger in seeking to grasp how recognizing the linguistic specificity of philosophical concepts is not tantamount to a linguistic relativism. The closing section of this chapter looks at Derrida's treatment of questions of history and tradition in his early (1964) essay on Levinas, "Violence and Metaphysics." I examine how Derrida's confrontation with Levinas's evocation of a Judaic "other" of the philosophical tradition allows Derrida to extend his reflections on the exemplarity of the Greek and the European in philosophy.

Chapter 3 takes a different point of departure from within Derrida's "Introduction" to Husserl's "The Origin of Geometry" in order to trace Derrida's thinking about universality and particularity in his work on questions of language. Looking at some of the discussions of linguistic matters in sections 5, 6, and 7 of the "Introduction," I explore how Derrida launches a new "thematization" of language in the sense elaborated by Eugen Fink in an influential lecture held in Paris in 1957 that presented language as an "operative concept" in Husserlian phenomenology. By looking at both the "Introduction" and selected later works, I show how this thematization leads to insights about the interplay of singularity and universality in language, especially with respect to proper names and the question of translation.

Part III turns to the seminar cycle on "philosophical nationality" that is the focal point of my investigation into Derrida's philosophy. In this seminar cycle and works emerging from it, Derrida explores the paradoxes of what he calls "exemplarism" in works such as those of Fichte, Cohen, and Valéry that appeal to specific national identities. Chapter 4 focuses on two themes pursued by Derrida particularly in the first year of the seminar (1984–85): (1) conceptions of language involved in and implied by discourses of national affirmation; and (2) the idea that although national entities are paradoxical in their simultaneous aspiration to particularity and

universality, these paradoxes yield an ethical responsibility for such entities to transform themselves and open themselves up to what they are not. Chapter 5 is a combined look at Rosenzweig's philosophy of Judaism and at the German and the Jewish as privileged examples in Derrida's "philosophical nationality" writings, in which Rosenzweig's texts on Judaism also figure prominently. Rosenzweig and Derrida are shown to share a view of (Jewish) identity or "belonging" as constituted by self-difference. An important aspect of this view is that it relies on a theory of translation as an originary linguistic operation, as I demonstrate with reference to Rosenzweig's reflections on translation and Derrida's treatment, in the seminar's final year (1987–88), of Gershom Scholem's and Rosenzweig's famous exchange in the 1920s on translation and sacred language.

"Chosen people" narratives and exemplarist national discourses regularly include the idea of a redemptive future. Part IV focuses on this temporal and historical dimension of election and exemplarity. In Chapter 6 I examine the development of Rosenzweig's thought as a philosophy of history—from his early rejection of historical relativism and "atheistic theology" in the name of individual human existence, to the messianic history he lays out in *The Star of Redemption* and the "messianic epistemology" he proposes in his essay "The New Thinking." While Jewish thought from the Enlightenment onward had reinterpreted messianism as the drive toward the realization of universal justice in history, the redemptive capacity of the Jewish people for Rosenzweig consists in their being "already at the end," a specific mode of "wresting eternity from time."

In Chapter 7 I discuss a similar turn to the question of messianism in Derrida's work, especially his evocation of a "messianicity without Messiah" in *Specters of Marx*. I trace this term's appearance in Derrida's thought as a way of taking account of a certain class of experiences of time or history, especially preoccupations with an "end of history" or an "end of philosophy." Read alongside a messianic text by Rosenzweig, Derrida's considerations of the messianic emerge as a powerful account of history's radical openness to the future. Further, I show how Derrida's concern to determine an "abstract" "messianic" apart from culturally specific messianic traditions extends his thinking about the relationship of philosophy to its particular cultural expressions, not least by inviting reflection on the very possibility of abstraction.