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The Other Heading: Husserl, Spirit, Crisis

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The crisis of European existence can end in only one of two ways: in the ruin of a Europe alienated from its rational sense of life, fallen into a barbarian hatred of spirit; or in the rebirth of Europe from the spirit of philosophy, through a heroism of reason that will definitely overcome naturalism. Europe's greatest danger is weariness.

— Edmund Husserl, *Vienna Lecture*

We are younger than ever, we Europeans, since a certain Europe does not yet exist. Has it ever existed? And yet we are like these young people who get up, already old and tired. We are already exhausted.

— Jacques Derrida, *The Other Heading*

The question of the *Vienna Lecture* is posed once again: what is to become of the project of European humanity? In May of 1935, in a soon to be provincial capital of the German Reich, Husserl spoke against a barbarism that had turned itself away from the origin of Europe and thus forsook the spiritual telos of European humanity. In the wake of Husserl's death that barbarism fell upon all of the territories surrounding Berlin, resulting in a global strife in which the question of the European identity would be exiled for near half a century. Yet, in this last decade of the twentieth century, both the fire and ice of that global conflict have receded. Europe now stands free—appears to stand free—and once again questions can be asked meaningfully regarding what the continent is and what it could be in the future. The question thus remains: what is to become of the project of European humanity? However, while this question of Husserl's is of vital importance once again, we can perhaps now begin to ask what, exactly, the meaning of posing this question is.

This reversal of the point of the question is of philosophic and political significance. It is the question posed by one philosopher, Derrida, to another, Husserl, across time and across tradition regarding the very standing of the phenomenological project, its logical form, and its ontological presuppositions.¹ Our asking is philosophical in that, insofar as we examine the character of Husserl's question, we will be examining the question of "being."² The asking is political, however, in that it reorients our perspective on the very prospect of a European project. The question mark no longer abides at the end of the interrogative sentence, but moves forward and places itself next to humanity?, European?, project? Our question, Derrida's question, comes toward the interlocutor and asks him, not to justify a possible answer to his own question, but to justify the question itself. Our asking is political because the very putting of

the question unsettles current discourse surrounding the would-be identity of Europe and demands that it justify itself, if that is at all possible.

It is through this dual quality of our questioning of the question that we will have recourse to Derrida's recent "political essay" *The Other Heading*, as well as his earliest thinking on Husserlian phenomenology, especially as exhibited in *Speech and Phenomena*.³ Just as Husserl's question remains pertinent and reveals much about the status of Europe today, Derrida's examinations of transcendental phenomenology also remain pertinent, if not crucial, to his latest, more explicitly political writings. The juxtaposition of *Speech and Phenomena* and *The Other Heading* shows that this recent writing is not just an exceedingly lengthy piece of journalism, but that the explanation for placing Europe within quotation marks—and not just provisionally—is immanent within Derrida's critique of Husserl's whole notion of there being a crisis of European spirit and his analysis of Husserl's phenomenological ontology.

This essay, then, is an attempt at explicating the significance and revealing the possibilities of Derrida's critique of Husserl with an outlook toward the current ethical and political situation in Europe.⁴ The crux of this explanation, or investigation, will be the terms "spirit" and "crisis," their presuppositions, implications, and political uses. Indeed, as Derrida notes, the posing of the question of the crisis of spirit joins the Europe of 1935 with this Europe, today's Europe of 1993 in a parallelism that bears careful consideration.⁵

Husserl's Crisis, Today's Crisis

The point of departure for this essay is best found in a strategic movement of the question mark within the texts of Husserl that will enable us to open up the scope and significance of these writings. Indeed, we need to reiterate the questions suggested above: what is humanity for Husserl? What is Europe? But we may also ask: what is barbarism? And what is crisis? In what do these negative appellations and descriptions consist? It is with these latter questions that we will proceed, as Husserl himself does, and thereby open the general topic of Husserl's question about the future of European humanity.

At the outset of *The Crisis of European Sciences* Husserl describes the moment of crisis as a situation which "meant an indifferent turning away from the questions which are decisive for a genuine humanity."⁶ The questions which Husserl is indicating are those which concern origins, and not the technical or practical questions which we pose or confront in our day-to-day living. We have, within the twentieth century, turned away from the questions regarding origins, Husserl claims, through a forgetting of the European tradition which stands upon the culture of ancient Greece and the revival of the science of origins during the Renaissance.⁷ This forgetting, this turning away has been exacerbated and accompanied by Europe's positive acceptance of two

counter-sciences, or philosophies: naturalism and *Weltanschauung*. These two approaches, in Husserl's estimation, have forsaken the task of original thinking and have fallen into the worst sort of technical or mysticized thought. Naturalism became so enthralled with the developments of the early modern sciences as to give itself completely over to the pursuit of "facts," while failing to consider the question of origins. This positivistic approach unreflectively placed all of being within a spatio-temporal grid and forgot the "higher dignity" of those questions which precede matters of fact.⁸ *Weltanschauung* philosophy, on the other hand, following on the historicist and perspectivist tendencies of the nineteenth century, sought to temporalize the question of origins; Hegel, at one extreme, and Nietzsche at his opposite, are emblematic of the historicist tendency that Husserl is critiquing. Husserl, however, responds to this development with the assertion that the truths of science are neither created, evolved, nor dissolved by history.⁹ Insofar as naturalism and *Weltanschauung* are descriptive of the intellectual and cultural currents of twentieth century Europe, the notion of and search for a genuine humanity—that is, a humanity of origins—has been lost. What results is a humanity that is nothing more than an assemblage of facts and data (as in psychology) or an insubstantial historical construction about which no ultimately true, atemporal statements can be made. Either way, the question of origins has been obscured. The loss of this question and vocation stands as our failure to remain on the path to the true answering of the question of who "we Europeans" are.

Husserl likens the trajectory of contemporary Europe not only to a falling off or forgetfulness of the proper path of science and philosophy, but to a true loss of faith. In the *Crisis* he writes:

If man loses this faith it means nothing less than the loss of faith "in himself," in his own true being. This true being is not something which he always already has, with the self-evidence of the "I am," but something he only has and can have in the form of a struggle for his truth, the struggle to make himself true.¹⁰

To lose faith is to lose the particularly European vocation of seeking origins. Moreover, insofar as one loses this faith one has lost one's identity since Husserl draws a strict relation between this vocation and the self, the "European man." This loss, then, is what constitutes barbarism and the oncoming of the crisis. Like the ancient Greeks—who are named as the spiritual forebears of European humanity in the *Crisis*—Husserl identifies as barbarian that which does not participate in the same identity, in a self-same relationship with the European community. The barbaric is that which threatens European humanity, and its culture of philosophy as rigorous science, from without and, most significantly, from within.¹¹ Indeed, while the vast continent of Asia is populated with "barbarians," it is not their existence that precipitates the European crisis.¹²

Rather, the crisis is located around the infections of naturalism and *Weltanschauung* philosophy within the borders, the spiritual corpus of Europe itself. Thus Husserl's distinction between the barbaric and that which belongs to the common community, differs from the distinction employed by the Greeks. The community of European humanity is not one of blood or fealty, but a spiritual community linked to the possibility for and the achievement of the rational vocation of original thinking. Significantly, the spiritual community of which Husserl writes has exactly the characteristics of being "supra-national" and universal.¹³ For this reason Husserl does not fear external assaults, but, rather, decay from within; it is the "European" barbarians such as the naturalists, the *Weltanschauung* philosophers, and the National Socialists that are Husserl's concern.

This forgetfulness of both the thought of origins and the project of seeking origins which characterizes the barbaric is founded on a mistaken or one-sided rationalism. Such limited rationalism looks upon empirical facts or uncriticized appearances as the original matter of knowledge and being, and hegemonically sets them over and against other interpretations of the world. As opposed to this defective form of rationalism, the faith in oneself, the "true being" that Husserl identifies is located in an universal rationalism that seeks to perform reductions, foundational investigations, on all the phenomena brought forth by one-sided rationalism. As distinguished from limited rationalism, this universal reason, or transcendental phenomenology, is the pursuit of the origin of cognition in the intending transcendental subject and of the objects that this subject intends; the concern of phenomenology is not the appearance, which the other sciences fixate upon, but the ideal conditions for the possibility of the phenomenal appearance. Transcendental phenomenology delves through the layers of the sedimentation toward the core of consciousness, while one-sided rationality is content to remain amidst the play of phenomena on the surface.¹⁴

The distinction which establishes the difference between transcendental phenomenology and the sciences of one-sided rationalism, then, is that between universality and finitude. Unlike one-sided rationalism, phenomenology is universal in its scope and in the duration of its activity. Transcendental critique "places in question all experience as such" and thus is not a specialized field or discipline.¹⁵ Further, phenomenology is universal for the fact that its task of critically analyzing appearances is infinite. The object of pursuit in transcendental analysis is not the atomic object that has the particular and finite qualities that the empirical scientist would claim that we can seize and possess. Rather, transcendental phenomenology investigates the horizon of possibilities of a particular object of knowledge, a horizon that can only be consumed by infinite investigation. In his essay, *Philosophy as Rigorous Science*, Husserl writes:

Everything psychical which is thus an "experienced" is, then, as we

can say with equal evidence, ordered in an overall connection, in a "monadic" unity of consciousness, a unity that in itself has nothing at all to do with nature, with space and time or substantiality and causality, but has its thoroughly peculiar "forms." It is a flow of phenomena, unlimited at both ends, traversed by an intentional line that is, as it were, the index of the all-pervading unity. It is the line of an immanent "time" without beginning or end, a time that no chronometers measure.¹⁶

The ideal object sought is not to be seized, and phenomenology can only follow its train in the infinite expanses of the past and future. While it is not a complete science in the sense of representing a body of axiomatic knowledge, the activity of this universal and infinite pursuit of the ultimate objects and origins of experience Husserl believes to be the proper and commanding ground for every specific science. In forwarding transcendental phenomenology as rigorous science Husserl would not seem to be eliminating the diversity of the European sciences, but eliminating their divisiveness; since it is not a one-sided rationality, phenomenology does not seek to displace other sciences, but seeks to anchor them in the activity of original thinking. In transcendental phenomenology all scientific practitioners, all theorists, all Europeans can find the ground of their knowledge and practice. The vocation of European humanity, then, is to establish "a scientific essential knowledge of consciousness, toward that which consciousness itself 'is' according to its essence."¹⁷

The crisis of European humanity is located precisely in its failure to seek these origins or essences through transcendental analysis; the crisis is the failure to seek a "philosophy from the ground up."¹⁸ In remaining ignorant of origins, in persisting in their one-sided rationality, Husserl wants to say that the Europeans of the twentieth century are creating a dark night of divisiveness and strife amongst what ought to be a spiritual community that would struggle in order to achieve Europe's true being. However, this poverty of the continent's sciences is based on a deeper poverty. The origin that Europe is most dangerously ignorant of is its own spiritual origin in ancient Greece, the cultural milieu where the infinite task of seeking essences was begun and founded on the "universality of the critical standpoint."¹⁹ This insight into true universality Husserl holds to be intrinsic to the Greco-European spirit and, as such, original to the spirit of no other people. Universality, Husserl claims, is not an original feature of the Indian or Chinese spirit, and only comes to those peoples via a process of "Europeanization." Thus, the crisis of European humanity is not exactly a failure to reach a goal or attain an identity that has been set out before this segment of humanity as a mere possibility. Rather, the crisis marks a failure of Europe to recognize its original and true identity as an universal, philosophic people. Without this more primordial sense of origins, the taking up of original thinking through transcendental phenomenology is impossible. As Husserl

writes in the text of his *Vienna Lecture*: "Precisely this lack of genuine rationality on all sides is the source of what has become for man and unbearable unclarity regarding *his own existence and his infinite tasks*."²⁰

The dynamic of identity and true knowledge—which is forgotten in this state of crisis—is in a sense circular, or, better, reflexive. The origin does not represent some provisional, incomplete, or indefinite starting point. Rather, the origin—both in Husserl's anthropology and his epistemology—is a full, complete, and ideal present. Through phenomenological reduction we find that the object that we consciously experience is originally intended as an ideal object. For example, when we have an experience of a particular ball we are more primordially, and necessarily, intending an ideal and original notion of ball, or ball "as such." The particular ball that we experience, with its accidents and imperfections, can only be compared with the telos of the perfect ball, the ball "as such," insofar as this ideal ball was already at the origin of our intentional experience of the particular object. Through phenomenological reduction we find that the telos is nothing other than the original and ideal object circling around in front of our experience providing direction and continuity to our reasoning about empirical objects. In this way the telos is a reflection of the ideal object which is at the origin of intention.²¹ Likewise, when phenomenology is applied to European humanity, Husserl's reduction finds that the telos of Europe is its origin. And, insofar as Europe is lost in one-sided rationality, that telos is to return to its origin through the activity of a progressive futural science. These origins revealed through the phenomenological reduction are not temporalized, not effected by history, but abide in a living present at the origin of European humanity's trajectory through time. Most significantly for our essay, this location of a living present as both the origin and telos of European humanity sets the Europeans apart as a spiritual people, a people with a definite and indissoluble identity. This identity Husserl considers to be that of original thinkers, a culture founded on original thought.

The task of European humanity, then, is to seek to rejoin its original and true spiritual identity. The crisis that Husserl speaks of on the eve of the German provincialization of Czechoslovakia and Austria was Europe's inability to retrieve this ideal origin of Greek humanity. Thus, in a contemporary Europe bereft of a notion of its proper telos, the striving for identity became chaotic or was forsaken entirely; the true reflection between arche and telos was interrupted by the deep ignorance in which Europe turned away from transcendental analysis.

Today's crisis—or the renewal of a crisis that was suspended during the wars of Europe, both hot and cold—is founded on nothing other than the revival of the question of what Europe is and what its telos ought to be. Indeed, the crisis that can be said to mark this post-Cold War Europe is the unques-

tioned taking up of this question, once again. What we are witnessing is a multitude of ethnic, religious, and political factions bringing to life Husserl's question and projecting/remembers an identity that is "Europe." Derrida presents the situation of Europe in *The Other Heading*, and asks this question:

What imminence? Something unique is afoot in Europe, in what is still called Europe even if we no longer know very well what or who goes by this name. Indeed, to what concept, to what real individual, to what singular entity should this name be assigned today? Who will draw up its borders?²²

Who will speak for Europe and what Europe is to be spoken for? More than a half century after Husserl's *Vienna Lecture* the question of Europe is being posed, once again, as a question of identity. Dangerously, the question is being put forward by a culture that is bereft of original—or, non-original—thinking. Once again, the struggle that is arising is one which contests what that land mass', that "spiritual body's" true identity is. Once again, in Vienna, Prague, Berlin, and Paris the question is being asked if that city is a capital, and a capital of what? Or are these cities provincial outposts, but then, of what greater entity? Once again we ask: what is Europe and what is European humanity?

The Non-Originary Origin

For the moment we will let this reiteration of Husserl's question linger and approach the topic of crisis and spirit from another, perhaps more oblique angle. Yet, in now turning our attention to Derrida's *Speech and Phenomena* it could be said that we are simply continuing the discussion of the previous section. The specific locale of crisis, however, has shifted from that of Europe to that of writing. In this shift the question of Europe appears to wait unattended, whereas, in fact, the concerns which led us to this initial question continue to be explored and their implications deepened. The struggle between European humanity and barbarism is paralleled here in Derrida's consideration of Husserl's understanding of the relation between speech and indication, between *phone* and *graphe*. Through a radical but crucial shift in registers what we will find is that the question of Europe as posed by Husserl is nothing other than a token of phonocentrism, a privileging at the outset of the phenomenological investigation of a metaphysics of presence over and against the possibility of a grammatology.²³ In working through the issue of speech and writing what we will see is that the barbarism that Husserl fears is nothing other than a subspecies of non-phonetic signification, or writing. As Derrida announces: "The moment of crisis is always the moment of signs."²⁴

Derrida's critique of Husserlian phenomenology is a fundamental critique, a critique which draws the very logical structure of phenomenological analysis into question. Insofar as the goal of phenomenological reduction is to locate a

pure and present object which is said to be at the core of our intentional activity, Derrida offers a dual challenge in *Speech and Phenomena*. First, it is to be questioned whether Husserl has not misrepresented the phenomenological pursuit when he places it under the title of being an "infinite task." If we take temporalization and the iteration of experienced objects seriously, the possibility of performing even an infinite reduction that would reach a purely present, ideal object begins to take on the character of an impossibility. The projection of a pure present at the end of the infinite task of European science—that is, the employment of the Idea in the Kantian sense—Derrida finds to be simply a response to the threat of a temporalized analysis of phenomenology; in the desire to preserve that pure present which eludes us in our reflection upon past experience transcendental phenomenology deceptively casts it ahead, beyond experience, as a futural possibility.²⁵ Second, even if we were to concede to Husserl the possibility or reality of such a pure present, the question then becomes what it could possibly mean to intuit such an ideal object. As Derrida makes clear in the latter chapters of his analysis, and particularly in "The Supplement of Origin," the possibility of such a pure present having any meaning is doubtful; it is more likely that such an ideality would be the eclipse of meaning, or death itself. In order to lay the basis for returning to our discussion of Europe we need to consider both of these levels of criticism in more depth.

In pursuing the task of challenging the pure ideality of the teleology of consciousness that was initiated by Derrida's claim that it is simply a response to the threat posed by a temporalized consideration of phenomenological analysis, the task becomes to show the degree to which phenomenology is "tormented" from within; we need to examine the way in which transcendental phenomenology is always and already internally beset by barbaric culture.²⁶ That is to say, we must show how the Idea in the Kantian sense only conceals the impossibility of this ideality. Conversely, the basis for any argument for the possibility of the phenomenological critique reaching a pure present must, then, rest on certain foundational distinctions which will attempt precisely to maintain the dignity of presence. To this end, it is Husserl's fundamental concern to distinguish the meaningful forms of essential consciousness in expression from the non-expressive or non-meaningful indicative function of signs. The class of meaningful expressions and the class of merely sense-producing signs are further distinguished by Husserl's drawing of a strict relation between expression and the human voice. The indicative activity of signs, on the other hand, is linked with non-vocal or written figures. While the written sign only motivates us, points us toward another object which itself grounds meaning, speech is constitutive of meaning itself in that it is but the exteriorization (ex-pression) of a meaning-generating intentional consciousness. In speech we give meaning to the world; we want to say something and, thereby, intend the world with a definite meaning. Everything which is not of

this essential vocal form—that is, signs, symbols, *graphie*—are meaningful only insofar as they are in the service or under the control of voice. Upon Husserl's reading, untouched or unanimated by voice, signs lie dormant and are without meaning. Yet, importantly, such "dead" signs are not without significance.

As Derrida remarks in his discussion of Husserl's distinction between expression and indication, even a cursory consideration of speech suggests that it is a highly complicated structure within which one cannot make strict separations or distinctions between expression and indication; in communicative speech the functions of expression and indication appear to be intimately related and inter-meshed. Once a Husserlian meaning intention is "expressed" it loses its purity and becomes mixed with signs—gestures, lettering, symbols—that have other possibilities than simply being the means by which this particular meaning intention is related. Signs belong to a public and intersubjective sphere in which they are useful precisely for their variable and indeterminate character. What is clear, however, is that Husserl must distinguish the two and find a direct connection between vocal expression and the living present of subjective consciousness. The weight and importance of this distinction, the necessity of it to Husserl's project, is apparent when we broaden the field to terms to which "voice" is analogous in the Husserlian vocabulary. The cluster of analogous and often interchangeable terms that Husserl uses along with voice are: spirit, breath, and life.²⁷ Voice is implicated in this group of terms which are all suggestive of being, of a primordial being present. What voice carries with it, what it itself is, then, is the origin which constitutes meaning prior to any appearance in the world. Derrida writes, introducing his critique:

For it is not in the sonorous substance or in the physical voice, in the body of speech in the world, that he will recognize an original affinity with the logos in general, but in the voice phenomenologically taken, speech in its transcendental flesh, in the breath, the intentional animation that transforms the body of the word into flesh, makes the *Körper* a *Leib*, a *geistige Leiblichkeit*. The phenomenological voice would be this spiritual flesh that continues to speak and be present to itself—to hear itself—in the absence of the world.²⁸

The voice, as life, exists as an ontologically necessary precursor to all appearances, all expressive and indicative activity. The voice is what conserves meaning in that it is the pure origin of meaning. As such, the full presence of voice is cast ahead as the promise of a pure teleological ideality that can be reached via a phenomenological analysis which strips away the dead layers of signs. This ontological assertion provides Husserl with the theoretical leverage to prise expression loose from the dead indicative signs that it is bound up with in communicative speech.

However, without this grounding of voice in life itself, all speech and written systems that appear to rely on voice would be unable to offer that promise and would be characterized by a non-substantial play of indication. In Husserl's estimation, as long and only as long as voice vitiates expression, and other forms of communication, the promise of ideality is preserved. Considering the grouping of terms surrounding the Husserlian concept of voice, the threat posed by indication and writing is clear. If speech is the repository of life, of being present, writing is death and the eclipse of meaning. Once that living present is embodied in written signs and symbols it is set at a distance from the breath which conserves its meaning. And once that distance between intended meaning and written sign becomes apparent the misinterpretation, the forgetfulness, and the utter death of the meaning intention all become possible.²⁹ A sign, a written symbol cut off from the meaning intention which gave it life offers no prospect for intuition, but gives itself over to non-teleological, non-truth-guided interpretation. In this way the dead sign remains dangerously and critically significant. This, then, is the moment of crisis in classical and Husserlian semiology: when a sign is so distant from the meaning intention after which it was patterned as to lend itself to interpretation in the absence of that origin/telos.³⁰ This is the moment of strife and conflicting interpretation without the hope of a mediating or ruling principle.

The question Derrida poses regarding Husserl's distinction between expression and indication, speech and sign, is whether, in fact, expression is not always already "contaminated" by signification such that the "introduction" of indication to expression does not constitute a moment of crisis.³¹ The point which Derrida presses in the chapter "Meaning as Soliloquy" is that all manifested, communicative acts of internal consciousness, insofar as they appear in space and time, are indicative. Moreover, it is important to note that indication does not just inhabit public speech, but abides in soliloquy as well. Both space and time are fields of differentiation and, for this reason, not even Husserl's monadic subject of time consciousness escapes differentiation and dispersion.³² The internal voice, the spoken word, the gesture, the written word, insofar as they are spatio-temporal appearances, all resist the reduction to a pure present and the sloughing off of their indicative "shell."

Husserl can thus think that some elements of a substantially discursive order (word, parts of speech in general) function in certain cases as indicative signs. And this indicative function of speech is everywhere at work. All speech inasmuch as it is engaged in communication and manifests lived experience, operates as indication. In this way words act like gestures. Or rather, the very concept of gesture would have to be determined on the basis of indication as what is not expressive.³³

Once the living consciousness seeks to manifest itself—even if only to itself—it has begun to exile itself into the world of signs and indication. The very breath that gives life to our words is receding as the phone is exhaled; truly, they begin to expire. The term "crisis" suggests that this intermixture, this losing of meaning in indication is a state of degradation and a state that can be circumvented or from which we can recuperate through a proper application of phenomenological analysis. What Derrida's criticism reveals is the contrary. Insofar as this task of phenomenology is being pursued in the intersubjective sphere—including the subject speaking to itself—which demands the exteriorization of meaning, it is inevitably caught in a field of signification that founds its movement not on presence but on absence which functions in the play of spaces and the inter-relation of differences.

The infinite task of phenomenology, which is to get to the living core of consciousness and the objects intended by consciousness, then, is more aptly described as an impossible task. At this level of critique the question of crisis is rendered moot in that indication and difference are an inescapable part of all speech, and even would be necessary for a purely present subject to reveal itself to itself. The "pure" moment that is revealed in the "blink of an eye" only gains its circumscription and self-identity by the distinct space that the blinking of the eye creates.³⁴ Further, internal speech, insofar as it is discursively saying something, would be contaminated by indication for the very same reasons that externalized speech is. The spacing and difference which are generally taken to be characteristic of writing, then, are not the moment of crisis in which the origin is lost, but the very means by which meaning is enabled to appear.

Thus the infinite task of phenomenology that declares itself to be the teleological pursuit of a pure present (the Idea in the Kantian sense) is deeply problematic insofar as that task unfolds in time and by means of speech which is inevitably caught up in systems of indication. Yet, there is the second level of Derrida's critique that we only sketched at the outset of this section. Even if every expression or discursive rendering of meaning were instantaneously contaminated by signs and writing, there is still the possibility that in the pure interiority of the subject there is a living present that speaks without signs. This is the reduction to the interior monologue which Derrida characterizes as a self that is immediately present to itself and, thus, no longer needs signs to point toward an existence.³⁵ There would be no spatiality or temporality in this self-present subject, no gaps or differences, and so all communication becomes superfluous or useless. Thus the voice of the pure subject keeps silent and resides in an unmediated and simple "is"; this subject is being itself, metaphysically understood.

The question that Derrida asks is whether, given this description of the

pure subject as simple, unmediated, self-present, and silent, this original/teleological living present is not more appropriately thought of as death. The total being which the living present represents in its completeness is without feature, difference, or motion; in its full being it is nothing. At the close of *Speech and Phenomena* Derrida writes:

The history of metaphysics therefore can be expressed as the unfolding of the structure or schema of an absolute will-to-hear-oneself-speak. This history is closed when this infinite absolute appears to itself as its own death. A voice without difference, a voice without writing, is at once absolutely alive and absolutely dead.³⁶

Indeed, the close of Derrida's critique of Husserlian phenomenology is a complete shifting of registers from presence to absence. The condition for the possibility of meaning is no longer Husserl's living present, but is located in the death of the subject that was first thought to be the ground of meaning. Meaning generated through indicative activity, if it is to have any point, necessitates the death or absence of its subject. Yet, what we find in following out the logic of semiology is that this subject is not just temporarily or practically absented, but is, at its very "core," absented or dead; in that self-same "core" the life-giving activity of indication ceases and, thus, there never was and never will be a meaningful subject other than the dead or absented subject. Because of this, Derrida is able to affect the displacement of the cluster of *phone*, speech, identity, and life with the new cluster of *grame*, writing, difference, and death.

The radical shifting from the paradigm of life to that of death within Derrida's critique and working out of the structure of Husserlian phenomenology is founded on standard paradigm of classical semiology. The earlier consideration of communicative speech showed how we could not actually separate or distinguish expression from indication. Based on this inevitable inter-relation, all speech with reference to an object or to the speaking subject is engaged in indication at some level and, as such, is pointing to something which is not immediately present. The very meaning of signs within classical analysis is to stand in for a currently absented presence, to serve as a supplement to what is currently not present. In Husserl's case, speech, in its expression, still is said to point to an ideal object or pure subject. Both classical and Husserlian semiology, then, presuppose distance, separation, and absence within the very structure which purports to arrive at that which Husserl would like to describe as a unified and living present. However, what we found when we considered the pure object at which both classical semiology and Husserlian phenomenology seek to arrive is that all semiosis, all communication ceases in the sphere of pure presence. Semiosis, as the structure of life and meaning-giving activity, is impossible at the point of pure presence since there is no distance or difference to motivate it. The death or absence of the subject, as

Derrida notes, is thus the "structural necessity to the pronouncing of the I";³⁷ or, to link this point with our first analysis: voice is not contaminated by indication, for this indicative "contamination" is all there is to voice. To indicate oneself with the "I" is only to say that one is not fully present. More radically, the "I" signifies that one has never been fully present and, thus, has never been alive in a strong metaphysical sense. The world in which we live and communicate in is not only "plagued" by absence and difference, but is "founded" on this absence.

Thus *Speech and Phenomena* brings us to a point where we have to reconsider the notion of crisis as a being ignorant of, or a being distant from origins. The ground of life and activity does not appear to be an original presence, but, rather, an absence and differentiation which Derrida will term "*différance*." We will have to turn to a consideration of *différance* and its significance for our thinking about crisis more closely in the next section. However, it should be clear that an acceptance of *différance* as the "ground," as the non-originary origin of our living will amount to "challenging the very form of the question" in which Husserl proposes the issue of crisis.³⁸

Différance: Crisis Reconsidered

Re-approaching the question of Europe and the crisis of spirit, it is evident that the difference between Husserl's and Derrida's philosophical methodology is not that the former proposes that we take up the issue of origins and that the latter eschews the importance of what we have termed here as "original thinking." Rather, both of these Europeans ask us to think originally, or, in Derrida's case, "originally." The difference is that Derrida does not think that we can take up Husserl's call to origins through transcendental phenomenology naïvely; the issue of origins itself has to be put to criticism prior to any questioning of the possibility of an origin or telos of Europe. Thus in his Introduction to Husserl's *Origin of Geometry* Derrida speaks of Husserl as representing a "'naïveté of a higher level' or an investigator become irresponsible"; Derrida goes on to refer to him as one who "was a stranger to history" and, as such, "incapable of taking it seriously."³⁹ Which is to say, Husserl is guilty of propagating his own one-sided rationality. To act responsibly and to be faithful to Europe and the history of Europe requires that we pause even at a point prior to Husserlian original thinking.

Speech and Phenomena is where the notion of origin is itself made the object of phenomenological (non)reduction and it is in that text that we find that the origin itself is never originary, that a reduction in the proper sense is impossible. What we refer to as an origin, insofar as it is significant, is only revealed by a more "fundamental" and "primordial" structure of absence and difference. That Husserlian origin of the living present which we found to lack significance because it would reside in an undifferentiated pure presence is, in fact, the death

and absence upon which all systems of signification are "founded." This dynamic in which that which is absent serves as an "origin"—as the non-originary origin since it is never and cannot be made present—of all appearances is that quasi-transcendental structure of *différance* as differentiation in the fields of both space and time.⁴⁰ Derrida approaches and, then, veers away from the possibility of transcendentizing *différance*:

Constituting itself, dynamically dividing itself, this interval [*différance*] is what could be called spacing; time's becoming spatial or space's becoming temporal (temporalizing). And it is this constitution of the present as a "primordial" and irreducibly nonsimple, and, therefore, in the strict sense nonprimordial, synthesis of traces, retentions, and protentions (to reproduce here, analogically and provisionally, a phenomenological and transcendental language that will be presently be revealed as inadequate) that I propose to call protowriting, prototrace, or differance.⁴¹

The point here is not to replace one transcendental structure with another; differance cannot be another transcendental structure in which being and presence are lurking, even at an infinite remove. The non-originary background of spacing and differing in time, while it has made the thinking of presence possible, simultaneously makes the actuality of presence, the realization of the Idea in the Kantian sense, impossible. As we stated in the previous section, the absolute impossibility of presence, death itself, fuels the economy of classical semiosis; the everyday uncritical and unproblematic semiosis of presence can only operate in the face of an irremediable absence. However, the proper taking up of this critical analysis of origins that Derrida offers in *Speech and Phenomena* demands more of us than an indifferent acceptance of our day-to-day life founded on the metaphysics of presence, or even Husserlian phenomenology. Rather it reveals to us a responsibility to reject the "nostalgia" for returning to a "lost fatherland of thought" and to resist giving ourselves over to those ways of thinking which presuppose such a "fatherland" as either its origin or telos.⁴²

In light of this brief exposition on *différance* we can better understand how Derrida's approach to the question of Europe is akin to Husserl's in that they both demand that our naïve assumptions be reflected upon and overturned. The demand that Derrida forwards, however, goes beyond Husserl's in that Husserl directed his criticisms at the answers being offered to the question: what is Europe? Derrida's point is that we have to begin our thinking before we form the question and, thus, submit the question itself to interrogation.⁴³ Derrida's essay on the topic of Europe, *The Other Heading*, is just such an exercise in critical non-technological thinking which eschews the taking up of the ready-made axioms of our day. Once we begin, as we have throughout this essay, to question the question of European identity itself, then we can begin to rethink

the alarm of the "spiritual" crisis of 1935 and 1993, and thereby reflect upon Europe in a more responsible way.

The possibility of recognizing Europe to be in a state of crisis, as Husserl does, is founded on the belief that in Europe there is an entity to which we should be faithful, and whose dissolution would be a true loss of being as well as a loss of a promise for the future. In *The Other Heading* Derrida describes the situation of Europe in the following terms:

Hope, fear, and trembling are commensurate with the signs that are coming to us from everywhere in Europe, where, precisely in the name of identity, be it cultural or not, the worst violences, those that we recognize all too well without yet having thought them through, the crimes of xenophobia, racism, anti-Semitism, religious or nationalist fanaticism, are being unleashed, mixed up, mixed up with each other, but also, and there is nothing fortuitous in this, mixed in with the breath, with the respiration, with the very "spirit" of the promise.⁴⁴

Each group, each faction, each subculture of the European continent is acting out of a responsibility that it locates within the "spiritual geography" of Europe. What Europe is to these various factions is not a sphere of indeterminate possibility, but a promise of a certain identity and way of being. Various, Europe is taken, both in its origin and its telos, to be: a universal and cosmopolitan culture; a harbor for the displaced and homeless people of the surrounding territories; a locale for the unrestricted condensation of economic wealth; a homeland for a quasi-Aryan race; a collection of various independently-directed and ethnically-defined nation-states; and so on. In today's scenario, Husserl's call for an Europe founded on a genuine humanity of original thinkers would be but one call amidst the rest. Further, Husserl's voice would be but one amidst the crowd yelling "Crisis!"; what motivates Husserl's call, and all of these others, is a fearful vision of the possibility of the finitude of the promise of that particular Europe which is for them Europe itself.⁴⁵ The recognition of crisis can arise from no other situation than the one in which the construct of the metaphysics of presence demands that we formulate the statement: Europe is x. Once that step of thinking of Europe as a pure entity is made the situation in Europe becomes a contest for the very being of Europe in which the advent of change always provokes the moment of crisis, the potential loss of being.

While in this essay Derrida refers to this thinking within the construct of the metaphysics of presence as "capital thinking," as thinking of an origin or a center, we can also term such approaches to the topic of Europe as being "spiritual thinking." In contrast to this approach, we have what Derrida recommends in *Speech and Phenomena* and elsewhere: the reflection upon

différance, non-original thinking, thinking otherwise, or non-spiritual thinking. To think in this manner, to find ourselves "thinking at last," on the topic of Europe, will necessitate that we perform the sort of phenomenological non-reduction on the notion of Europe as we performed on Husserl's transcendental phenomenology. The result will be the realization that, as Derrida notes, rather than the call of crisis being the call to preserve the "life" of Europe, the call only reveals Europe's own "refined taste for finality, for the end, if not for death."⁴⁶

In *The Other Heading* Derrida does not pursue a rigorous phenomenological analysis of Europe in order to reveal the impossibility of thinking of Europe as an entity. Instead the essay proceeds from two axioms which are the product of the two-level analysis which was explored in the previous section and Derrida established in *Speech and Phenomena*. The first axiom which Derrida announces is contained, in part, in the epigram with which we began this essay: that the possibility of a "re-unification" of Europe, of Europe's returning to itself, its proper identity, is not possible in that Europe has never been and could never be such a unified and self-present object.⁴⁷ Europe, insofar as it is locatable and significant, is revealed through differentiation and a structure of arche-writing (*différance*) which employs spacing and absence. Further, the pursuit of Europe—either into the past or into the future—will rely on the dynamics of semiosis which structurally necessitate the deferral of the possibility of the fully-present object such a "Europe." The second axiom Derrida states sharply as: "what is proper to a culture is not to be identical to itself."⁴⁸ As in our discussion of what would identify Husserl's living present, we find that a culture which became completely self-reflexive and self-identifying in an undifferentiated way would, actually, be the very annihilation of itself; the perfect gathering of European culture in upon itself would represent its total eclipse. What generates life, meaning, and significance is differentiation within a culture. Thus, to the contrary of those factions which are calling for a return to the spirit of Europe as a way of preventing the death of the continent as a spiritual entity, this call for a "true Europe," a "Europe for Europeans," is a flirting with the actual negation of Europe.

This consideration of the topic of Europe under the heading of Derrida's non-original thinking reveals to us, not only the dangers contained in pursuing the "promise" of European identity, but the logical impossibility of the promise itself. Taking heed of these two axioms, then, the call to come to the defense of "Europe" does not raise our fervor, but incites us to question. The presentation of the question, "What is Europe?" provokes us to question the question and look critically upon all those who rush forward to answer the question with ready-made responses. The structure of the betrayal of Europe was initially witnessed in Husserl's admonition regarding the failure to respect the "is" or the capital (reserve/origin/telos) of Europe. Upon Derrida's revision of phenomenology, the betrayal of Europe is now constituted in respecting that

capital, that origin, to the exclusion of its contraries.

I believe, rather, that this event takes place as that which comes, as that which seeks or promises itself today, in Europe, the today of a Europe whose borders are not given—no more than its name, Europe being here only a paleonymic appellation. I believe that if there is any event today, it is taking place here, in this act of memory that consists in betraying a certain order of capital in order to be faithful to the other heading and the other of the heading. And this is happening at a moment for which the word crisis, the crisis of Europe, the crisis of spirit, is perhaps no longer appropriate.⁴⁹

To reflect upon Europe and to remember Europe in a non-technological way is to begin to dissolve crisis-thinking. In our non-original thinking on the topic of Europe what we find is a memory of Europe which demands a certain faithfulness from us. That memory, if we reflect properly, will show us a Europe that does not have a pure origin and that has never been a pure identity. Heterogeneity has "constituted" Europe and a faithful keeping of that memory will resist the movement toward a European identity founded on the desire for homogeneity or any notion of a pure identity.⁵⁰

Once we reconceive the European "identity" upon the "basis" of *différance*, the significance and appropriateness of the term "crisis" begins to fade. Crisis can only appear when the possibility of true loss is recognized. Insofar as we rethink Europe, not as a pure being which can be lost or preserved, but as a relation of differences and distinctions (a system of writing) which mutually depend on one another to form what we call Europe, we can no longer see Europe as being in a state of crisis. Indeed, in that we have located the significance of Europe in there being an-other heading and an other in the very heading of Europe, to awaken the metaphysical cry of "Crisis!" would only be an act of betrayal and the jeopardization of that Europe which is necessarily without an origin. We only pay heed to the "spirit": of Europe, to Husserl's notion of the "spirituality" of the continent, at the risk of degrading or losing "Europe" itself.

This analysis of the European situation and of the phenomenology of the "European identity" suggests to us that Husserl's own presentation of the question of Europe, rather than leading us out of the situation of the darkness of pre-World War II Europe, is itself only a symptom of the metaphysical culture which made that crisis—and its various "solutions"—possible. Thus, when Husserl states that "the spiritual need of our time has, in fact, become unbearable," his voice does not provide a counter-point to that of the National Socialists, but is actually working within the same ontological framework as that barbarism.⁵¹ Husserl's contention with the National Socialists, and with all

of the factions of barbarism, was not a clash of ontological paradigms, but a struggle for hegemony within the paradigm of the metaphysics of presence; all the factions had a vision of what the essence of Europe was and what its spiritual goal ought to be. While we must end any comparison of Husserl's position to the that of National Socialists at this point, it is clear that Husserl was committed to the very same form of argument as were his foes: the battle over essence. To think about Europe within the framework of crisis, however, is only to commit oneself to the unending factionalism, divisiveness, and struggle for the "true" European identity which Husserl took himself to be working against. Thinking of crisis, crisis thinking, is not the point of departure from that situation, but the very creation of the problem.

Non-Spiritual Responsibilities and Democracy

Derrida's reading of Husserl's transcendental phenomenology and of contemporary Europe calls on us to forsake crisis thinking and the metaphysics of presence that undergirds it. Yet, while we are to resist describing the situation of Europe as one of crisis, this does not mean that we cannot speak of there being important and crucial issues in Europe, issues which should concern Europeans and others. Indeed, in the writing of *The Other Heading*, Derrida confirms the importance of thinking about and acting politically with respect to Europe. The critique of original thinking and the shift to non-original thinking does not signify the end of ethical thinking or political engagement; critics of the popularizations of Derrida's thought and all that passes as "deconstruction" aside, non-original thinking is not nihilism.

To underscore this point, and to get to the matter most directly, it is to be recalled that Derrida's short essay is most critically—and Derrida uses this word frequently throughout the text—about responsibility. Derrida writes:

Now, we must ourselves be responsible for this discourse of the modern tradition. We must bear the responsibility for this heritage, right along with the capitalizing memory that we have of it. We did not choose this responsibility; it imposes itself upon us, and in an even more imperative way in that it is, as other, and from the other, the language of our language.⁵²

Once the phenomenological critique of the notion of "origin" has been performed our responsibilities are not lost but are altered. We become responsible for a Europe—the memory of a Europe—of which and in which there is no origin to be located. We become responsible for a Europe that has always appeared and been significant precisely for the fact of the other "outside" of its borders and because of the alterity which has been "inside" Europe itself. This, then, is the responsibility that is irresponsible;⁵³ in its irresponsibility to that Europe which provokes calls of crisis, this rethinking of Europe is recognizing

and living its responsibility. In this way we leave behind Husserl's call to take up our spiritual responsibilities to Europe and, rather, consider our non-spiritual responsibilities. While Derrida enumerates a short list of duties to which this rethinking of Europe commits us, the simplest and most figuratively powerful given our time and place, is this: "but not to close off in advance the border to the future, to the to-come of the event, to that which comes, which comes perhaps and perhaps comes from a completely other shore."⁵⁴

Within the European context, and beyond, the general tendency has been to designate as fascistic those forces or thoughts which would oppose this general form of non-spiritual responsibility. The desire to close one's borders to the other not of one's origin or heading, and the desire to seek to maintain a purity of identity are certainly an outgrowth of a fascistic attitude or ideology. Given the limitations of our political vocabulary and the diadic structure of political discourse since 1945, the reaction of most opponents of these fascistic attitudes is to promote what goes under the general title of "democracy." One of the most prominent rallying cries of those groups opposed to the "nationalistic" forces within and without the governments of western Europe has been for an "open and democratic" society. And it would seem that many of the features of democracy, as it is currently understood, do provide a counter-point to such explicitly political forms of the metaphysics of presence as instanced in fascism. The universal right of suffrage, the formulation of policy by vote and not by decree, negative rights to check the hegemony of state and majority interests: these all go a long way toward resisting the forces of homogeneity which seek to obliterate differences in the pursuit of a "true" identity. Yet, while the support of democracy is undoubtedly efficacious in light of the political situation in Europe, it is still worthwhile to ask a further question. If we have taken the effort to pursue Derrida's question regarding Husserl's question of European humanity, then it is only proper that we pause and ask whether these "democratic solutions" are in keeping with our task of non-original thinking. So now, by way of conclusion, we ask: is the pursuit of democracy a form of non-spiritual responsibility?

When we begin to actually think about democracy, particularly after pursuing the dynamic of Derrida's phenomenology, we find that, rather than being an antidote to the metaphysics of presence, democracy appears to operate on the very same presuppositions as does fascism: identity, life, a unity of being. This is the case in both the French/Rousseauian and British/Lockean democratic traditions. Derrida's differences with Rousseau are well-known since Derrida made this paradigmatic figure of communitarian-Enlightenment thought the subject of critique in working out the principles of a grammarology in the text, *Of Grammatology*. The force of Rousseau's thought—which, revealingly, influenced the political philosophy of both Kant (the cosmopolis of reason) and Hegel (the all-encompassing coming to be of the Idea)—was to see

the political state as self-defining force whose highest aim was to converge on a single unanimously affirmed identity. While there was no predetermined identity which stood before Rousseau's polis as a fixed goal, the democratic process was established as the one mechanism by which these diverse wills could cease to be different and would unite as a singular entity. The "force of law," upon Rousseau's reading, is derived from law's being identical with the general will; that is, legal legitimacy flowed from the law's being a reflection of the collective self of the polis.⁵⁵ Democracy functions as the procedure by which this self-reflexive law—and, thus, the possibility of justice—can come into being.

Lockean notions of democracy, being far more libertarian than communitarian or socialist in orientation, appear to differ quite significantly from those of Rousseau. More pessimistic about the possibilities of human association, Locke takes democracy to be a mechanism adopted to best adjudicate the clash of self-legislating wills. Democracy is not on the way toward justice, but is a way of protecting certain fundamental rights of citizens. Justice is attained by having good fences (laws) and these allow us to muddle through a bad situation with the assent of a majority of people. In Locke's case the self-legislating and, thus, lawful body is the individual self, and not the polis. However, the similarity with Rousseau resides in the fact that law, insofar as it is legitimate, continues to be a reflection of the identity of the rational individual. Democracy's concern, as that mode of political association which roughly equates the government with the will of the "people," is being true to the identity of the "people." Law is founded on its relation to being, and laws thus founded provide us with justice.

These two, brief portraits are admittedly reductive and gloss over complexities in the thought of both Rousseau and Locke. However, these sketches are adequate insofar as we are concerned with these two main Enlightenment traditions as they have been handed down to us and how they inform our contemporary notions about democracy. And, given these sketches, it would appear that there is a real disjunction between our non-spiritual responsibilities and those responsibilities we undertake in a democratic state. Both democracy understood as a growth toward a collective self-defining identity and as a system instituted to best protect and respect a self-defining identity are profoundly irresponsible by the measure of non-original thinking. Both, in their desire for totality and closure are instances of what we have already noted to be Europe's "refined taste for finality, for the end, if not for death." They both orient their whole function and distribution of value according to the presence of being and do their best to make being one with itself. The goal is always unity, the "people" being at one with itself. Democracy, as traditionally understood, never seeks dispersion or an irremediable alterity.

Admittedly, Rousseau's version of democracy is somewhat out of fashion; those who seek such social and political convergence (for example, the "Slovaks," the "Croats," the "Belarusians") typically bypass the consensual process toward unanimity and seek a simple majority vote, if not a decree, to establish the final result. Yet, in many of the calls for "democratic" responses to fascistic actions or policies in Europe we certainly can find a Lockean understanding at work. Here proponents of democracy seek to protect the other by invoking some version of negative rights, a respect for the sovereign identity of the other. This form of democratic process is motivated by a fundamental sense of the unity, autonomy, and self-defining quality of the individual. Thus, against tendencies to collapse differences around narrow notions of identity guided by ethnicity or race, others might be welcomed (e.g., suffrage could be expanded or refugees could be accepted). This "openness" and "receptivity" to the other, however, is guided by a metaphysics of presence which equates the singular other with being and because of this identity is deemed to be worthy of respect.

What results from this generally Lockean or liberal conception of democracy, as Habermas and others have so correctly noted, is that democratic society becomes an utilitarian market place of political wills. In this market, political wills are collected, weighed against one another, and justice provided upon the basis of the metaphysical law. Each individual speaks with his or her indissoluble and singular voice and, then, awaits the result of the elaborate compromise which is the promise that the democratic process proposes to deliver.⁵⁶ Upon reflection it is evident that we have not, in fact, come that far from Locke's *Second Treatise* of 1698. Hardly a strong commitment to the sort of indeterminate openness which the attempt to think of difference elicits, this democratic posture is a technique for efficiently administering the to-come of the future. Moreover, any "democratic solution" to the ideologies of racial or ethnic identity, so long as it derives its impetus from the inviolability of the individual being, a being present, continues to be a contest for dominance within the field of the metaphysics of presence; it is a struggle to name what that individual is, to the exclusion of all other names. To call for "democracy" in the face of "fascism," then, falls well short of the shift of ethical and political registers that non-spiritual thinking requires.

The promise of democracy, as "we Europeans" currently understand it, is, then, to adjudicate the relations of self-possessed and inviolable monads; democracy is a way—and perhaps still the best way—of being responsible toward human entities, beings. Yet, our being responsible, our non-spiritual responsibilities demand more of us than being technically proficient in the ways of laws and rights. Derrida writes in *Force of Law: The 'Mystical Foundations of Justice'*:

The sense of responsibility without limits, and so necessarily exces-

sive, incalculable, before memory; and so the task of recalling the history, the origin and subsequent direction, thus the limits of concepts of justice, the law and law (*droit*), values, norms, prescriptions that have been imposed and sedimented there, from then on remaining more or less readable or presupposed.⁵⁷

Democracy, as a political program and as an ethical commitment, has its limitations in that it comes to determinate answers, fixes upon prescriptions, and promotes a technical law and a technicity of lawfulness. The limitation of democracy as we currently understand it is that it cannot begin to attempt to think of *différance*; closedness to *différance* and to the irremediable non-origin in absence is a prerequisite for the common commitment to democracy. Democracy is fulfilling its responsibilities in providing us with justice when it executes the law, the law which is erected upon the basic premises of human dignity. Yet, the unlimited responsibility of our non-spiritual thinking before *différance* demands that we serve justice by interrogating law and the "justice" it provides.⁵⁸ The practise of this unlimited interrogation Derrida calls deconstruction, and its commitment is to the form of justice which, unlike justice before the state or before "man," in principle can never be served. This sense of the unlimited suggests the justice of difference.⁵⁹

If democracy is to be maintained as a responsible political attitude—and it is not at all clear that our thinking of democracy can withstand this revision—then it must be a democracy which incorporates non-original thinking into its practise. What Derrida is pointing toward in *The Other Heading*, then, is an attempt at understanding democracy as an ethical and political practise which has "the structure of a promise":

The same duty dictates assuming the European, and uniquely European, heritage of an idea of democracy, while also recognizing that this idea, like that of international law, is never simply given, that its status is not even that of a regulative idea in the Kantian sense, but rather something that remains to be thought and to come [*à venir*]: not something that is certain to happen tomorrow, not the democracy (national or international, state or trans-state) of the future, but a democracy which must have the structure of a promise—and thus the memory of that which carries the future, the to-come, here and now.⁶⁰

Unlike our current notion of democracy which represents an economy for managing being or the relations amongst self-possessed beings, the main concern of this new democracy, or "democracy," is not any particular promise, but the form of the promise, the maintenance of the promise of the unexpected and unknown. The ethical and political task of "democracy" becomes to cultivate this space in which phenomena can take shape. Thus the commitment

to the to-come, *à venir*, is not precisely a commitment to, say, multiculturalism, or freedom of speech, or the irreducible dignity of persons; all of these ethical commitments fall on the side of the metaphysics of presence. Rather, this responsibility for the to-come of the future is "based" on a commitment to thinking otherwise, the thinking of limits, the impossible thinking of the non-transcendental condition of appearances which is difference. The concern, as Derrida notes, is not with any particular way of being or language, but with "the language of our language."

For these reasons it is proper to answer our question by stating that this "democracy" that is of "the structure of a promise" is not democracy in any traditional sense. The deconstructive practices which exemplify non-spiritual thinking do not grow out of traditional democratic thought, not even dialectically. Rather, non-spiritual thinking is concerned with the moment before democratic thinking and practice; the move from democracy to deconstruction is not simply a matter of criticism, but a shifting of registers. Derrida does not want to debate within the metaphysics of presence, but to change the matter of discussion. This "democracy," a "democracy" of the promise, is neither any current political system or ethical program nor is it of any to come, even at an infinite remove.⁶¹

The notion of "democracy" of the form of a promise exceeds or escapes democracy. It is about thinking what Derrida calls a "double bind": not to think of simple presence, but also not to think simple alterity or dispersion.⁶² Yet, this form of thinking, since it involves a thinking about that which is neither an object nor a concept (*différance*), is approaching the impossible. "Democracy," as non-spiritual thinking and a desire for justice as *différance*, necessarily cannot be packaged in any ethical or political program. As Derrida notes in *Force of Law*:

I think that there is no justice without this experience, however impossible it may be, of aporia. Justice is an experience of the impossible. A will, a desire, a demand for justice whose structure wouldn't be an experience of aporia would have no chance to be what it is, namely, a call for justice. . . . Law (*droit*) is not justice. Law is the element of calculation, and it is just that there be law, but justice is incalculable, it requires us to calculate with the incalculable; and aporetic experiences are the experiences, as improbable as they are necessary, of justice, that is to say of moments in which the decision between just and unjust is never insured by a rule.⁶³

The very character of this double bind which is found in "democracy" calls for a two level response in which, both, democracy and "democracy" have a place. The maintenance of a liberal democracy, and of the technical law which it requires, is a deviant but valuable political attitude insofar as we fail, as we

undoubtedly will, to consistently think non-spiritually. The necessary disjunction between formulaic or programmatic thought and non-spiritual thinking means that we have to have a serious concern for our everyday modes of thought; "democracy" cannot become an everyday way of thought, but we cannot escape the everyday. In its affirmation of the individual against the totality and in its respect for the other, then, liberal democracy has a special role to fulfil in our day-to-day, metaphysically-grounded life. Liberal democracy, unlike other political attitudes that could be characterized as despotic or fascistic, has a concern—albeit a metaphysical concern—for the particular, the other, and the alter. Liberal democracy protects and thinks about the elements of justice, but in its unavoidable systemization of its thinking cannot do justice to them. In this way, as Derrida remarks, this formal legality and technical democracy fails to be just, yet is indispensable insofar as it outlines some of the concerns of non-spiritual responsibility and provides the space in which responsibility can be practised.⁶⁴

Epilogue as Prologue

This moment, of course, is just the beginning of the topic. The whole of this essay stands as an introduction in that it has only served to bring us to the point where the most serious work begins: the work of living the technical or political commitment to democracy and the non-spiritual commitment to "democracy" as maintenance of the promise or condition of the to-come. However, it has been an important task to bring the writings and thought of Derrida into a space in which we can see his work as having ethical and political significance, not just accidentally or sporadically, but as a consistent effort since the beginning of the critique of Husserlian phenomenology with the writing of his *Introduction to Husserl's Origin of Geometry*. Moreover, this examination of Derrida's work should serve to revitalize our thinking on Europe and disrupt our tendency to conceive of the situation in the dyadic terms of democracy or fascism. The proposal of "democracy" or non-spiritual responsibility is one which eschews solutions and commits itself to an ongoing questioning beyond all technical considerations. The coercion of technical ways of life and the terror of definition and marginalization are undermined by this mode of questioning which is not aimed at any possible solution but represents the activity of justice itself. As such, we can begin to see—contrary to the critics who point to the "crisis" of "nihilism" that deconstruction portends—the way in which non-spiritual thinking, precisely because of its avoidance of "solutions," is of ethical and political importance.

Endnotes

¹ Derrida: "We have thus a prescription for the most general form of our question: do not phenomenological necessity, the rigor and subtlety of Husserl's

analysis, the exigencies to which it responds and which we must first recognize, nonetheless conceal a metaphysical presupposition? Do they not harbor a dogmatic or speculative commitment which, to be sure, would not keep the phenomenological critique from being realized, would not be a residue of unperceived naïvete, but would constitute phenomenology from within, in its project of criticism and in the instructive value of its own premises?" *Speech and Phenomena and Other Essays on Husserl's Theory of Signs*, trans. David Allison (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1973), pp. 4-5.

² In working through an explication of a Derridean reading of a text or texts—in this case the texts of Husserl and of Europe—questions arise regarding the status and usefulness of typical philosophical terms such as "being." While "being" certainly is meaningful and useful for Husserl, it would only find a place in Derrida's analysis insofar as it stood under erasure, and even then such a term would be questionable. The term "Europe," which also reflects certain ontological presuppositions, is also in a difficult position. Here I will not attempt to rigorously write all the terms of metaphysics, and those which derive their standing from the metaphysics of presence, under erasure. Rather, I hope, through the writing of this essay, to show how such term are problematic and set them under erasure as is instructive.

³ *The Other Heading*, trans. Pascale-Anne Brault and Michael Nass (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992).

⁴ This "explicating" and "revealing" is not, however, to be understood as doing something which Derrida has not, in a sense, already done. In making his ethical reading of Europe in *The Other Heading* and of Heidegger in *Of Spirit* (trans. Geoffrey Bennington and Rachel Bowlby [Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1989]) Derrida explicitly draws connections between the presuppositions of Husserlian phenomenology and ethical concerns. This essay attempts to draw that relationship into sharper relief and thereby more explicitly address question posed to Derrida concerning the ethical import of his readings and critiques.

⁵ *The Other Heading*, pp. 50-53.

⁶ *The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology*, trans. David Carr (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1970), p. 6.

⁷ The "we" used here in conjunction with European humanity includes North American humanity insofar as this notion of humanity is founded on a sense of spirit and intellect—*Geist* having both connotations—and not geographical borders.

⁸ *The Crisis of European Sciences*, p. 9.

⁹ See the essay, *Philosophy as Rigorous Science* in the volume *Phenomenology and the Crisis of Philosophy* (trans. Quentin Lauer [New York: Harper and Row, 1965]), pp. 26-27.

¹⁰ *The Crisis of European Sciences*, p. 13.

¹¹ This notion of the presence of barbarism, alien culture, within that entity which Husserl is determining to be Europe will be fundamental to our discus-

sion of Derrida's chapter on soliloquy in *Speech and Phenomena* and to his larger argument in *The Other Heading*.

¹² Indeed, instead of Europe having to guard its frontiers against barbarian assaults, these edges of European culture are the launching points for what Husserl refers to as the "Europeanization of all other civilizations." Moreover, in his attempt to re-Europeanize Europe Husserl sees himself as being the "functionary of mankind." *The Crisis of European Sciences*, p. 16.

¹³ See the *Vienna Lecture* in the volume *Phenomenology and the Crisis of Philosophy*, p. 178.

¹⁴ See Husserl's *Cartesian Meditations* (trans. Dorion Cairns [Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1991]) as an example of the reductions of transcendental phenomenology.

¹⁵ *Rigorous Science*, p. 87.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 107-108.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 89. Husserl writes on page 110 of the same essay: "Intuiting essences conceals no more difficulties or 'mystical' secrets than does perception. When we bring 'color' to full intuitive clarity, to givenness for ourselves, then the datum is an 'essence;' and when we likewise in pure intuition—looking, say, at one perception after another—bring to givenness for ourselves what 'perception' is, perception is itself (this identical character of any number of flowing singular perceptions), then we have intuitively grasped the essence of perception."

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 122.

¹⁹ *Vienna Lecture*, p. 174.

²⁰ Italics mine. *Ibid.*, p. 189.

²¹ In his text, *Edmund Husserl's Origin of Geometry: An Introduction* (trans. John P. Leavy [Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1989]), Derrida writes regarding the reflexive nature of the phenomenological pursuit: "But if each infinitization is a new birth of geometry in its authentic primordial intention (which we notice still remained hidden to a certain extent by the closure of the previous system), we may wonder if it is still legitimate to speak of an origin of geometry. Does not geometry have an infinite number of births (or birth certificates) in which, each time, another birth is announced, while still being concealed? Must we not say that geometry is on the way toward its origin, instead of proceeding from it?" (pp. 130-131)

²² *The Other Heading*, p. 5.

²³ The introduction of such words as "phonocentricism" and "graphie" indicate that the critical terminology in the section will be drawn from both *Speech and Phenomena* and *Of Grammatology* (trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak [Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976]).

²⁴ *Speech and Phenomena*, p. 81.

²⁵ Derrida writes: "Every time this element of presence becomes threatened, Husserl will awaken it, recall it, and bring it back to itself in the form of a telos—that is, an Idea in the Kantian sense. There is no ideality without there

being an Idea in the Kantian sense at work, opening up the possibility of something definite, the infinity of a stipulated progression or the infinity of permissible repetitions." *Ibid.*, p. 9.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 6.

²⁷ Derrida indicates this cluster on page 10 of *Speech and Phenomena*.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 16.

²⁹ See *Speech and Phenomena*, pp. 57-78.

³⁰ *Of Grammatology*, p. 40.

³¹ *Speech and Phenomena*, p. 20.

³² This is precisely the significance of Derrida's notion of difference: differentiation in the registers of both space and time. In the next section we will take up the subject of difference. On this matter I am most grateful to Dr. John van Buren for his helpful comments.

³³ *Ibid.*, pp. 37-38.

³⁴ See Derrida's chapter "Signs and the Blink of an Eye" in *Speech and Phenomena*.

³⁵ Derrida: "The reduction to the monologue is really a putting of empirical worldly existence between brackets. In 'solitary mental life' we no longer use real (*wirklich*) words, but only imagined (*vorgestellt*) words. And lived experience—about which we were wondering whether it might not be 'indicated' to the speaking subject by himself—does not have to be so indicated because it is immediately certain and present to itself." *Ibid.*, p. 43.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 102. In *Of Grammatology* Derrida writes: "The subordination of the trace to the full presence summed up in the logos, the humbling of writing beneath a speech dreaming its plenitude, such are the gestures required by an onto-theology determining the archeological and eschatological meaning of being as presence, as parousia, as life without difference: another name for death, historical metonymy where God's name holds death in check" (p. 71).

Compare Derrida's presentation with this description of the being-present with God that the character Adso offers in Umberto Eco's *Name of the Rose*: "Soon I will be joined with my beginning, and I no longer believe that it is the God of glory of whom the abbots of my order spoke to me, or of joy, as the Minorites believed in those days, perhaps not even of piety. *Gott ist ein lauter Nichts, ihn rührt Nun noch hier*. . . . I shall soon enter this broad desert, perfectly level and boundless, where the truly pious heart succumbs in bliss. I shall sink into the divine shadow, in a dumb silence and an ineffable union, and in this sinking all equality and inequality shall be lost, and in that abyss my spirit shall lose itself, and will not know the equal or the unequal, or anything else: and all differences will be forgotten. I shall be in the simple foundation, in the silent desert where diversity is never seen, in the privacy where no one finds his proper place. I shall fall into the silent and uninhabited divinity where there is no work and no image." *Name of the Rose*, trans. William Weaver (New York: Warner Books, 1983), pp. 610-611.

³⁷ *Speech and Phenomena*, p. 97.

³⁸ *Of Grammatology*, p. 19.

³⁹ Edmund Husserl's *Origin of Geometry*, p. 31 and p. 93. Indeed, much of Derrida's criticism of the presuppositions of Husserl's phenomenology could be worked out through the *Origin*, which was actually written prior to *Speech and Phenomena*. The virtue of pursuing the topic as we have in this essay is the parallelism in the construction of *Speech and Phenomena* and *The Other Heading*. This parallelism will be considered shortly.

⁴⁰ Derrida explains the neologism of "*différance*" as a coupling of meanings typically kept separated in the French language. In adding the letter "a" to the word *différer* the connotation of both spatial and temporal differentiation is given. In this way the English words "differ" (spacing) and "defer" (temporalizing) are united. See Derrida's essay *Différance* in the *Speech and Phenomena* volume, particularly pp. 129-131.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 143.

⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 159.

⁴³ Derrida writes in *Différance*: "What differs? Who differs? What is difference? If we accepted these questions even before examining them as questions, even before going back over them and questioning their form (even what seems to be most natural and necessary about them), we would fall below the level we have now reached. For if we accepted the form of the question in its own sense and syntax ("What?." "What is?." "Who is?."), we would have to admit that difference is derived, supervenient, controlled, and ordered from the starting point of a being-present, one capable of being something, a force, a state, or power in the world, to which we could give all kinds of names: a what, or being present a a subject, a who" (p. 145).

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 6.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 33.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 28.

⁴⁷ See pp. 6-9 in *The Other Heading*.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 9.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 30-31. Regarding the phrase, "the other heading," Derrida means for it to function in three ways: indicating the headings or cultures which lie outside of European culture as "the other heading;" indicating the identity or ideal metaphysical aspirations or these other cultures as the "heading of the other;" and indicating the presence of the other within the predominant notion of identity in European culture as "the other of the heading."

⁵⁰ The question of whether, in fact, heterogeneity constitutes Europe signifies the "double bind" which Derrida says represents the sort of thinking that is required in Europe today. Certainly the movement toward a homogeneous entity has to be resisted for all of the reasons that have been laid out in this essay. However, Derrida's thought would only mark a mere inversion if we were to begin to dogmatically privilege heterogeneity. The "double bind," then, is to resist homogeneity without getting caught up in an opposed ontological structure that unthinkingly supports heterogeneity. The double bind is to resist

these oppositional relations and attempt to shift out of the metaphysical register completely. Derrida himself admits to the extreme difficulty of this way of thinking and we will explore some of these difficulties in the concluding section. See *The Other Heading*, pp. 44-46 and p. 79.

⁵¹ *Philosophy as Rigorous Science*, p. 140.

⁵² *The Other Heading*, p. 28.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 72.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 69.

⁵⁵ The weight of this common phrase is borrowed from and eludes to the title of an essay of Derrida's, *Force of Law: The 'Mystical Foundations of Authority'*, which was presented at a conference at the Cardozo School of Law and whose proceedings were collected in the *Cardozo Law Review* (v. 11, nos. 4-5) and in a book, *Deconstruction and the Possibility of Justice*, ed. Drucilla Cornell (London: Routledge, 1992). Citations will be to the text as it appears in the *Cardozo Law Review*.

⁵⁶ In his discussion of public opinion in the essay *Call It a Day for Democracy*, which is contained in volume *The Other Heading*, Derrida largely agrees with the general form of Habermas' and MacIntyre's critique in holding that this elaborate compromise of interests which settle in a sense of public opinion or the will of the majority is neither democracy nor justice. The expression and tallying of desires and sentiments is neither responsible nor liberating. Rather, as Derrida notes, this "democratic" rule by public opinion can lead to a more subtle form of de-politicizing censorship which controls and deadens the manner in which people can respond to their situation. See *Call It a Day for Democracy*, pp. 99-105.

⁵⁷ *Force of Law*, p. 953.

⁵⁸ Derrida: "Constantly to maintain an interrogation of the origin, grounds and limits of our conceptual, theoretical or normative apparatus surrounding justice is on deconstruction's part anything but a neutralization of interest in justice, an insensitivity toward justice." *Ibid.*, p. 955.

⁵⁹ Derrida: "But the paradox that I would like to submit for discussion is the following: it is this deconstructible structure of Law (*droit*), or if you prefer justice as *droit*, that also insures the possibility of deconstruction. Justice itself, if such a thing exists, outside and beyond law, is not deconstructible. No more than deconstruction itself, if such a thing exists. Deconstruction is justice." *Ibid.*, p. 945.

⁶⁰ *The Other Heading*, p. 78.

⁶¹ See *The Other Heading*, p. 78 and *Force of Law*, p. 967.

⁶² *Call it a Day for Democracy*, p. 105.

⁶³ *Force of Law*, p. 947.

⁶⁴ *Call it a Day for Democracy*, p. 108.