

Black Socrates?

Questioning the philosophical tradition

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Inconsiderateness in the face of tradition is reverence for the past.

Martin Heidegger, *Sophistes*

Funk not only moves, it can remove.

George Clinton, *P. Funk*
(*Wants to Get Funked Up*)

Philosophy tells itself stories.¹ One might go further and claim that the life of philosophy, the memory that ensures its identity and its continued existence as something to be inherited, lived and passed on, consists in the novel repetition of certain basic narratives. And there is one story in particular that philosophy likes to tell, which allows philosophers to reanimate, theatrically and sometimes in front of their students, the passion that founds their profession and which, it seems, must be retold in order for philosophy to be capable of inheritance. It concerns, of course, Greece – or rather, as General de Gaulle might have said, a certain idea of Greece – and the passion of a dying Socrates.

Philosophy as de-traditionalization

Socrates, the philosopher, dies. The significance of this story is that, with it, we can see how philosophy constitutes itself as a tradition, affects itself with narrative, memory and the chance of a future, by repeating a scene of radical *de-traditionalization*. For Hegel and Nietzsche, to choose two examples of philosophers who affect themselves with a tradition – although from seemingly opposed perspectives – the historical emergence of philosophy, the emergence of philosophy into history, that is to say, the decisive break with mythic, religious or aesthetic world-views, occurs with Socrates' death.²

Who is Socrates? So the story goes, he is an individual who claims that the source of moral integrity cannot be said to reside in the traditional customs, practices and forms of life of the community, what Hegel

calls *Sittlichkeit*; nor, for Nietzsche, in the aesthetico-religious practices that legitimate the pre-philosophical Greek polis, that is to say, attic tragedy. Rather, Socrates is an individual who demands that the source of moral legitimacy must lie in the appeal to universality. It must have a universal form: what is justice? The philosopher does not ask 'what is justice for the Athenians?' or 'What is justice for the Spartans?', but rather focuses on justice in general, seeking its *eidos*. Socrates announces the vocation of the philosopher and establishes the lines of transmission that lead from individuality to universality, from the intellect to the forms – a route which by-passes the particular, the communal, the traditional, as well as conventional views of ethical and political life.

The vocation of the philosopher is *critique*, that is, an individual interrogation and questioning of the evidence of tradition through an appeal to a universal form. For Hegel and Nietzsche, Socrates' life announces the death of tragedy, and the death of the allegedly *sittlich* (ethical) community legitimated through the pre-philosophical aesthetico-religious practices. In Hegel's words, Socrates' death marks the moment when tragedy comes off the stage and enters real life, becoming the tragedy of Greece.³ Socrates' tragic death announces both the beginning of philosophy and the beginning of the irreversible Greek decline that will, for Hegel and Nietzsche, take us all the way from the legalism of the Roman Republic to the eviscerated *Moralität* (abstract morality) of post-Kantian Germany. Of course, one's evaluation of Socrates' death will vary, depending on whether one is Hegel or Nietzsche. For the former (not without some elegaic regret for the lost Sophoclean polis) it is the first intimation of the principle of subjectivity; for the latter, Socrates' death ignites the motor that drives (Platonic-Christian) nihilism. But, despite these differences of evaluation, the narrative structure is common to Hegel and Nietzsche; the story remains the same even if the moral is different: Socrates' death marks the end of tragic Greece and the tragic end of Greece.

It is a beautiful story, and as I recount it I am once again seduced by its founding passion: the historical emergence of philosophy out of the dying Socrates is the condition of possibility for de-traditionalization. It announces the imperative that continues to drive philosophy, *critique*, which consists in the refusal to recognize the legitimacy of tradition without that tradition having first submitted itself to critical interrogation, to dialogue *viva voce*.

Philosophy as tradition

However, if on my view philosophy is de-traditionalization, that which calls into question the evidence of tradition, then what is philosophy's relation to its own tradition? What is the relation of philosophy to the stories it tells about itself?

With the admittedly limited examples given above, one might say that the philosophical tradition is a tradition of de-traditionalization, of stories where the authority of tradition is refused. As Descartes famously writes, 'I will devote myself sincerely and without reservations to the general demolition of my opinions'.⁴ As we will see presently with reference to Husserl and Heidegger, the philosopher's appeal to tradition is not traditional, it is, in Derrida's words, 'an appeal to tradition which is in no way traditional'.⁵ It is a call for a novel repetition or retrieval of the past for the purposes of a critique of the present, often – for example, in Husserl – with a view to the construction of an alternative ethical teleology. But, slightly getting ahead of myself, should we believe the stories that philosophy tells to itself? Should these stories themselves be exempt from philosophical critique? More particularly, what about the story of the dying Socrates? What more can I say about this story apart from feeling its beauty and pathos despite (or perhaps because of) its being so often recounted?

To ventriloquize a little: 'One might point out that the story of Socrates' death is a *Greek* story, a narrative that recounts and reinforces the Greek beginning of philosophy. Indeed, it is a story that can be employed to assert the exclusivity of the Greek beginning of philosophy: Philosophy speaks Greek and only Greek, which is to say that philosophy does not speak Egyptian or Babylonian, Indian or Chinese and therefore is not Asian or African. Philosophy can only have one beginning and that beginning has to be the Greek beginning. Why? *Because we are who we are*. We are Europeans and Europe has a beginning, a birthplace, that is both geographical and spiritual, and the name of that birthplace is Greece. What takes place in Greece, the event that gives birth to our theoretical-scientific culture, is *philosophy*. By listening to the story that philosophy

tells to itself, we can retrieve our beginning, our Greek beginning, the Greek beginning or the European Spiritual adventure. Furthermore, by appropriating this beginning as our own we will be able to come into our own as authentic Europeans, to confront the crisis of Europe, its spiritual sickness, a malaise which consists in the fact that we have forgotten who we are, we have forgotten our origins and immersed ourselves unquestioningly in tradition. We must de-traditionalize the tradition that ails us and allows us to forget the crisis – be it the crisis of objectivism (Husserl), rationalization (Weber), commodification (Marx), nihilism (Nietzsche) or forgetfulness of Being (Heidegger). We must project another tradition that is truly our own. The only therapy is to face the crisis as a crisis, which means that we must tell ourselves the story of philosophy's Greek beginning, of philosophy's exclusively Greek beginning – again and again. If philosophy is not exclusively Greek, we risk losing ourselves as Europeans, since to philosophize is to learn how to live in the memory of Socrates' death.'

This troubling ventriloquy is very loosely based on Husserl's 1935 Vienna Lecture, 'Philosophy and the Crisis of European Humanity',⁶ which in many ways perfectly exemplifies the concerns of this paper and the position I am seeking to question. We could also quote examples from Hegel, Nietzsche, Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty, Arendt, Gadamer, and an entire German and English romantic tradition. What such remarks testify to, I believe, is the importation of a certain model of ancient history, centred on the exclusivity of Greece, into philosophy as the foundation stone of its legitimating discourse. I would briefly like to explore and question the historical basis for this belief.

Philosophy as invented tradition

One of the most challenging consequences of reading Martin Bernal's *Black Athena*⁷ – regardless of its many alleged scholarly infelicities, which I am simply not in a position to judge – is the way in which he traces the genealogy of the invented historical paradigm upon which Husserl bases his remarks; the 'Aryan Model' of ancient history, which (astonishingly) only dates from the early decades of the nineteenth century and was developed in England and Germany. Prior to this period, and indeed for most of Western history, what Bernal calls 'The Ancient Model' of classical civilization had been dominant. The latter model believed, amongst other things, that the Egyptians invented philosophy, that philosophy was essentially imported into Greece from Egypt, and that Egypt – and remember Plato visited there around 390 b.c.e. – was the font of all philosophical wisdom. In addition to the Egyptian influence on Greek

civilization, it was also widely assumed that Greece was subject to colonization and extensive cultural influence from Phoenician traders and mariners, and that, therefore, Greek civilization and the philosophy expressed by that civilization was largely a consequence of the influence of near-eastern cultures on the African and Asian continents. That is to say, Greek culture – like all culture – was a *hybrid ensemble*, a radically impure and mongrel assemblage, that was a result of a series of invasions, waves of immigration, cultural magpieism and ethnic and racial mixing and crossing.

Contesting this picture of the African and Asiatic roots of classical civilization given in the Ancient Model, a picture that Bernal wants to revise and defend, the Aryan Model claims that Greek civilization was purely Indo-European and a consequence of either the autonomous genius of the pre-Hellenes – resulting in what is sometimes called ‘The Greek Miracle’, the transition from *mythos* to *logos* – or of alleged invasions from the north by shadowy Indo-European peoples. Bernal’s polemical thesis is that the displacement of the Ancient Model by the Aryan Model was not so much driven by a concern for truth as by a desire for cultural and national purity which, for chauvinistic, imperialist and ultimately racist reasons, wanted to deny the influence of African or Semitic culture upon classical Greece, and by implication upon nineteenth century northern Europe.

The influence of this Aryan Model in philosophy can be seen in the way the canon of the history of philosophy was transformed at the beginning of the nineteenth century.⁸ Up until the end of the eighteenth century, the history of philosophy was habitually traced back to multiple so-called ‘wisdom traditions’ in Egyptian, Hebraic, Babylonian, Mesopotamian and Sumerian cultures. However, from the early 1800s, these traditions were generally excluded from the canonical definition of ‘philosophy’ either because of their allegedly mythical or pre-rational status or because they were largely anonymous, whereas the Greeks, like Thales, had names. The individual thinker rather than a body of thought becomes the criterion for philosophy. The consequence of this transformation of the canon is the belief that philosophy begins exclusively amongst the Greeks; which is also to say that philosophy is indigenous to the territory of Europe and is a result of Europe’s unique spiritual geography – setting aside the unfortunate geographical location of certain pre-Socratics on the Ionian coast, which is usually explained away by calling them Greek colonies, an explanation that conceals a slightly anachronistic projection of the modern meaning of colonialism back into the ancient world.

The hegemony of the Aryan model can also be seen in the development of the discipline of Classics in England in the nineteenth century based on the German model of *Altertumswissenschaft*. Both are premised upon a vision of the Greeks as quasi-divine, pure and authentic. What Bernal shows is the way in which this vision was complicit with certain northern European nationalisms and imperialisms (particularly in England and Germany), where contemplation of the Greeks was felt to be beneficial to the education of the future administrators of empire. It is on this point of a possible link between culture and imperialism that one can perhaps link Bernal’s analysis to the wider problematic of the invention of tradition in the nineteenth century, as diagnosed by Eric Hobsbawm and others.⁹ Hobsbawm shows that traditions were invented with extraordinary rapidity in this period by various states (notably Britain, France, Germany and the USA) in order to reinforce political authority and to ensure the smooth expansion of electoral democracy – for males at least.

More specifically, the traditions invented in this period, which in Britain were as grand as the fabrication of a modern monarchy complete with its jubilees and public processions, or as small as the invention of the postage stamp complete with image of the monarch as symbol of the nation; or, more widely, the proliferation of public statuary in France and Germany, with the ubiquitous image of Marianne in the former and Bismarck or Kaiser Wilhelm in the latter, or the spread of national anthems and national flags – culminate, claims Hobsbawm, in the emergence of *nationalism*. It was nationalism that became the quasi-Rousseauesque civic religion of the nineteenth century, and which, crucially, ensured social cohesion and patterns of national identification for the newly hegemonic middle classes, providing a model which could then be extended to the working classes, as and when they were allowed to enter the political process. The power of invented tradition consists in its ability to inculcate certain values and norms by sheer ritualization and imposed repetition, and to encourage the belief that those traditions are rooted in remotest antiquity, in the case of English nationalism in the sentimental myth of ‘a thousand years of unbroken history’.

My concern, as someone who teaches philosophy, is the extent to which the version of tradition that is operative and goes largely unquestioned in much philosophical pedagogy and post-prandial parley (the belief in the exclusivity of the Greek beginning of the philosophy and the centrality and linear continuity of the European philosophical tradition) remains tributary to an invented historical paradigm, barely two centuries old,

in which we have come to believe by sheer force of inculcation and repetition. Is the vision of philosophy offered by those, like myself, working on the geographical and spiritual edges of the Continental tradition, tributary to the Aryan model of ancient history and thereby complicit with a Hellenomania that buttresses an implicit European chauvinism? Indeed – although this is not my direct concern here – might one not be suspicious of the nationalist motives that lead to the retrieval within an Anglo-American tradition suspicious of the high metaphysics of ‘Continentalists’ of a specifically ‘British’ empiricist tradition in the 1950s to justify either an Anglicized logical positivism or Oxford ordinary language philosophy?¹⁰ Or the self-conscious retrieval of pragmatism or transcendentalism as distinctively and independently *American* traditions in the work of thinkers as diverse as Stanley Cavell, Richard Rorty and Cornel West?¹¹

All of which brings me to some critical questions: must the Greco-European story of the philosophical tradition – from ancient Greece to modern northern Europe, from Platonism to its inversion in Nietzsche – be accepted as a legitimating narrative by philosophers, even by those who call themselves philosophers only in remembrance? Must philosophy be haunted by a compulsion to repeat its Greek origin? And if so, what about the possibility of other traditions in philosophy, other beginnings, other spiritual adventures? Could philosophy, at least in its European moment, ever be in the position to repeat another origin, announce another beginning, invent another tradition, or tell another story?

More gravely, and with reference to Bernal and also to David Theo Goldberg’s *Racist Culture*,¹² is there perhaps a racist logic intrinsic to European philosophy which is founded on a central *paradox*, hinted at above in the coincidence of the geographical and the spiritual or the particular and the universal in Husserl? That is, philosophy tells itself a story which affirms the link between individuality and universality by embodying that link either in the person of Socrates or by defining the (European) philosopher as ‘the functionary of humanity’,¹³ but where at the same time universality is delimited or confined within one particular tradition, namely the Greco-European adventure? Philosophy demands universal validity, or is defined by this demand for universal validity, yet it can only begin here, in Europe. We are who we are, and our supra-national cultural identity as Europeans is founded in the universality of our claims and the particularity of our tradition; a tradition that, for Husserl, includes ‘the English dominions’, i.e. the USA, but does not extend to the gypsies, ‘who constantly wander across Europe’,¹⁴

like some living memory trace of Egypt. No other culture could be like us, because we have exclusive rights to philosophy, to the scientific-theoretical attitude.

In the light of Edward Said’s work, such philosophical sentiments do not seem far from the core belief of imperialism: namely, that it is the responsibility or *burden* of the metropolitan powers to bring our universal values to bear on native peoples, that is, to colonize and transform other cultures according to our own world-view and to conceal oppression under the cloak of a mission. As Said puts it, why are most professional humanists unable or unwilling to make the connection between, on the one hand, the prolonged cruelty of practices such as slavery, colonialism, imperial subjection and racial oppression, and, on the other hand, the poetry, fiction and philosophy of the societies that engage in such practices?¹⁵

However, if we provisionally admit that there is a racist or imperialist logic in philosophy – and this is as much an accusation against myself as against Husserl – then could it ever be otherwise? That is, would it be conceivable for philosophy, or at least for ‘we European philosophers’, to be in a position to repeat another origin? Wouldn’t this be precisely the fantasy of believing oneself to speak from the standpoint of the excluded without being excluded, of wishing to speak from the margins whilst standing at the centre, that is to say, the fantasy of a romantic anti-Hellenism or Rousseauesque anti-ethnocentrism? If so, where does this leave us? How do we proceed? As a way of sharing my perplexity, rather than resolving it, I shall try to illuminate these questions by taking a slightly different tack.

Sedimentation, reactivation, deconstruction

Tradition can be said to have two senses: (1) as something inherited or handed down without questioning or critical interrogation; (2) as something made or produced through a critical engagement with the first sense of tradition, as a de-traditionalization of tradition or an appeal to tradition that is in no way traditional. Of course, this distinction is artificial insofar as it could be claimed that the consciousness of tradition *as such* only occurs in the process of its destruction, that is to say, with the emergence of a *modernity* as that which places in question the evidence of tradition.

However, it is this second sense of tradition, the philosophical sense, that is shared – not without some substantial differences – by Husserl and Heidegger. For the Husserl of the *Crisis of the European Sciences*, the two senses of tradition correspond to the distinction between a *sedimented* and a *reactivated* sense of

tradition. Sedimentation, which in one passage of the *Crisis* Husserl compares to 'traditionalization',¹⁶ and which it is helpful to think of in geological terms as a process of settling or consolidation, would consist in the forgetfulness of the origin of a state of affairs. If we take Husserl's celebrated example of geometry, a forgetfulness of the origin of geometry leads to the forgetfulness of the historicity of such a discipline, of the genesis of the theoretical attitude expressed by geometry, and the way in which the theoretical attitude belongs to a determinate *Lebenswelt*. What is required to counter the sedimentation of tradition is the *reactivation* of the origin in what Husserl calls 'a teleological-historical reflection upon the origins of our critical scientific and philosophical situation'.¹⁷ Thus, philosophy in the proper sense of the word, i.e. transcendental phenomenology, would be the product of critical-historical reflection upon the origin of tradition and the (re)active making of a new sense of tradition against the pernicious naïvetés of objectivism and naturalism.

Matters are not so different with the early Heidegger's conception of *Destruktion*, the deconstruction of the history of ontology, which is precisely not a way of burying the past in nullity, but rather of seeking the positive tendencies of the tradition. *Destruktion* is the production of a tradition as something made and fashioned through a process of repetition or retrieval, what Heidegger calls *Wiederholung*. The latter is the assumption of the tradition as a genuine repetition, where the original meaning of a state of affairs (the temporal determination of the meaning of Being, to pick



an example at random) is retrieved through a critical-historical reflection. In the period of *Being and Time*, Heidegger articulates the difference between a received and destroyed tradition in terms of the distinction between tradition (*Tradition*) and heritage (*Überlieferung*), where the possibilities of authentic existing are delivered over and disclosed.¹⁸

It is important to point out that the target of Husserl's and Heidegger's reflections on tradition – and this is equally true of Hegel's reflection on the history of Spirit and Nietzsche's conception of nihilism – is not the past as such, but the *present*, and precisely the *crisis* of the present. The true crisis of the European sciences (Husserl) or distress of the West (Heidegger) is felt in the absence of distress: 'crisis, what crisis?' At the present moment, when the Western techno-scientific-philosophical adventure is in the process of globalizing itself and reducing humanity to the status of happy consumers wearing Ronald McDonald Happy Hats, we are called upon to reactivate the origin of the tradition from which that adventure sprang, and to do this precisely in order to awaken a sense of crisis and distress. Thus, a reactivated sense of the tradition permits us a critical, perhaps even *tragic* consciousness of the present. As Gerald Bruns points out in an essay on tradition,

On this line of thinking a good example of the encounter with tradition would be the story of Oedipus and his discovery of the truth of what has been said about him by seers, drunks, and oracles, not to mention what his own awakened memory can tell him. I mean that from a hermeneutical standpoint the encounter with tradition is more likely to resemble satire than allegory, unmasking the past rather than translation of the past. Or, as I've tried to suggest, the hermeneutical experience of what comes down to us from the past is structurally *tragic* rather than comic. It is an event that exposes us to our own blindness or the limits of our historicity and extracts from us *an acknowledgement of our belongingness to something different*, reversing what we had thought. It's just the sort of event that might drive us to put out our eyes.¹⁹

The Husserlian-Heideggerian sense of reactivated tradition which destroys the past in order to enable us to confront the present achieves this by consigning us, as Derrida puts it,²⁰ to the security of the Greek element with a knowledge and confidence which are not comfortable, but which permit us to experience crisis, distress and tragedy.

But we must proceed carefully here: on the one hand, it seems that the Husserlian-Heideggerian demand for

the reactivation of a sedimented tradition is a necessary and unavoidable move, it is the step into philosophy and critique, that is, into the realization of tradition as something made or fashioned (re)actively as a way of confronting the tragedy of the present. However, on the other hand, the problem here is that the tradition that is retrieved is uniquely and univocally Greek; it is only a Greek tragedy that will permit us to confront the distress of the present. The way in which globalized technoscientific ideology is to be confronted is by learning to speak Greek. My problem with this conception of tradition, as pointed out above, is that it might be said to presuppose implicitly an imperialist, chauvinist or racist logic. One recalls the remark that Heidegger was reported to have made to Karl Löwith in 1936, where he asserted that his concept of historicity was at the basis of his political engagement with National Socialism.²¹

It is with this problem in mind that I want to make an excursion into Derrida's 1964 essay, 'Violence and Metaphysics', which deals with the thought of Emmanuel Levinas insofar as that work might be said to offer an ethical challenge to the Heideggerian and Husserlian conceptions of tradition. I think it is justified to claim that Derrida's thinking of tradition, at least in the early work, is dominated by the problem of closure, that play of belonging and non-belonging to the Greco-European tradition, which asserts both the necessity and impossibility of such a tradition. Broadly stated, the problem of closure describes the duplicitous or ambiguous historical moment – *now* – when our language, institutions, conceptuality and philosophy itself show themselves both to belong to a metaphysical (or logocentric) tradition that is theoretically exhausted, while at the same time searching for the breakthrough from that tradition.²² The problem of closure describes the liminal situation of late modernity out of which the deconstructive problematic arises, and which, I believe, Derrida inherits from Heidegger. Closure is the double refusal of both remaining within the limits of the tradition and of transgressing that limit. Closure is the hinge that articulates the double movement between the philosophical tradition and its other(s).

In 'Violence and Metaphysics', Derrida's general claim is that Levinas's project cannot succeed except by posing the question of closure, and that because this problem is not posed by Levinas in *Totality and Infinity*,²³ his dream of an ethical relation to the Other which is linguistic but which exceeds the totalizing language of the tradition, remains just that, a *dream*. Derrida calls it the dream of pure empiricism that evaporates when language awakens. Levinas's discourse – and Derrida repeats this strategy with regard to all discourses that

claim to exceed the tradition, those of Foucault, Artaud, Bataille or whoever – is caught, unbeknownst to itself, in an economy of betrayal, insofar as it tries to speak philosophically about that which cannot be spoken of philosophically.

Now, one conservative way of understanding the problem of closure is to argue that Derrida demonstrates the irresistibility of the claims of the Greco-Roman tradition and the impossibility of claiming any coherent position outside of this tradition – 'Hegel, Husserl and Heidegger are always right!' Although this interpretation is to some extent justified, it is by no means the whole story. The logic of closure works within a double bind, that is, if there is no outside to the philosophical tradition from which one can speak in order to criticize its inside, then, by the same token, there is no inside to the tradition from which one can speak without contamination by an outside. This is why closure describes the *liminal* situation of late modernity, and why it is a *double* refusal of both remaining within the limits of the tradition and of transgressing those limits. Thus, there is no pure Greek inside to the European tradition that can be claimed as an uncontaminated origin in confronting the crisis. This, I believe, explains Derrida's strategy when confronted with a unified conception of tradition, when he works to show how any such conception is premised upon certain exclusions which cannot be excluded. One thinks, for example, of his unpicking of Heidegger's reading of Nietzsche or of Foucault's reading of Descartes, or again in *Glas*, where the focus is on that which refuses the dialectical-historical logic of *Aufhebung*, and in *La carte postale*, where Heideggerian unity of the Greek sending of Being (*envoi de l'être*) is undermined and multiplied into a plurality of sendings (*envois*).

Tradition as a changing same

Turning from the philosophical tradition to tradition as such, the deconstructive thinking of tradition leaves one in the situation of the double bind discussed by Derrida in relation to European cultural identity:

It is necessary to make ourselves the guardians of an idea of Europe, of a difference of Europe, *but* of a Europe that consists precisely in not closing off in its own identity and in advancing itself in an exemplary way toward what it is not, toward the other heading or heading of the other, indeed – and this is perhaps something else altogether – toward the other of the heading, which would be the beyond of this modern tradition, another border structure, another shore.²⁴

Although such statements are problematic, not the least because Derrida tends to assume too much unity to the

'European culture' that is being deconstructed, it is clear that, for him, being European means obeying the irreducibility of a double duty (and why only a double duty? Why not a triple, quadruple or multiple duty?): to retrieve what Europe is or was, whilst at the same time opening Europe to the non-European, welcoming the foreigner in their alterity.

On a deconstructive account, then, any attempt to interpret tradition and culture in terms of a desire for unity, univocity and purity must be rigorously undermined in order to show how this desire is always already contaminated by that which it attempts to resist and exclude. If deconstruction has a sociology, then it is a sociology of impurity, of contamination. Culture and tradition are hybrid ensembles, they are the products of radically impure mixing and mongrelism. For example, being British today means recognizing the way in which the dominant English culture has been challenged and interpellated by previously dominated cultures, be they Scottish, Welsh, Irish, Afro-Caribbean or Asian. As Edward Said persuasively suggests, the consequence (and inverted triumph) of imperialism is the radical hybridity of culture, where histories and geographies are intertwined and overlapping, troubling any appeal to cultural and national exclusivity. Cultural identity (or perhaps one should say, cultural self-differentiation) is relationally negotiated from amongst competing claims that make conflicting and perhaps awkward demands upon us.

Of course, one response to this conflict is racism, or the essentialist identification of race, culture and nation that is shared by white supremacism, Tebbit-esque British nationalism and oppositional Black nationalism. Needless to say, I do not think the latter are the most felicitous responses to the hybridity of culture and tradition; but the cultural-political task facing the Left, as I see it, lies in hegemonizing hybridity. As Said intimates, this can only entail an internationalist politics, which would try to hegemonize those oppositional movements – Said speaks of the *intifada*, the women's movement, and various ecological and cultural movements – that resist the global political cynicism of 'hurrah capitalism'. The vocation of the intellectual (whatever that much-maligned word means at this point and whoever it includes and excludes) consists in trying to focus and exacerbate these internationalist energies by being the exilic consciousness of the present through the practice of what Said calls *contrapuntal criticism*. The latter would be a form of critical-historical, genealogical or deconstructive reflection that would bring us to the recognition of the hybridity of tradition, culture and identity. Contrapuntal criticism, the

comparative analysis of the overlapping geographies and intertwined histories of present cultural assemblages, would reveal hybrid ensembles as hybrid ensembles and not as unities or essences.

A recent and stunning example of such a contrapuntal criticism is Paul Gilroy's *The Black Atlantic*.²⁵ The basic polemical point of this book is to oppose any easy (and fatal) identification of race or culture with nation, where notions of racial purity function as legitimating discourses for nationalistic politics, for example within Black nationalism. In opposition to the latter, the black Atlantic is a transnational and intercultural framework that exceeds the borders of existing or Utopian nation states; it is a 'rhizomorphic, fractal structure' that opposes 'the ethnic absolutism that currently dominates black political culture'.²⁶ What is most impressive about Gilroy's book is the way in which the frequently reified and reifying discourse on race and roots is transposed onto a discourse of routes: a historical tableau of traversals and criss-crossings signifying upon a vast oceanic surface; a diaspora, that Gilroy courageously compares to Jewish experience, but where the potentially Mosaic discourse of roots and the promised land is maintained as a mosaic of routes. Gilroy engages in what we might call a spatialization of history, where the potential essentialism of historical narrative is problematized through a recourse to geography.

But it is Gilroy's conception of tradition that, for me at least, forms the centre of the book and which speaks directly to the concerns of this paper. Gilroy's basic historical thesis is that it is not possible to view slavery as an epiphenomenon within modernity, or as some residue of pre-modern barbarism carried over into modernity. Rather, using Zygmunt Bauman's terminology, slavery and black Atlantic experience as a whole constitute a distinct *counter-culture* within modernity that complicates and disrupts certain versions of modernity's emancipatory project. The question here is whether there is room for a memory of slavery within modernity; that is to say, for Gilroy, is there room for a personalized, sublime and perhaps pre-discursive moment of liberatory creativity within modern experience? This emphasis upon creativity and aesthetic experience takes us to Gilroy's main contention, which is that black expressive culture, particularly music, is the means for articulating this counter-culture and for activating this memory. For Gilroy, black music is 'a cipher for the ineffable, sublime, pre-discursive and anti-discursive elements in black expressive culture'.²⁷ Black music is, in Gilroy's words, a *changing same*. Taking the examples of dubbing, scratching, sampling, mixing, borrowing and alluding that one can find in Hip Hop,

Rap, Reggae and more recent musical hybrids, Gilroy argues against the notion of an authentic racial art and the conception of black music as a fixed dialogue between a thinking racial self and a stable racial community. In this sense, black musical expression exemplifies the relation between identity and difference that is constitutive of cultural traditions and tradition as such. Thus, cultural traditions, like music, cannot be reduced to 'the transmission of a fixed essence through time', but is rather a series of 'breaks and interruptions'. In this sense tradition itself 'may be a distinct though covert response to the destabilizing flux of the post-contemporary world'.²⁸

Tradition is a changing same – that is, by insisting on the place of the memory of slavery within modernity, Gilroy disputes the supposed opposition between tradition and modernity, where, for example, black nationalists might claim the purity and authenticity of an African tradition in order to oppose the oppression of European and American modernity. This can be seen vividly in George G. M. James's attempt to show how the Greco-European tradition that culminates in modernity and racism is, in fact, a stolen legacy from a prior Egyptian and African civilization.²⁹ In contradistinction to such attempts, Gilroy fascinatingly proposes a *black modernism*, that is to say, a self-consciously modernist relation to tradition, where the specificity of the modern lies precisely in the consciousness of the problematic relation between the past and the present, between tradition and the individual talent. For the modernist, and the resonances with Derrida's notion of closure here become apparent, tradition is that to which we simultaneously belong and do not belong, what Gilroy suggestively calls 'a *non-traditional tradition*, an irreducibly modern, ex-centric, unstable and asymmetrical cultural ensemble that cannot be apprehended through the manichean logic of binary coding'.³⁰ Tradition is that duplicitous experience of continuity and rupture or of belonging and non-belonging that we have tried to discuss already in relation to Derrida. In response to this conception of tradition, what is required, according to Gilroy, is a Du Boisian experience of double consciousness, or simultaneous attraction and repulsion, where one recognizes the doubleness of one's identity as being shaped by modernity without feeling fully part of it.³¹ An experience of modernity as something which one is both unable to believe in and unable to leave. In Toni Morrison's words, tradition, like the supple and evasive rhythms of funk, 'slaps and it embraces, it slaps and it embraces'.³² Tradition is the story of overlapping geographies and intertwined histories, perhaps an

ultimately non-narratable narrative that thwarts the desire for cultural, racial or philosophical purity.

Contrapuntal philosophy?

Drawing together the threads of this discussion into a conclusion, in addition to the two senses of tradition we introduced above, we are now in a position to add a third.

1. *Sedimented tradition*: where tradition is inherited as forgetfulness of origins, as pre-critical inheritance or pre-philosophical *doxa*, as the moral world-view that is inculcated into us by family, schooling, etc.
2. *Reactivated tradition*: the Socratic moment of a critical, philosophical engagement with the first sense and the retrieval of an 'authentic' Greco-European tradition (histories and genealogies of Spirit, of nihilism, of Being's oblivion, of the forgetfulness of origin). This is the *philosophical* articulation of sedimented tradition, which one might conceive as a defining characteristic of *modernity*.
3. *Deconstructed tradition*: where the unity, univocity and linearity of the reactivated traditions would be critically questioned, and where the founding presuppositions of such traditions would be shown to be premised upon certain exclusions that are non-excludable, leaving us in the double bind of closure, and encouraging us to face up to the doubleness (or more than doubleness) or hybridity of tradition; culture and identity. This would be the contrapuntal or double consciousness of tradition as a changing same.

So, deconstruction provides a third sense to the concept of tradition, where the reactivated philosophical-critical sense of tradition – a perpetual modernity – is not rejected or set aside, but rather where its power for getting us to face the crisis of the present is both incorporated and – crucially – *contested*, where the philosophical tradition is forced to acknowledge the limits of its jurisdiction and the failure of its demand for exclusivity.

As I see it, the position I have argued for has three important consequences for those concerned with philosophy and its history: (i) The acceptance of the necessity of the Greco-European tradition as the linguistic and conceptual resource with which what 'we Europeans' (leaving the limits of this 'we' deliberately vague) call thinking takes place. (ii) The necessary failure of any attempt to constitute an uncontaminated Greco-European tradition, a pure inside that would presuppose the European exclusivity of philosophy and the privileging of the European over the non-European. The identity of the European tradition is always impurely traced and contaminated by the non-European other that

it tries unsuccessfully to exclude. (iii) The acceptance of the impossibility of a pure outside to the European tradition for 'we Europeans', the irretrievability of an other origin, the fantasy of a European anti-Eurocentrism, of anti-ethnocentrism, of romantic anti-Hellenism, of all post-Rousseauian versions of what Derrida calls *nost-Algérie*.

Tradition, culture and identity are irreducibly hybrid ensembles. The purpose of critical-historical, genealogical or deconstructive reflection – contrapuntal criticism – is to bring us to a recognition of these ensembles *as ensembles*. On analogy with the latter, I wonder – and this is the tentative expression of a (Utopian) hope rather than the statement of a programme – whether it would be possible to study and practice philosophy contrapuntally. That is, to philosophize out of an experience of the utter contingency of historical being (and being as such insofar as the latter is constituted historically) and with reference to the intertwining and overlapping of those histories and geographies that make up something like a philosophical canon or tradition. As I see it, this would mean studying the history of philosophy not as a unified, universal, linear, narratable and geographically delimitable (i.e. European) procession stretching from the Athens of Socrates to Western late modernity, but rather as a series of constructed, contingent, invented and possible non-narratable contrapuntal ensembles that would disrupt the authority of the hegemonic tradition. Can one conceive of the philosophical tradition as a series of contrapuntal ensembles? I have two closing suggestions in this regard: firstly, might it be possible to conceive of the history of philosophy in terms of what Derrida calls with reference to Levinas *sériature*, that is, an interrupted series, or series of interruptions that would constitute less a teleologically destined succession of epochs or figures of spirit and more a multiplicity of sendings in the manner performed in *La carte postale*?³³ Secondly, might the history of philosophy be approached *geographically* as a series of plateaux in the manner of Deleuze and Guattari, that is, as a multiplicity of dated, stratified assemblages?³⁴ Might not such a contrapuntal consciousness of the philosophical tradition have the potential to transform philosophy into a practice of radical reflection rooted in the acceptance and affirmation of hybridity as the condition of possibility for philosophy's historical emergence and its future flourishing?

Notes

1. These thoughts were first assembled for a conference on the theme of de-traditionalization held at Lancaster University in July 1993. They were extensively reworked

for a conference on the work of Edward Said held at Warwick University in March 1994. But their real source lies in conversations with Robert Bernasconi over the past few years and, more recently, with Homi Bhaba. I am particularly grateful for the careful comments of Jonathan Rée and Peter Osborne, although I don't think I have fully responded to either of their criticisms.

2. See Hegel, 'Tragedy and the Impiety of Socrates', from *Hegel on Tragedy*, eds. A. and H. Paolucci (Harper and Row, New York, 1975), pp. 345-66; and Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, tr. W. Kaufmann (Vintage, New York, 1967); and 'The Problem of Socrates', in *Twilight of the Idols*, tr. R. J. Hollingdale (Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1968), pp. 29-34.
3. 'Tragedy and the Impiety of Socrates', p. 364.
4. 'Meditations on First Philosophy, *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*, Vol. II, trs. J. Cottingham et al. (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1984), p. 12.
5. 'Violence and Metaphysics', in *Writing and Difference*, tr. A. Bass (Routledge, London and New York, 1978), p. 81.
6. In *The Crisis of the European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology: An Introduction to Phenomenological Philosophy*, tr. D. Carr (Northwestern University Press, Evanston, 1970), pp. 269-99.
7. Martin Bernal, *Black Athena. The Afroasiatic Roots of Classical Civilization*, Vol. 1 'The Fabrication of Ancient Greece 1785-1985' (Vintage, London, 1991 [1987]).
8. I rely here on Robert Bernasconi's paper, 'Heidegger and the Invention of the Western Philosophical Tradition', *Journal of the British Society for Phenomenology*, forthcoming.
9. *The Invention of Tradition*, eds. E. Hobsbawm and T. Ranger (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1983); see esp. pp. 1-14 and 263-307.
10. See Jonathan Rée, 'English Philosophy in the Fifties', *Radical Philosophy* 65, p. 15.
11. In this regard, see especially Cornel West, *The American Evasion of Philosophy* (Macmillan, London, 1989).
12. David Theo Goldberg, *Racist Culture, Philosophy and the Politics of Meaning* (Blackwell, Oxford, 1993), p. 6. Also see in this regard Harry M. Bracken's 'Philosophy and Racism', *Philosophia*, Vol. 8 (1978), pp. 241-60. In an innovative and provocative discussion of racism and empiricism, it is argued that Lockean (and, to a lesser extent, Humean) empiricism facilitate 'the expression of racist ideology and that Locke was actively involved in formulating policies (compatible with those theories) and encouraging practices (e.g. the African slave trade and perpetual racial slavery) which were racist in character' (p. 255). In contrast to empiricism, and by way of a covert defence of the Cartesianism of Chomsky's linguistic theory, Bracken argues that Cartesianism contains 'a modest conceptual barrier to racism' (p. 254).
13. *Crisis of the European Sciences*, p. 17.
14. *Ibid.*, p. 273.
15. Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (Chatto and Windus, London, 1993), p. xiv.
16. *Crisis of the European Sciences*, p. 52.
17. *Ibid.*, p. 3.
18. *Being and Time*, trs. J. Macquarrie and E. Robinson (Blackwell, Oxford, 1962); German pagination, p. 395; English pagination, p. 447.
19. Gerald L. Bruns, *Hermeneutics Ancient and Modern* (Yale University Press, New Haven and London, 1992), p. 204 (my emphasis).
20. 'Violence and Metaphysics', p. 82.

21. Karl Löwith, 'My Last Meeting with Heidegger in Rome, 1936', in *The Heidegger Controversy*, ed. R. Wolin (MIT, Cambridge, Mass. and London, 1993), p. 142.
22. For a detailed discussion of the problem of closure in Derrida, see my *The Ethics of Deconstruction* (Blackwell, Oxford, 1992), pp. 59-106. For an illuminating discussion of tradition in Derrida in comparison with Walter Benjamin, see Alexander Garcia Düttmann's 'Tradition and Destruction' in A. Benjamin and P. Osborne, eds., *Walter Benjamin's Philosophy* (Routledge, London and New York, 1993), pp. 33-58.
23. I argue that matters become much more complicated in Levinas's later work, *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence*; in this regard, see my 'Eine Vertiefung der ethischen Sprache und Methode', *Deutsche Zeitschrift für Philosophie*, Vol. 42, no. 4 (1994), pp. 643-51.
24. Derrida, *The Other Heading*, trs. P.-A. Brault and M. Naas (Indiana University Press, Bloomington, 1992), p. 29.
25. Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic. Modernity and Double Consciousness* (Verso, London, 1993).
26. *Ibid.*, pp. 4-5.
27. *Ibid.*, p. 120.
28. *Ibid.*, p. 101.
29. George G. M. James, *Stolen Legacy. Greek Philosophy is Stolen Egyptian Philosophy* (Africa World Press, Trenton NJ, 1992 [1954]).
30. *The Black Atlantic*, p. 198 (my emphasis).
31. Incidentally, this is also how Cornel West defines the situation of the prophetic critic, in *Keeping Faith. Philosophy and Race in America* (Routledge, London and New York, 1993), p. xxi.
32. *Ibid.*, p. 78.
33. See Derrida, 'At this very moment in this work here I am', tr. R. Berezdivin, in R. Bernasconi and S. Critchley, eds., *Re-Reading Levinas* (Indiana University Press, Bloomington, 1991); and *The Post Card*, tr. A. Bass (University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1987).
34. Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus. Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, tr. B. Massumi (Athlone, London, 1988). Although, with regard to Deleuze and Guattari, it should be noted that they also insist upon the exclusivity of the Greek beginning to philosophy: 'If we really want to say that philosophy originates with the Greeks, it is because the city, unlike the empire or state, invents the agon as the rule of society of 'friends', of the community of free men as rivals (citizens).' (*What is Philosophy?* tr. G. Burchell and H. Tomlinson [Verso, London, 1994], p. 9; and cf. pp. 43-4 and Chapter 3, 'Geophilosophy', pp. 85-113). Although Deleuze and Guattari insist upon the contingency of the historical origin of philosophy in Greece, and emphasize the crucial role that migrants and foreigners played in the formation and articulation of Greek culture, their representation of philosophy and the ancient world is pervaded by the power of invented tradition as presented in this paper. For example, their representation of the space of the *polis* as the pre-philosophical plane of immanence and the condition of possibility for philosophical concept creation would seem, in a manner that is absolutely traditional, to link the historical emergence of philosophy to the political form of democracy in opposition to the alleged hierarchy and transcendence of all forms of imperial or theological space. But this is precisely to forget that the space of the Greek *polis* was, at once, powerfully imperial and theological. In this context, I would merely like to signal my intention here of continuing the work begun in this paper in a critical discussion of Deleuze and Guattari's notion of 'geophilosophy'.

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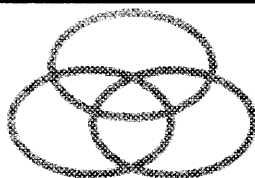
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