

DELIRIUM, PARTICULARITY, ANALYTICS, AND ABRAHAM

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Near the beginning of World War I, German-Jewish philosopher Hermann Cohen wrote to American Jews asking them to try to stop America from going to war against Germany. He argued that Germany was the true homeland of the Jewish people. According to Jacques Derrida, Cohen's argument is not merely erroneous; it exhibits a delirium. This paper analyzes why Derrida provides this diagnosis, taking for context Derrida's thoughts on his own Judaism in 'Abraham, the Other'. Cohen aims to combine two particular dwelling-places (Germanism and Judaism) into one single dwelling-place. Believing himself to have constructed a place, Cohen tries to call others to what is actually a non-place. In the Derridean framework, this means that Cohen tries to assume the position of God. Cohen tries to justify all of this by predicating universality to one particular. All of these attempts contravene the structure of the universe. Therefore, Cohen's views are delirious.

Near the beginning of World War I, German-Jewish philosopher Hermann Cohen wrote to American Jews asking them to try to stop America from going to war against Germany. His paper, 'Germanism and Judaism', argued that Germany, his home, was also the true homeland of the Jewish people (*passim*). According to Jacques Derrida's 'Interpretations at War', Cohen's argument is not merely erroneous; it exhibits a delirium. This exegetical paper analyzes why Derrida provides this diagnosis, taking for context Derrida's thoughts on his own Judaism in 'Abraham, the Other'.

According to Derrida, Cohen is struggling with an instance of the conflict between the belief in a universal human morality and identity, and the fact that humans must exist in a particular place and time; moreover, humans exist in particular identity-groups such as nations which exclude other persons as part of their definition. There is a tension between the particularity that each individual necessarily takes part in and the desired universality. Cohen feels a further tension, because he tries to take part in multiple particularities. Some of these particularities have members who believe that Cohen should not take part in their particularity, because he takes part in other particularities that in their opinion are not compatible with their own.

Cohen's response is that Germany is the true Jewish homeland. As a response, this is a failure, but a fascinating one; his text enters into what Derrida calls a 'delirium' (150). Derrida takes it as given that Cohen's text exhibits a delirium rather than being a simple failure, but it is not immediately clear what makes Cohen's views delirious. We shall construct through Derrida an analysis of Cohen's views that explains why Derrida takes Cohen's views as delirious. This analysis finds that Cohen's delirium is threefold: firstly, that he resolves the tension between two particularities by folding them into a single particularity, a maneuver at first glance persuasive but upon analysis impossible;

Note: I would like to thank the editors for numerous suggestions that have substantially improved this paper.

second, that he believes himself to call others to this non-place, in effect behaving as God, a role which for humans is impossible; third, that his response to exclusion and to the particular-universal tension is to make universality a predicate to a particular, which is impossible.

The Call

To understand why Derrida considers Cohen's text a delirium, we will briefly discuss the framework in which Derrida approaches these issues. Derrida's own response to being-Jew(ish) [as he calls it] is set forth in 'Abraham, the Other'. Here Derrida discusses the Binding of Isaac, the Biblical story in which Abraham, the first Jew, is required by God to sacrifice his favored son, Isaac, up to God. Abraham complies, but before he kills Isaac, God stops him, saying, 'Now I know that you fear God, since you have not withheld your son...from me'; Abraham sacrifices a ram instead. When God commands Abraham to sacrifice his son, and when God stops him from doing so, *God calls*, 'Abraham', and Abraham responds 'Here I am' (Genesis 22). In 'Abraham', Derrida treats this call and response as the key element of the Binding of Isaac.

'Here I am' matters because the affirmation of place is the beginning of everything. If everything begins with the response to the call (and everything does begin with the response to the call), then any response is 'an acquiescence' to dwelling in a *lieu*, a place (3). The call is a placement of I. Wherever the call comes from or through, it gives 'room to no certainty' as to whether one is called (7), presumably because a certain call would be a forcible placement, and so would require no affirmation of dwelling in the place; it would not need a response as part of the symbiotic call-hear relation in which there is not one without the other.

Not any speech from some other who tries to place an individual is a call—Derrida says that the statement 'you are (a) jew' is insufficient for the response 'I am (a) jew' ('Abraham', 18); that someone else views me as dwelling in the place of (a) jew does not mean that I do inhabit that place. I cannot say 'no' to a call without saying 'yes, I am'.¹ As Derrida says: 'Even if, during the response [to the call] I were to say "no...I am not here"...well, then, this "no" will have said "yes", "yes, I am here to speak to you"' ('Abraham, the Other', 3). Therefore, not all views of my situatedness are calls, or else the form 'you x' would require 'I x'.

It follows that a call is differentiated from ordinary ascriptions of place by the acquiescence of the one being called to dwelling there, even if the acquiescence is in the form of a denial. If there is no acquiescence, then there is no call. This implies that distinguishing between a call and an ordinary ascription of place requires knowing whether acquiescence has occurred. Therefore, either calls are distinguished retrospectively, or acquiescence is temporally concurrent with the call. Retrospective determination would mean that many 'you x's are 'you x's with the potential to be non-calls or calls, and I get to choose among them and then by acquiescing to one, it becomes a call. However, this interpretation would diminish the element of calling in the call—it

¹ Derrida normally does not capitalize 'jew'. Since this paper is exegetical, we shall follow his lead.

would lack a sense of urgent demand. Therefore, call and acquiescence are concurrent and mutually necessary. If a call, it is acquiesced to, and I dwell in the place I am called to. If not a call, I do not hear it and do not dwell in the place at all; if someone said to me 'you Libyan', I would not agree, but could not deny that I am Libyan, because I do not know enough about being Libyan to even formulate a denial. It is like not noticing someone else's name being called on the street; words are spoken in my general direction, but they do not speak to me. Since if I am called, I acquiesce, and since the call and acquiescence are concurrent and mutual, the acquiescence and call are an affirmation of my dwelling in the place. Since there is no temporal lapse, at the time of the call I dwell in the place; my dwelling, my acquiescence to dwelling, the call, and the affirmation of my dwelling are all concurrent.

The Place of the I

Derrida defines the *khora* as the place that gives the occasion for each revelatory human and theological event ('Abraham', 33).² Therefore, when the call-acquiescence places me in being-jew, this placing takes place in the *khora*. The question that arises is whether I am both in a being-jew place and a *khora* place, with the being-jew a distinguishable place that is itself placed in the *khora*, like my house placed in my neighborhood, distinguishable yet placed in something larger, or directly in the *khora*, unmediated, and it is only my own interpretive failure that makes me see the place I am in as if it has borders. For, according to Derrida, the *khora* has no borders, at least, none that could ever reveal themselves to a being; the *khora* is the place that gives place to all being. (Derrida specifies it as 'anthropo-theological'; for our purposes it is unnecessary to consider whether the *khora* gives place for all being or just human-being.) Derrida specifies that the *khora* is 'the place, the ahuman and atheological location that opens the place' (33). This seems to say that the *khora* opens itself, located at a place neither attainable or unattainable to humans, but irrevocably other-than-human; the *khora* therefore is beyond ontology yet grounding ontology. Thus, it can give place to the ontic while being other-than-ontic. The *khora* is universal across beings by definition; if all being is given place by the *khora*, then all beings share the same place-giver. Yet what the *khora* gives is the place that an individual is called to; it gives the particular place, the being-jew. So the particular is grounded in the universal, and the universal is dwelt in whenever one dwells in the particular. One cannot directly dwell in the universal, which is ahuman.

The particular being of the I is as an I, an I within the universal *khora*, and it would not exist without being an I. The *khora* gives the place for all particular places, and so there is no I without the *khora*. There can be no I directly dwelling within the *khora*, only through a mediating particularity. Therefore, for there to be any I, it must dwell within the particular place given by the universal. To dwell in the place is to be called, for to be called is to acquiesce to the dwelling. To not acquiesce to the dwelling is to not

² The *khora* is not a physical location. Nonetheless, the use of 'place' should not be taken as merely metaphorical. This is what we might call identity-space; and the use of geographical terms may be less disorienting if one remembers that logical space, probability space, and so forth, are used in a similarly non-physical manner.

dwell there. It follows that to be an I is to be called. But who or what calls? The call to Abraham was from God. God is The Place ('Abraham, the Other', 33). It is not explicit whether God is the place as in the *khora*, or the place as in the particular place, or both. Crucially, in Derrida, there is only one call, 'the call'. No matter what 'you x' calls, no matter what place I am called to, it is the same call, the one call, the call. The call is universal. But it is also a call to a particular place, albeit a place given place by a universal ahuman place. The universal call to the particular thus must not originate from the particulars themselves, else the calls would be multiple and particular. The universal call must originate from the universal—thus, God, as the universal, is the *khora*. But how can a universal call call to place persons in particular places? The universality of the call must not derive from the calling to the place called to, but rather the fact of being called to a place; what is universal about all the affirmations of place is not the place but the affirmation. The placing of I permits for the I, for being-I. For myself, for I, the affirmation of place is the beginning of everything. For every being, the affirmation of place is the beginning of being. Thus, being—which to us is everything—results from the call. The dwelling in the universal enabled by the dwelling in the particular is a result of the call. The particular is within the universal, although the universal *khora* is beyond the particulars that we can comprehend.

The Project

Derrida's 'Interpretations At War' reads *through* Cohen's 'Germanism and Judaism' more than it reads his text. Derrida tries to penetrate the text to understand its underpinnings. He does not directly grapple with Cohen's text; he does not deal with the question Cohen directly raises and wishes to answer: 'Should American Jews support or oppose an American campaign against Germany?' Instead, Derrida reads Cohen as 'typical of a certain Jewish-German intelligentsia' of that time period, an intelligentsia for whom Cohen's resolution of these tensions of particularity was 'well-worked-out', an elegant representation of their views (146). Derrida takes these views as delirious, and without explaining what makes them delirious (rather than just false), he deconstructs the text in order to understand what underpins the delirium. This deconstruction makes clear the constituent parts of Cohen's views, and so makes possible our constructive analytic reading, which aims to identify precisely how those parts are supposed to fit together, to analyze why they do not fit, and why believing that they do or can fit together is delirious. We will read Derrida's commentary on Cohen in the context of Derrida's commentary on Abraham; the discussion of the call, dwelling, and particularity helps shed light on why Derrida believes Cohen's text is delirious.

Derrida identifies three elements in tension: Judaism, Germanism, and Kantianism. Derrida says Cohen alleges 'a Jewish-German symbiosis occasionally defined in terms which collide with common sense' (140). It is important to note that the symbiosis (mutual reliance) is not of Jew-German-Kant, but of Jew-German, with Kant's part in the symbiosis as the culmination of Germanism (Kant presents 'the essence of German philosophy', 147). Cohen presents this symbiosis as a call to American Jewry, calling them to the Jew-German symbiosis, as will be established below.

The Delirium of the Impossible Dwelling

Cohen sees a 'deep internal kinship' (147) between Judaism and Kantianism—the latter being the conception of universal law, duty, and liberty, and representing the essence of Germanism. What these two share in common is Greek philosophy (147). The argumentative form is *tertium comparationis*, the showing that each two particular places in which one may dwell bear an intrinsic alliance with the third term, and so with each other. The 'internal kinship', or 'intrinsic alliance', suggests that unlike an external alliance, in which two forces ally but do not change each other, an intrinsic alliance is an alliance that is basic to both allies; the suggestion is that the combination of allies produces a new thing, such that the alliance is intrinsic to it.

Therefore, the question that arises is: if x is intrinsically allied to y , and y is intrinsically allied to z , is x intrinsically allied to z ? Is intrinsic alliance, internal kinship, *transitive*? Our answer to this, I take it, depends on whether internal kinship between *particular places that one can be called to* is a matter of identity or supervenience. If neither of these, the relation is not internal. If identity, then Cohen is claiming that being-Jew(ish) is the same as being-Hellenist(ic), and thus that the call to being-Jew(ish) is identical to the call to being-Hellenist(ic). If supervenience, then Cohen is claiming that being-Jew(ish) and being-Hellenist(ic) together form a third particular place that one can be called to, which supervenes over those two. The call to that third supervening place itself supervenes on the other two calls; one who is called to the third is called to the other two. An identity relation is by definition transitive. A supervenience relation is not transitive: we cannot say that because A supervenes on x and y , and B supervenes on y and z , that A supervenes on y and z . A by the terms of supervenience is fully dependent on x and y and nothing else for its being; as such, it could not be if it did not supervene on x or did not supervene on z . Identity is not an acceptable choice because 'Cohen assumes...the Christian logos which will serve as mediator between Judaism and Germanity' (148). Identity relations do not need a mediator. In the equation $2+2=4$, there is no mediation needed, and there is no mediation possible, between $2+2$ and 4 . $2+2$ simply is 4 . Thus, Cohen's tracing of a mediated relation forbids an identity relation.

Derrida attempts to give the most generous interpretation of Cohen's views that he can. Cohen, he suggests, is treating the relation as *consubstantiality* (148).³ Consubstantiality is transitive, because it consists of an identity relation among specific predicates, so any x with the same predicates as some y which has the same predicates as some z has the same predicates as some z . However, observe how Cohen traces this consubstantiality (as Derrida terms it), keeping in mind that this is an attempt to *call* a German-Jewish symbiosis through observing transitive intrinsic alliances of Jew-Greek and Greek-German. The intrinsic alliances are genealogical, and work as follows:

³ That is, 'of the same being', in the same sense that Christian theology takes the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost to be of the same being, being one without being identical or being constitutive parts of one being. It is a matter of identity in substance and essence, but not complete identity. Another example is the bread and wine eaten at mass, which are consubstantial with the flesh and blood of Jesus—the congregants are not eating Jesus, they are eating something whose substance (in the Aristotelian sense) and essence is identical to that of Jesus.

Judaism combines with Platonism in the wisdom-loving of Philo Judaeus, who makes an intrinsic alliance between them by using both for his conception of the logos, a concept which is intrinsic to Christianity (148), and there is an intrinsic alliance between Platonism and German Idealism, which takes the Idea to be the hypothesis (154), and whose anti-clerical leanings are allied with the Reformation, a movement which has an intrinsic alliance with Germany through Luther, and is obviously intrinsically Christian (156-7), and so through transitivity, the German(ic) is consubstantive with the Jew(ish). This is so in that Judaism is an originary force in the history of the German nation, and manifests itself through Christianity to influence Germanity at every transformative or historically significant development (149). This statement is one of causal constitution—that Judaism has a continuing causal influence on the German nation through Christianity, and so is part of the German identity. But consubstantiality requires that nothing that is consubstantial is posterior to that with which it is consubstantial ('Consubstantial', *New Catholic Dictionary*). However, this historical account makes clear that Judaism is prior to Germanity, in that it was from whence Germanity arose and was temporally prior to Germanity, making Germanity posterior, and so not consubstantive. Thus, Derrida's generous interpretation cannot save Cohen's argument; it is impossible.

To review: Cohen relies on the principle that if x and y have an intrinsic alliance, and y and z have an intrinsic alliance, then x and z must have an intrinsic alliance. He instantiates these as: x : Jew, y : Greek, z : German. Thus, Cohen relies on intrinsic alliances being transitive. Since the alliance is basic to both allies, it must be either an identity relation or a supervenience relation. Supervenience is not transitive, so intrinsic alliance must be an identity relation. But it cannot be an identity relation, because it requires a mediator, and identity relations do not require mediators. Derrida suggests that the relationship is consubstantiality; but that does not work, either. There is no Jew(ish)-German(ic) place to be called to. However, as we will see, Cohen believes that there is such a place and acts as if he can call that call. It is from this attempt to live in and call to the impossible that the text turns from failed to delirious.

The Delirium of the False Calling

As established, God, or the *khora*, is that which calls. This does not forbid the call manifesting itself through another being, but by trying to call another to a particular place, make that other answer the call and dwell in that place. Indeed, the call is only the call when the one who receives the call acquiesces to it. To acquiesce is to dwell, but it is impossible to dwell in the impossible, and so an attempt to call one to the impossible, if treated as a call and acquiesced to, will understandably drive one to delirium, trying to dwell in that which is no-place and cannot be. Cohen nonetheless tries to call American Jews to the impossible, saying that being-Jew(ish) is intrinsically allied with being-German(ic). Thus, by saying, 'you Jew-German', he wants his readers—American Jews—to each reply, 'I Jew-German'. He takes Judaism's fundamental thought to be freedom of the soul and duty to the transcendent law, which is similar to Kant's fundamental thought—the autonomy of the individual and the duty to universal law (165). And since

Kant is Protestant (165), the demand for universal truth in Protestantism which Kant represents is fundamentally that of Judaism (157). Thus, when Cohen says 'you Protestant' (and so 'you German'), 'you were *already* Protestant', and so are converted to Protestantism (157). Reading through 'Abraham', we put this in terms of the call: Cohen calls, and one acquiesces to the call, and dwells in the place called to, and all of these are concurrent—at the call, one already dwells in the place. Map 'convert' to 'acquiesce'. Thus, when 'converted' to Protestantism (the place), one's conversion is not posterior to the call; one already dwells in the place, for one was already Protestant. So we can see through Derrida that Cohen is trying to call. It is a false call, a call to the impossible, but it is a deliberate attempt to call.

Deliberately calling is itself an error. One cannot force or convince others to dwell in a place; they either acquiesce or they do not, and if they do not, no amount of theoretical argument that they already have acquiesced will convince them otherwise. Cohen's theoretical argument is an attempt at calling. But it is not a call unless they acquiesce concurrent with the call. If they do not, a call to them to acquiesce fails, because, again, it is by definition not a call. Moreover, only God (the *khora*) can call, and though God can call through humans, humans cannot decide to have God call through them. And God would not call the call Cohen wants called, because it is a call to a non-place. The call is always to a place. So, Cohen takes himself to be calling throughout his essay, calling forcefully, stridently, even persuasively—but all that supposed calling is not calling at all. He does not do what he thinks he does.

Not only does Cohen not do what he thinks he does, he is not where he thinks he is. It is reasonable to presume that Cohen in calling others to this non-place believes that he is in this notional place that we know to be a non-place.⁴ Finally, in choosing deliberately to call, he usurps the role of the universality, the *khora*, or God. Cohen in effect is the god of non-place, calling out for people to join him in nowhere. This is truly more than the effect of most failed arguments; it is a delirium, a symptom of the argument.

The Delirium of the Universal Predicate

Cohen's acclamation of the particular also contributes to his delirium. This acclamation is in part a response to anti-Semitism, which, as Derrida notes, was official, institutional, and legal in Germany at this time (166). Cohen directly feels anti-Semitism, in that his university bans Jews from student associations. Nonetheless, Cohen says, 'We are living in the great German patriotic hope that the unity between Judaism and Germanity...should finally be brought to full light' (166-7). Thus, despite being excluded by Germans from what he views as Jewish-Germanity, Cohen claims Jewish-Germanity to himself, saying 'we are living' as German patriots, even though most self-described patriotic Germans would not accept him as a 'real' German. Importantly, it is because he is excluded that he must claim Jewish-Germanity. It is not enough for Cohen to dwell in

⁴ If it is so important for all Jews to realize that they are Jew-Germans, then why wouldn't Cohen himself adopt this particularity, especially after he went to such trouble to 'construct' this non-place?

Jewish-Germanity—others are always trying to push him out. Rather than just dwelling, he must continually claim Jewish-Germanity as his own—and he does so throughout his essay. Cohen is driven to a mistake here, for a particular place can only be dwelt within; it cannot be claimed. Cohen has switched from 'I am Jew(ish)-German(ic)' to 'Jew(ish)-German(ic) is mine'.

Cohen does not just claim the Jew(ish)-German(ic), he *acclaims* it. 'Acclaim' here means to shout, to approve, to praise, to claim, and to elect. It is a loud and approbatory claim, then, one that elects this particular place over other particulars. He says, in what Derrida calls a 'hyperbolic tribute' (171), that Judaism is great in that it holds to the idea of universal morality, and that Germanism is great because it provides the historical event in which this idea is rooted (168); this combination of particulars, in rooting the idea of universal morality, gives rise to universality, and therefore is superior to all other particulars, which are only particular, and out of which universality does not arise. This unique greatness of Germanism manifests itself in Fichte, who held that the 'I' is social and that the social 'I' is necessarily a national 'I' (173-5). The 'I' arises within the particular place, the nation, just as Derrida holds that the placing of the 'I' permits the 'I' to be. Cohen further develops this argument: since Jew(ish)-German(ic) idealism's truth is the national 'I', and since German idealism's truth is universal philosophy's truth, the truth of nationality is Jew-German idealism; when the 'I' is a self-positing nation, a particular place, it is German (176). Since the 'I' is the basis of humanity, and Judaism-Germanism the basis of the 'I', Judaism-Germanism is superior to all other particularities, in that it holds the universal feature we all share—'I'-ness, or humanity.

Cohen relentlessly acclaims this particular (Judaism-Germanism); it is his counterintuitive way of achieving universality. That is, since *the universal is held in this one particular*, by focusing in on this (non-existent) particular, we come closer to universality. This requires holding that universality is a predicate of one particular. But universality cannot be a predicate of a particular. A particular is by definition something that is limited, that is not universal. Cohen is holding that there is some x such that x is not universal and x is universal. And that since x is universal it should be acclaimed as the greatest non-universal. He does not merely argue it; he relentlessly approves of and praises this impossible particular for its impossible predicate. He claims it to himself, seizes it to himself in a defense from the anti-Semites, and calls others to this non-place.⁵ The failed argument in effect leads him into madness, into delirium.

Review

Derrida takes Cohen to be delirious because Cohen seems to believe things that are impossible. Cohen takes it that he dwells in a place that is in fact a non-place. Cohen

⁵ The acclamation may be compared to Derrida, who on hearing the call to the particular, *disclaims* the particular, saying that he is 'the most jewish' when he is the 'other than jewish'—when he, though dwelling in the jewish particular, disclaims it as a hold on him to try to achieve the universal, as he says: to emancipate himself from judaism in a way rooted in a 'jewishness that is markedly without Judaism' (32-3). He says that by disclaiming while acquiescing to the particular he comes as close as possible to the universal. For Derrida, each particular is called to from the universal. Derrida, at least, on his own grounds, does not suffer from delirium.

takes it that he calls to the non-place, when it is, necessarily, a non-call. And Cohen takes it that this non-place predicates an opposition to itself. It is for these reasons that Derrida calls the text 'delirious' rather than simply erroneous.

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