Review

Cosmo-nationalism: American, French and German philosophy

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This book is structured around four key philosophers – Immanuel Kant (1724–1804), Johann Gottlieb Fichte (1762–1814), Alexis de Tocqueville (1805–1859), and Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803–1882) – who have addressed philosophy’s ineradicable national inscriptions while retaining its universalistic ambitions. Generally speaking, the texts the author discusses have rarely been taken seriously by philosophers (at least not until recently), either because the writer is not regarded as a philosopher (this is the case with Tocqueville and Emerson) or because the texts subjected to close reading in the work under review are not considered as philosophically significant as their more well-known philosophical texts listed as classics (this is the case with Kant and Fichte). This study makes a valuable and timely contribution to such themes that have been marginalised for long.

The immediate question confronting the author is: if philosophy is universal in scope, how can it account for its national inscription? (p. 2). According to the author, the national in this context plays the role of a ‘schematic affiliation’, or of ‘a vehicle for philosophy’, more specifically, ‘a vehicle to accomplish a given set of cosmopolitical aims’ (p. 5). Following Kant and Derrida, a schema is the ‘third thing’ that ‘participates in both empirical and non-empirical elements at once through the faculty of imagination’ (p. 8). What results from such a hybridization and mutation of cosmopolitanism and nationalism is a peculiar form of nationalism that the author calls ‘cosmo-nationalism’, which the author ascribes to the four philosophers.

The first two chapters are devoted to Kant, who is taken to be an exemplary thinker of cosmopolitanism. Chapter 2 considers Kant’s relevant political writings that have been related to nationalism, internationalism, and cosmopolitanism. The author considers that Kant has played a pivotal role in the rise and formation of philosophical nationalities, that is, ‘philosophies differentiated by means of nationality *and* nations differentiated by means of philosophy’ (p. 27). However, he

also points out that such reflections on philosophical nationalities are at the same time marginalised and suppressed in Kant's own corpus. What is of particular interest in this chapter is an examination of a series of Latin and German political terms such as *natio*, *populus*, *Land (territorium)*, *Nation*, and *Volk*, which Kant has deployed.

Chapter 3 focuses on what Kant has to say concerning the French and German national character and their respective national philosophies. In various places, Kant attaches importance to language, but it is not as decisive a factor as it is for Fichte (see next chapter). However, Kant makes an important distinction between *Volkssprache* and *Schulsprache* (one can be referred to Kant's distinction between *Schulbegriff* [scholastic concept] and *Weltbegriff* [cosmical concept] of philosophy in his *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*, B867–68). Philosophers should avoid obscure language and philosophy should be made available to the public (*das Publikum*, *das Volk*), except for one thing: 'the system capable of thinking the supersensible can never become popular' (p. 88f). Scholastic philosophy (and its *Schulsprache*) must be insisted upon in order for 'reason be brought to understand itself' (Kant, cited on p. 89).

Chapter 4 presents a detailed discussion of Fichte's *Addresses to the German Nation*. Insofar as the 'national mission,' Fichte outlines in this text is 'drawn in cosmopolitan terms' (p. 93), the author argues that Fichte's thinking cannot be claimed to be an ethnic nationalism but 'a novel kind of philosophical nationalism' (p. 114). His stance is both nationalist *and* cosmopolitan in its outlook. However, this does not undermine Fichte's persistent view that 'the German idiom is the only language of philosophy'. As Derrida points out, Fichte's *Addresses* 'essentialises Germanity to the point of making it an entity bearing the universal and the philosophical as such' (cited p. 114).

The author rightly emphasizes that different receptions of Fichte's *Addresses* in the Francophone and Anglophone world may well have been caused by the 'untranslatability' of the German word *Geschlecht* (pp. 99–104, 114 n. 5). German–English dictionaries give as possible meanings of *Geschlecht*: kind, type, species, genre, manner, way, style, stock, sex, gender, nature, family, race, descent, lineage, dynasty, generation, genealogy, community, and probably more. Hence, it is better left untranslated (as Derrida also remarks, p. 101) and explained in so far that is possible.

In chapter 5, the author discusses the 'pivotal role' (p. 117) that Descartes plays in Toqueville's work. According to Toqueville, Americans are the best followers of Descartes even though they have hardly studied his work, inasmuch as 'each American appeals only to the individual effort of his reason' (cited on p. 119). Hence, France possesses the intellectual copyright of the democratic method, whereas both English and German are aristocratic. One may expect a more elaborate discussion of the (alleged) inconsistency between French as the democratic language and the activities of the French Academy in regimenting

the French language and the publication of Descartes' works outside France (for example, in Leyden and Amsterdam).

In chapter 6, the author identifies a 'cosmo-national' strain of thought in Emerson, who has been narrowly regarded as an American writer. The author considers his work philosophically relevant, because 'Emerson shows it is the essence of language not to let itself be appropriated by any one as uniquely national property' (p. 156f). Philosophy is presented as 'open to the other, and so the other in philosophy, as well as the other of philosophy' (p. 158).

Although the selection of the four philosophers range from the 18th to the 19th centuries, the author proclaims that his theoretical framework and method of analysis build on Derrida's thinking as found, in particular, in a number of his seminars from the 1980s, in which Derrida pioneered an exploration of the intertwinement between philosophy and nationalism (pp. 14–22). The influence of Derrida on this book is pervasive. There are more than fifty references to Derrida's work in the bibliography. However, one can find a focused treatment of Derrida only in one section in the Introduction. If Derrida has provided the framework of interpretation for this work, one may expect a substantive discussion of Derrida's thinking.

Each chapter in this book starts with a clear statement of what the reader may expect, but does not end with a conclusion, and there lacks a concluding chapter after the five chapters of impressive close readings. We only find a one-paragraph summary of the major differences with respect to the issue of language. Kant claims that philosophy must be written in a natural language; Fichte announces that language has to be German in spirit (*Geist*); Tocqueville considers that language has to be French in method; and Emerson 'does not claim that one language is the language of philosophy' (192), with whom Derrida would agree on this point.

This may be the very first book-length treatment of the way in which philosophy can be both nationalistic and cosmopolitical at the same time. The choices of the materials are apposite, the investigations are rigorous, and the methodology is innovative in trying to combine both historical and formal perspectives. However, the author's 'meta' discussion of philosophy, language, and politics is restricted to philosophers working in German, French, British English, and American English languages. In this sense, it is not completely cosmopolitical but situated within the boundaries of American and European philosophies. Of course, one cannot deal with everything in one book. However, a concluding chapter would have given the author the opportunity to say a few words about the relevance of the texts he discusses with respect to contemporary discussions that extend beyond Europe (both geographically and ideologically). At least, the author could have noted that recently his publisher has released two books concerning Islamic or Muslim views of cosmopolitanism.

Alongside the lack of a cosmopolitical perspective, there is too little critical distance from the philosophers the author deals with. One such example is this:

Keohane explicates that Fichte assigns a privileged role to the ‘secret idiom’ of German (pp. 101, 99–104) and thus ascribes superiority and uniqueness to the German language at the level of metaphysics. However, his analyses stop at reconstructing Fichte’s view without making efforts to problematize the Eurocentric strain of such claims. At the most, the author will accept that ‘others’ can participate in the process of European self-criticism, but he still maintains that the rules of the supposedly universal conversation have to be stipulated by the philosophers from the ‘centre.’ Keohane refers to the World Congress of Philosophy at the very beginning of his book (p. 3), but he does not address the fact that the World Congress was held in Athens in 2013 and in Beijing in 2018, and that the official languages of the Congress included not only French and English, but also Chinese. One of the things this fact reminds us is the no less prominent cosmopolitan dimension that one can identify in traditional Confucianism, as reflected in its concern with the *tianxia* 天下 (under the heaven): a gentleman-king is expected to cultivate himself and regulate his family perfectly, and then to maintain a good order both in one’s country and under the heaven. In the current situation, if Confucianism is claimed to be the core of national identity that differs from ‘foreign’ traditions such as liberalism, such concerns with the *tianxia* unavoidably take on features resembling what Keohane calls cosmonationalism. Does it call for new intellectual resources to address this variety of ‘cosmo-nationalism’ – rather than classical German philosophy and/or Derrida?

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