

Derrida's Jewish Question

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*This paper will pose the question of the future minoritization of the white, gentile, Christian European and Euro-American identity, which has dominated world history from colonization through the post-Cold War historical present. The question is not how this is coming to an end in the near future as empirical fact and in what manner, but an attempt to imagine another future, another identity than what has been proscribed in the past. In order to move into this alterity, we will engage in a critical reading of Derrida's essay "Abraham, The Other," in the volume titled *Judeities: Questions for Jacques Derrida*.¹ By examining the philosophical complexity of Derrida's quasi-autobiographical reflection on his Jewish identity, we can prepare the conditions for how the future gentile white European identity could look when not grounded in its self-edifying monotheism of a white, Christian-dominated political and cultural state. The relation between the future diversification of European identity is not just a matter of postcolonial immigration and multiculturalism. It has to do with the ontological problem of how to understand the origin and telos of gentile white European identity in its Christian heritage and metaphysics (from the ancient Greeks to Hegel, Nietzsche, and Heidegger) when simple notions of origin and end are erased. This brings in the philosophical problem of historical time, movement, and epochal shifts between today's Europe and another Europe, today's future and what is other to that. Derrida's text provides a guide into what is other to monotheism, unicity, oneness, and—by extension, we will argue—gentile whiteness, Christianness too, which is not simply the opposite of polytheism and today's racial diversity, i.e., non-white and non-western Christian minorities in Europe, the United States, Canada, and the "west" in general. Having said that, this does have obvious implications regarding justice and equality as European and "western" societies in general diversify. Linking the most archaic, or the farthest in distance beyond the mythic origin of Abraham and therefore of Jewish biblical-historical identity, raises the prospects of "another" Abraham. This Other is not rooted in historical memory. This paper argues that Derrida's reflections will help us understand an alternative future whose metaphysics is yet to be written, one that is not simply a repetition of the contents of the history of (gentile) religion and philosophy in Europe and its linear, successive, chronological historical time-frame, i.e., the Gregorian calendar.*

Key words: Derrida; deconstruction; intersectionality; western metaphysics; philosophy of religion

1 Introduction

To answer new questions about the philosophical consequences of the future minoritization of gentile whiteness, we will have to interrogate the question of the "west" and how that question has been posed and has or has not been answered over the ages, i.e., Hegel to Derrida. This project is entirely philosophical. It makes no claims to contributing to the empirical social sciences on issues of diversity, globalization, migration, immigration, and racial and ethnic demographic shifts.² Rather, we shall turn to the anthology titled *Judeities: Question for Jacques Derrida* to unpack complex philosophical determinations of multidimensional identity through the tools of critical theory, phenomenology, and deconstruction.³

The splitting apart, dispersal, or, as Derrida would say, “dissemination” (Derrida 1981)⁴ means there is another future, an inverted eschatology that clips off its end. There is something other to the notion of end, which is also not in-finite, eternal, or endless. By reading Derrida, and moreover Derrida on Heidegger and Hegel (without ignoring Nietzsche), the paramount white gentile European philosophers of the modern west, we hope to philosophize about these ontological conditions beyond what is merely offered in the texts of these three great European philosophers.⁵ Their historical presents are not the same as ours: the years 1807 (Hegel’s *Phenomenology of Spirit*), 1887 (Nietzsche’s *On the Genealogy of Morals*), 1927 (Heidegger’s *Being and Time*), and 1967 (Derrida’s *Of Grammatology*) mark seismic events indeed in two centuries of continental European philosophical thought. All those tumultuous historical presents were radically different from each other; but more so, they were all different from ours. This throws into question the notion of one unified historical timeline constructed and determined by the European west since colonization. Our present demands a morally infused and philosophically invigorated response to how we understand the rising terror of gentile white ethno-nationalism in the EU and the US and how we can combat it. White supremacy is the greatest internal threat to the future of western identity, more than any other non-western civilization threat that neoconservative apostles such as Fukuyama and Huntington tried to imagine.⁶ However, our means is critical theory and philosophy through and through, not political theory or international relations.

2 Main Text: Beginning the Possibility of Reading Derrida’s Text, Or a Long Preface

We begin with a preface to how we can go about reading Derrida’s *Judeities: Questions for Jacques Derrida* while keeping Heidegger and Hegel in the background. By reading Derrida’s text, we want to unpack some of the issues prevalent today regarding gentile white nationalist, Islamophobic, antisemitic, anti-multiculturalist, anti-Roma, anti-refugee, and anti-immigration (legal and illegal) dynamics and movements today in continental Europe and, perhaps in a different context with different dynamics, in certain states in the US. Inversely, we have to ask the intersectional question of what it means to pass within the still-white majority of Europe without reducing oneself to the biological racial category of whiteness, the plight of Ashkenazi Jews and fair-skinned Sephardic, Mizrahi, and Arab peoples.

Derrida’s essay “Abraham, the Other” is uncanny not only in trying to think through a Kafka parable of many Abrahams, which could mean, perhaps, many types of monotheism. Derrida tries to engage this “more than one (*plus d’un*)” (Derrida 2005: 1). He does so not only for Abraham, but also one can say for outsiders to the unified ego and homogeneity of white, gentile, colonial European mastery: that would mean more ways to “being-jew” (Derrida 2005: 2).⁷ The gesture would indicate a differential deepening of difference, and intersectional multiplication of intersectionality. To that we can add more significations of being-Arab, North African, African, Asian, South Asian, Central Asian, and Asian Siberian Slavic in the heart of still-dominant white gentile western (and eastern) Europe.

This question of multiplying intersectionally what is already a complex heterogeneous concept—the “foreigner,” “the outsider,” in short the “Other”—harkens back to Levinas’ ethics on how we encounter the Other by giving ourselves up completely (Levinas 1969: 183).⁸ But in this text Derrida takes us in new directions beyond the transcendence, infinitization, and elevated dispersion of self as the Other; he beckons one to come closer while resisting all subjective representations of the experience of the Other as just another subject. Derrida’s aporetic knots of non-dialectical relations and differences between multiplying terms point to new horizons for future thought; traditional traces of being Jewish may not be as recognizable, and perhaps traces are possible other than being Jewish but still not gentile white European or white-passing within it. Given the deconstruction of gentile

white European identity, which cannot be conflated with white-passing Ashkenazi European Jews and their long history of suffering and trauma in continental Europe, we must tread carefully.⁹

Derrida himself is intersectionally complex. He was born in colonial French Algeria to Sephardic Jewish parents, took shelter with the Arab Muslim communities during the atrocious Vichy-Nazi supported regime and its inherent antisemitic oppression, including the banning of Hebrew in schools, and then faced the compounded, intersectionally oppressed category in France as a young person and philosopher in the making: not white-passing Ashkenazi but darker Sephardic, and therefore facing racism, xenophobia, and antisemitism all at once (Peeters 2013). This is an impossible simultaneity, or rather, it is the difficult simultaneity of many impossibilities of identity formation to intimate Derridean lines of aporetic thinking.

If one were to attempt multiple definitions of the term “intersectionality,” one could say:

- A. When multiple, discrete categories of being an oppressed minority intertwine: say, being simultaneously non-white, non-cisgender, queer, and a first-generation immigrant with an undiagnosed disability.
- B. When the formation of identity becomes so complex, and the vectors of oppression do not arise from just one domain but many simultaneously like racism, sexism, heterosexism, cisgender binaryism, ableism, nationalism, then there is no homogenous identity at one's core; these oppressed persons are invisibilized in an intersecting play of margins while the sources of intersecting oppressions are not transparent and are fleeting. Intersectionality therefore is not as simple as a spatial intersection, say, two roads that meet perpendicularly; perhaps it cannot be spatialized at all.¹⁰

Keeping this non-centralized plurality in mind, we have to ask with Derrida what does the “more than one” mean if a dogmatic conception of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam is rooted in the notion of oneness—say one God as One, a non-representable transcendental unity, which in the case of Judaism and Islam cannot be named, idolized, or represented especially as a historical human person as Jesus of Nazareth is for Christianity's conception of a Triune God, albeit monotheistic too. What are the conditions of possibility and impossibility of those conditions for trying to imagine other ways to think about the messianic without an eschatologically rapturous end to this world and the creation of a new one? What happens when there is more than one monotheism, which does not mean polytheism (many gods) or pantheism, the ever-present divinity as immanent in all things including nature?¹¹ How do we bring Derrida's reflections into dialogue with notions of intersectionality in an interracial, interreligious, and multicultural western Europe? The problem is not about a dialectical opposition between monotheism and polytheism or a metaphysical-Platonic one between one and the many, but rather, a primordial schism or alterity yet to be conceptualized regarding the very “origin” of monotheism, of oneness, and of unity. In fact, some of us were not born originally as one self, body, or subject; we may be two, three, or more, which is mischaracterized as one. We are dispersed at our own origin, and therefore do not follow the path of a single substance over the course of linear time and development. Furthermore, it is not an exaggeration to say that among the younger white generations, dogmatic commitments to Christian faith and practice, and even Christian identity, are vanishing.

3 Derrida's Text

Let us attempt a return once again to Derrida's text. In responding to his own double structure, his partial margins, this two-ness that is a substitute or trace in his own identity, a two-ness that cannot be dialectically synthesized, Derrida offers some preliminary remarks. The hesitancy in his prose is evident. For Derrida is trying to understand his own vantage point of "being jew" and not "being-jew" (Derrida 2005: 3). It is our task to philosophize out of his self-presentation what essential *différance* (difference, deferral) and multiplicity there is in the future "European" identity (whether new immigrants or multi-generational racial, religious, and ethnic minorities after decolonization) when it is no longer dominated by the white gentile Christian colonial past.

There is the event of differentiation and a delay of what that event of differentiation signifies. And this delay affects a minority's self-consciousness; it complicates how a minoritized one passes into white gentile European Christian space and loses oneself in it while the white gentile Christian space shrinks. It is as if a void is being created within another void. All the while one is distorting one's own anticipated original identity as split apart like two Lacanian mirror images facing each other: not quite always whole when one sees oneself in the mirror and mistakes the image as a total self when it is other, but also another mirror reflecting that delusion of unicity back on that first mirror, like two mirrors facing each other in a crosswise, asymmetric erasure. Two movements of dissimulation of what is not real or present, each inflecting the other in a macabre, fuzzy, distorted sense of presence.

This movement-event takes us back to Hegel's master-slave dialectic in the *Phenomenology of Spirit* (Hegel 1977: 111),¹² but slightly altered. Being European and not, being western and not, and being the minority to Europe and not, which means being between and not between within all those polarities: therefore a fourfold structure of identity flickers, which is not the Christian Trinitarian subject or is not dialectically synthesized back into One whole person as a dogmatic Hegelian might dream. Who are the philosophers of the world, who are made completely in the west as if their ontological (not biological) DNA were manufactured in western metaphysics, but are totally outside and other to any original birth as a native western human being? This is the question not only of the immigrant (whose birth lies elsewhere) but also of the other in general to western metaphysics that crosses out the a priori notion of birth as an event; it is not a three-moment dialectic or three dimensions of time in a linear sequence of now points. It is a placeholder regarding the question of the destiny of the western sense of Being if in fact, as Heidegger says, the west has been so far off the mark of its goal—the logos as word conceptualizing the truth of Being (not any being or beings)—based on its Platonic origin in Greek antiquity (Heidegger 1962: 1).¹³ The question is not just of forgetfulness but the question of the other, who was never included in the memory of the west, for one must possess memory first before there can be forgetfulness. For some, both are impossible, memory and forgetfulness. This is the place to begin a critical reading of Derrida's text. Derrida states:

How and by what right, can one distinguish, for example, between that which, in my experience, touches *in part* my "being jew (*être juif*)" at its most intimate, its most obscure, its most illegible (however one takes this "being-jew," and later I will in fact complicate the stakes of this expression—one cannot do everything at once) and *in part* that which, let us say, seems to belong in a more legible fashion to my work, the public work [...], which does not necessarily, nor always bear visible traces of my "being-jew," whether it concerns itself with writing, teaching, ethics, law or politics, or civic behavior, or whether it concerns itself with philosophy or with literature. (Derrida 2005: 2–3)

And yet tonight I will act for awhile as if these two orders were distinct, to seek to determine later on, here or elsewhere, at least as a disputable hypothesis, the rule of what passes [*ce qui passe*] from one to the other, the rule of what occurs [*ce qui se passe*] between the two, and for which I would have, in sum, to respond. (Derrida 2005: 3)

We will stay with this passage on passing and occurrence, and perhaps their secret connection insofar as two are kept apart. He speaks of two orders—in “part” “being jew” and in part working like the gentile (white) European thinker with no necessary trace of “being-jew”—the “rule” of what passes between them, and the “rule” of what “occurs” between them (Derrida 2005: 3). The distinction between the non-hyphenated “being jew” and the hyphenated “being-jew” (Derrida 2005: 3) is where the distended difference hangs in the balance. For this in-between and what is other to any in-between (any between two poles of being and not being), Derrida takes on the responsibility to respond. The responsibility is heavy because he does not want to disrespect anyone in any attempt to answer or foreground an answer to the question of what it means to “be-jewish.” The response has to be authentic in never speaking on behalf of another as if truly understanding what it is like to be the other. No one should disrespect in that regard, whether one is Jewish or not. One can call that a commandment of withdrawal and of silence, perhaps.

We can say too—this passing between two, the passing from one to the other and back is never present; like the monotheistic deity, it cannot be named or idolized or represented. Even in trying to utter the possibility of the thought of uttering the name, one is terrified; there is no name, for a name traps and encases being. But here we must imagine transcendence of Being beyond any name.¹⁴

When thinking of the passing between “being jew” and not “being-jew” (Derrida 2005: 3), no being appears. One cannot even say that it is traced as irreducibly Other to any representable content; the delay and differentiation of what might be a moment in time is not a moment in time, but also not outside it. This is irreducible to any dialectical synthesis of identity and non-identity, visible identity and invisible difference. Therefore, it has to be the antidote and supersession of all metaphysical substances predicated on a simple homogenous identity—racial, gendered, sexual, religious, able-bodied, etc., within any given historical context. It works to tear down the hierarchy of all “isms” that persist as forces in the world: racism, sexism, heterosexism, patriotism, nationalism, ableism, etc. Therefore, is it not supremely ironic that the Dasein and fate of gentile white western history from its classical Greco-Roman roots through the passage of medieval Christianity to the birth of modernity rooted in atheistic science, technology, democracy, secularism, and individual rights begins to fragment? It splits apart this passage of epochs between white, gentile, Christian, European history to another side, more than one side, and the opposites of any sides. And like Derrida we must ponder this question of the most profound event: how one passes from one to the other, but only partially, and what transpires in between the two destinations in the movement of becoming. This becoming appears to have an origin and end, but in a complex movement that includes what is other to an origin and other to an end. And all of this must be distinguished from the eternal, which has no origin and no end, and hence other to eternity too without relapsing back into a simple sense of linear time and being-in-time. The Other Europe, just like the Other Abraham, awaits articulation; it is buried as secret in the heart of Europe’s true beginning.¹⁵

And speaking of Abraham, it would be impossible to return to the Derrida passage, which we will elaborate on, if we do not cease to evade the biblical text itself, and if possible the Hebraic original of the first book of the Torah, Bereshit or “Genesis,” where Abram (אַבְרָם) makes his appearance.¹⁶

One may think that the question is “who” is Abram,¹⁷ the same figure in the Bible who will become the “father” and first patriarch of the Jewish lineage. He is most famous for the recounted story of an attempted sacrifice of his son, Isaac, based on a calling from God; no one else could hear Abraham’s thoughts and therefore understand his resolute drive to commit the incomprehensible act, which failed to complete itself due to an unpredictable intervention. Yes, Abraham may be famous for this tale, but this is not the question of the origin. Being called into being is not an original moment in and of time because the prior name “Abram” is called out of a demand to leave, to expel oneself from family and home.¹⁸ The site of this origin is the site of a departure, and therefore a departure that is original, an originating departure but not from a simple origin. So there is a question of withdrawal, self-expulsion, departure, and originative exodus. One can speak of the stretched nature of a relation that is never reducible to a present origin.

Coming back to the Derrida passage where no simple origin or end manifests, we can keep this in mind. Derrida’s “Other Abraham” is not just a recollection of the figure in the biblical tale. Similarly, the future, the Other Europe, is not simply a repetition of white gentile Christian identity from colonization to the present. As always, we have a problem of movement. The future cannot presence out of the present, any future present. It is not of the order of presence at all, a major deconstructive assumption. One can say that to construct the “identity” of Derrida and the other Abraham, one has to think of a neither-nor, both this and that, and an unnamable third, and something entirely other in-between and beyond the in-between buried in all those polarities and syntheses of the neither-nor and the this and that. Something so close and so far away as to what is most orthodox of the Jewish origin, the ones who keep the Law and Commandments and do not utter the tetragrammaton, the name of YHWH, is also other to any recapitulation of the gentile white Christian majority identity: not to be born-again in Christ (as the One who was resurrected from physical death like no other human being can do for themselves) and to trace the event of the erasure of the notion of resurrection and eternal afterlife. The simultaneity of all these possibilities is impossible. To negate not simply death but negate the negation of death called the resurrection: what is this event of thinking so beyond the realm of Christian dogmatics? Another sense of time and death beckons. Therefore, the task of philosophical articulation seems immense.

One can say that “being-jew,” but only partly, since there was a mutation at the origin, which is the trace of a wound with no prior condition of wholeness, while also not leaving any trace of “being-jew” (Derrida 2005: 3) in becoming what Derrida became (philosopher, public intellectual, citizen of France, academic at universities around the world, etc.) appears as a non-dialectical duality that cannot collapse itself. In this two-ness, we quote again Derrida:

And yet tonight I will act for awhile as if these two orders were distinct, to seek to determine later on, here or elsewhere, at least as a disputable hypothesis, the rule of what passes [*ce qui passe*] from one to the other, the rule of what occurs [*ce qui se passe*] between the two, and for which I would have, in sum, to respond. (Derrida 2005: 3)

Derrida speaks of the “rule of what passes from one to the other,” “the rule of what occurs between the two,” and in “sum” (Derrida 2005: 3) what Derrida has the compulsion to respond to an unanswerable question. We have a problem of movement and event, the event of movement and the movement of an event in which no-thing can appear as the in-between these two asymmetric and “distinct orders” (Derrida 2005: 3). One can ask what is the underlying motivation, the necessity of two-ness at the one origin, oneness as origin, and the origin of oneness? This is not about an unreal sequence of mathematical numbers before zero or negative integers, or the asymptotic infinity of

division between zero and one at which a one is never arrived. Two-ness as a linguistic registrar points to the difficulty of being called into being what one is supposed to be based on an expectation by another. Hence Derrida's concern with being called "jewish" or "being-jew" (Derrida 2005: 3).

But the senses begin to multiply even beyond two, as the movement of dissemination and deconstruction. Derrida takes us to the heart of his lifelong existential dilemma, the pulsation and constant torture of existent being and incessant writing. He speaks of the "wound" (Derrida 2005: 16), which he says is his first experience with antisemitism:

All that I would like to emphasize for now is the retreat and retrenchment [*retranchement*] of which I speak, a retreat, a caesura that appeared to decide itself, to carve itself within the very wound, within the wound that will not heal [*la blessure non cicatrisable*], that anti-Semitism has left in me, and a retreat outside of all community, including the one that was called my own, a merciless withdrawal that I felt already, and that I still feel, at once, at the same time, as less jewish and more jewish than the Jew, as scarcely Jewish and as superlatively Jewish as possible, more than Jew [*plus que Juif*], exemplarily Jew, but also hyperbolically Jew, when I was honing its cultivation to the point of mistrusting even the exemplarist temptation—not to mention the even more difficult and problematical language of election. This overbidding of an excess that never stops, that pursues and persecutes itself, the most becoming incomparably the least, or the other, a superlative more than a comparative—I have found it everywhere; it has found me everywhere, and one could locate a thousand signs in writings and teachings, in arguments that I did not direct—neither in appearance, nor in reality—toward the theme of any jewish question. (Derrida 2005: 16)

Let us remain with this passage of which there is so much to explore, starting with the "retreat and retrenchment [*retranchement*]" (Derrida 2005: 16). In the Hebrew Bible's Book of Genesis in Chapter 12, where Abram is being called and calling God, we know that:

7 Then the LORD appeared to Abram and said, "I will give this land to your offspring." So Abram built an altar there to the LORD, who had appeared to him. 8 From there Abram moved on to the hill country east of Bethel and pitched his tent, with Bethel to the west and Ai to the east. There he built an altar to the LORD, and he called on the name of the LORD [...].¹⁹

The Lord appearing, Abram emerging from being called by the appearance, Abram building an altar, and then calling the name of the Lord marks a totality as an event that cannot, paradoxically, be bounded or spatialized; it is not a simple sequence of events. This is where we will bring together the Derrida passage on the multiplicity of being-Jewish and the challenge to white gentile European Christian metaphysical history: the latter attempted to embody the logos in a human person (Christianity becoming the state religion of the Roman Empire in contrast to the first century CE Jewish-Palestinian context within which Jesus lived and died) but also tried to equate Being and Truth in terms of predicates (Forms, Transcendental Categories, Geist) before and after the birth of Christianity in the history of philosophy (Plato to Hegel).

Derrida is in "retreat," a "retrenchment" (Derrida 2005: 16), as he says, when called to the question of "being jew" and not "being-jew" (Derrida 2005: 3), where there is no simple, direct, immediate answer. One does not even have the privilege of a birth, not even an aborted birth or an orphaned identity being born as just anyone else but one's original parental creation. There is no

content in the Derridean passage, but there is a question of passage: there is an eruption, irruption, rupture, or break, the perpetually unhealing “wound” of antisemitism in a non-circular movement of “retreat” and “retrenchment” in terms of a carving within a carving, that is the “wound” (Derrida 2005: 16). Why did the fact of coming into being occur without coming into being as just anyone?

All of this takes place in registers that refuse to settle on the dichotomies, oppositions, tensions, polarities, whereby none of those terms suffice to understand the relations: between an impossible simultaneity within the retreating, withdrawal from unified selfhood that he is “less Jewish and more Jewish than the Jew,” “as scarcely Jewish and as superlatively Jewish as possible,” “more than Jew [*plus que Juif*], exemplarily Jew, but also hyperbolically Jew” (Derrida 2005: 16). Derrida traces in an asymptotic infinity what “less” and “more” (Derrida 2005: 16) mean as the sum of all acts, decisions, certificates, and, in short, traces of one’s record as one has lived on earth.

Derrida wants to avoid all notion of presence, singularity, a point in space-time, a bounded object, a perfect congruence of subjective mind and external reality, a definite now-point as presence whereby past is no-longer-now and future yet-to-be-now when trying to signify what is “exemplarist” or the “language of election” (Derrida 2005: 16), in other words the “chosen” ones or people, which is never a Jewish self-identification. How and when that is ascribed to Jews by the gentile majority is another matter, as the long history of antisemitic violence and oppression attests.²⁰ In a lifetime of avoiding the question of what Derrida thought of himself as “being-jew” (Derrida 2005: 3) and what that means, one comes to grip with a self-evisceration and complete abandonment of oneself, not from an original starting point but from no-where. No individual wants to attest to what was ascribed to them as an identity at their birth, unless they reaffirm some kind of racism, sexism, heterosexism, binaryism, able-bodied normativity, and nationalism toward what is other to the individual. It is not so much a self-wounding, but a wound inflicted on the self that was ascribed at birth in an event of transitivity. These registers, however, must still be overcome.

The intention of the author and person cannot be easily deciphered, and perhaps it never can. A lingering and happening are attributed to the unceasing “excess” that chases and prosecutes “itself,” which Derrida discovers “everywhere” just as it “found” him “everywhere” (Derrida 2005: 3). This non-centralized dispersion and self-entombing, encrypting of one’s non-unified self, exterior to any scripted self, is scattered in a traumatized “thousand signs in writings and teachings, in arguments” he “did not direct—neither in appearance, nor in reality—toward the theme of any Jewish question” (Derrida 2005: 16). This persistent absence of the question makes him shudder. The “Jewish question” (Derrida 2005: 16) simply did not appear as such. But why this unintentional evasion, how did this non-occurrence occur? Derrida had to write, which is nothing but the difference and delay: that stretch of not arriving on time or being postponed to an indefinite future, this gap cannot be captured in between any binary such as presence or absence but merely traces itself as that irreducible and non-representable, non-signified difference; he traces himself to a death to avoid answering the question of what it means to have been born a Jew. But what does this all mean?

One cannot attempt to answer or speak in place of the other, to speak for Derrida after he is gone. But one can try to understand this text he left behind as a remnant for future thinking and try to focus as if a collimated light were possible, a perfect alignment of his understanding of “being Jew” and not “being-jew” (Derrida 2005: 3). But it is to do so through all these passages and the biblical tale of the “origin” of Abram to which we now turn in conclusion. For such a paralleling of two lights, two texts—the allegedly atheistic philosophy and non-negative theology of deconstruction and the faith-filled religiosity of the Bible—cannot reflect each other in their togetherness. It is not so much the non-identity of deity in a negative theology and its emotive thrust, but the non-identity of the one who fails to believe—that is the question. They are both fated to the ultimate end of only being

diffracted. Both texts fail to reveal a final meaning, a lack of finality that can be contrasted with the gentile white Christian eschatological fulfillment in a peculiar belief—the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ (the Son of God) and faith in eternal life after an end-time resurrection of all the dead and a new creation (John’s Revelation). Will Europe and the white gentile west in general go down the path of this fulfillment at the expense of all other non-Christians? Or will the mystery of the dispersion at the origin become a perpetual future? We hypothesize the latter and must try to discern the reasons why.

We must ask now, two decades into the twenty-first century, while the white gentile west, in particular Europe and the US, faces future minoritization: in that the Other now will speak and speak from a standpoint of authority against the long arc of colonial violence and Christian hegemony used as its justification. For the death of Christianity in western Europe is imminent. But not because of the reasons espoused by gentile antisemitic intent, with their millennia-long persecution of the Jews who are accused of intending or conspiring to doubt Christianity, who fail to convert to the final revelation of God that is the Christian apocalypse, or machinate to replace Christianity with something else. These sinister and unforgivable subscriptions from the gentile mind have been responsible for the suffering and death of millions of Jews down the centuries right in the heart of Europe, the cradle of the gentile white west. In response, and calling into responsibility who can attest to the mystery of history, one can ask this question: why has history unfolded in the sequence of events that has led us to this present, and not another? Called into this question, we reinvoke the Biblical text of Chapter 12 of the Book of Genesis: again:

7 Then the LORD appeared to Abram and said, “I will give this land to your offspring.” So Abram built an altar there to the LORD, who had appeared to him. 8 From there Abram moved on to the hill country east of Bethel and pitched his tent, with Bethel to the west and Ai to the east. There he built an altar to the LORD, and he called on the name of the LORD...²¹

The LORD did manifest to Abram, this the non-idol, the non-name, the other to all imagination, not a voice as mere presence (like one human being to another) or writing as a trace (from a dead author in the past to a living reader today), and this calling led to building the altar. Yes, the altar is the horizon to call on the name of the Lord. Do we have a circle of hearing from being called to the one who calls? Not necessarily. The altar is the horizon of Being where caller, called, and calling commune in the highest form of holiness, the possibility of a fourth beyond the three, the promise of not being abandoned, as a hope and trust in justice and mercy so suffering is not meaningless. To call out to the One who calls you first reverses the order of time. To say one is not alone is precisely the highest form of irreducible singularity and non-comparable, un-surpassed non-ipseity. Is this not analogous to whatever possible “motive” appears, which is never rooted in a simple subjectivity, person, or identity, including the philosopher who once lived, namely Derrida, of deconstruction?

We must conclude in a hypothetical call to a future project, a critical exegesis of what Derrida meant in those passages about an occurrence, of why it is necessary to strive but also resist simple closure, the question of the meaning of “being jew” and not “being-jew” (Derrida 2005: 3). All those possibilities of the “excess” beyond the polarities of “less” and “more,” “scarcely” and “superlatively,” “exemplarily” and “hyperbolically” that cannot yield a resolution to identity—do the oscillations not cease as Derrida says? The destiny of the gentile origin of the west, the pre-Christian ancient Greeks for Hegel, to its end in the post-Christian *aufheben* of Hegel’s own three-moment system (Being,

Essence, Logic) did not yield the dialectical synthesis into the final solution—an Absolute Notion that replaces the Triune Christian God, the original identity, the negation, and the negation of negation in the resurrection. Something else has occurred, something that erases any trace of what remains in western metaphysics and Christianity. Instead, we have the altar, the horizon from where one will call and be called in the future on the name, one other to western metaphysics and its substantiation of the gentile apotheosis, the religion to supplant all other religions, in Christianity. Judaism, which not only came before Christianity and was perhaps the receptacle that gave birth to New Testament Christian scripture (three of the Gospel writers and Paul were Jewish) in pagan Roman-dominated Palestine nearly two millennia ago, but is also that which comes after Christianity in a minoritized gentile white west. And we have yet to get to the question of the rise of Islam in the west. What it means to come after Christianity is what no white European gentile philosopher has succeeded in answering, whether Hegel, Nietzsche, or Heidegger. But that is what we are called to do, what is calling the west and Europe to go forward and to become not what it is but what it can never be: the final resolution to the question of the meaning of Being. To think other to this non-finality does not mean that we must critique the teleology of history for the sake of the critique; rather, we must ponder what is other to both Being and Time (allusion to Heidegger directly) in a manner heretofore undisclosed in the history of western metaphysics.

4 Conclusion

This paper opened with the question of the future minoritization of gentile, white, Christian Europe and the west in general. But as a philosophical project, we did not aim to tease out the social, psychological, anthropological, and political consequences of this unthinkable event given the history of white domination from colonialism to the present. Rather, we chose to refract away from any prediction of what this could mean given the legacy of five centuries of colonization, the blood, genocide, horror, and (one can say) the unoriginal sin, an evil that had to serve as the precursor of industrial capitalism, as Marx concluded in his *Capital*, Vol. 1 (Marx 2015: 507–8).²² Instead, we focused on the intriguing possibility that after a three-moment Hegelian dialectic, there has always been another non-dialectical possibility whereby the unity of monotheism, gentile whiteness, and religious coercion to concepts of origin, end, and resurrection, namely Christianity, faces its Other, one that it could never conquer. To be “less” and “more” in “being-jew,” Derrida has given us the space to think otherwise than what history has revealed so far. If gentile western Christian metaphysics culminates not in its opposite but in what is irreducibly other, then we have an intriguing proposition. That deconstruction, as a philosophical movement (perhaps the last great movement in the modern continental European philosophy following Hegel, Nietzsche, and Heidegger), requires us to ponder the mystery: we have to understand why the logos (word), thought, and truth of Being originating out of pre-Christian gentile western metaphysics has culminated, paradoxically, which is to say in a non-end, in the unanswerable question, at least for Derrida, of what it means to be one who cannot name “being-jew” (Derrida 2005: 3). No one should name what this means, unless it be appropriated to yet another sacrifice to come, another horror in human history, another “wound” (Derrida 2005: 16), as Derrida says. This is the highest mystery beyond any teleological sense that says the commandments began with Judaism and will necessarily end as such and such. That kind of ending is impossible, and another sense of time and history awaits its appearance.

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- ¹ Jacques Derrida, "Abraham, The Other," in *Judeities: Questions for Jacques Derrida*, ed. Bettino Bergo, Joseph Cohen, and Raphael Zagury-Orly (New York: Fordham University Press, 2005), 1–35.
- ² We are not interested in exploring the statistical projections, say here in the US, when non-Latinx/non-"Hispanic" (a term being phased out for its derogatory insinuation) white individuals will become a minority in which all other non-white racial groups form the majority or when a racial minority today becomes the majority in the future, for example Latinx in the US. And to clarify, the term "white" could mean immigrants from Europe (western and Eastern) and Russia or those who have parents whose ancestors descend from Europe and Russia.
- ³ Truth be told, there is no way to consider a single moment in Derrida's vast corpus without encountering his deconstruction of the western metaphysical heritage, particularly on issues of time and death. But that would be a whole other massive task unto itself. It would require a treatment of death and time, particularly "world-time" and the encounter with Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit* (1807) in Division Two of Heidegger's *Being and Time* (1927), before turning to Derrida's early critiques of both thinkers. We would then move to Derrida's later lectures on the death penalty (given in 1999–2001) and sovereignty (given in 2001–2003) as well as his earlier encounters with Heidegger in the 1965 lectures translated as *Heidegger: The Question of Being and History* (2019), which also treats Hegel's system. That hypothesis would be as follows: Derrida's encounter with Heidegger and Heidegger's treatment of Hegel should be revisited so we can better understand the profound ontological conditions by which we understand epochs, temporality, and world-historical time in relation to the "crisis" of time and death today. And one can argue that in radically different but complementary ways, all three philosophers considered death as the main question running throughout all their works. All three had challenged the history of western metaphysics and its majoritarian Christian culture that preceded them. Perhaps they imagined another beginning or new beginning to western (European) history that would not repeat the same flattening, contradictory, and perhaps oppressive modalities of thinking Being from the ancient Greeks up to Kant, Fichte, and Schelling before Hegel began composing his system. Time and death could be experienced in the same way for all since we are a single biological species as humans. But is it really so when we think of the existential meaning of death? Is the phenomenological encounter with death the same for all? Hegel, Heidegger, and Derrida all answer that question in vastly different ways.
- ⁴ Jacques Derrida, *Dissemination*, trans. Barbara Johnson (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981).
- ⁵ To complicate matters, Heidegger was not only a white gentile, former Catholic, but a self-avowed Nazi. See Andrew Mitchell and Peter Trawny, eds., *Heidegger's Black Notebooks: Responses to Anti-Semitism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2017).
- ⁶ This is in reference to Fukuyama's *The End of History* (1989) and Huntington's *The Clash of Civilizations* (1995), which set the tone for the post-Cold War American imperial design.
- ⁷ Derrida does not capitalize the word "Jew."
- ⁸ Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1969).
- ⁹ Although gentile at birth, the author and his ancestors are not of European origin. The author makes no claims to understanding what it is like to be Jewish, let alone Ashkenazi Jewish, or to be of gentile white European descent for that matter. In the US, the author would be categorized, according to its Census, as South Asian Indian and therefore "brown."

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- ¹⁰ See Patricia Hill Collins, *Intersectionality as Critical Social Theory* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2019); eds. Kimberle Crenshaw, Neil Gotanda, Gary Peller, and Kendall Thomas, *Critical Race Theory: The Key Writings That Formed the Movement* (New York: The New Press, 1996).
- ¹¹ Canadian philosopher Charles Taylor tackles this question in his *A Secular Age* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007).
- ¹² G.W.F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. A.V. Miller (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977).
- ¹³ Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (New York: Harper and Row, 1962).
- ¹⁴ Of course Derrida and Levinas have pondered these issues throughout their writings. See Emmanuel Levinas, *Otherwise Than Being and Beyond Essence*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 2016) and Jacques Derrida, *On the Name*, translated by David Wood, John P. Leavey Jr., and Ian Mcleod (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995).
- ¹⁵ If this were a more concrete sociological presentation, we would raise philosophical questions about intersectionality, the US relation to the EU, diversity, decolonization, and what remains of the continental European western philosophical traditions of mostly Christian and Jewish thinkers through the ages that span the First Temple Period of the Jews with the birth of the Torah (circa 800 BCE) to the present. What happens when non-Christians, non-European or non-Ashkenazi Jews, and people of color, who are not of white European descent but who are rather from Africa, the Middle East, and Asia, create their own metaphysics within “western identity” of Europe and amidst those white peoples whose ancestors descend from Europe in present-day US, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand? If whiteness has been the condition of possibility to construct racial others out of non-whiteness (Black, Brown, Yellow, Red) and has remained an invisible color itself from colonization to the present, then what happens when whiteness becomes an “object” of color, when it colors itself? To this we turn to Derrida’s ruminations of what it means to be Jewish in relation to the white gentile majority that has dominated the European west from antiquity to the present.
- ¹⁶ Biblos.com. <https://biblehub.com/interlinear/genesis/12.htm>
- ¹⁷ This is a moment in the biblical narrative before Abram’s name is changed to the familiar “Abraham.”
- ¹⁸ Biblos.com. <https://biblehub.com/interlinear/genesis/12.htm>
- ¹⁹ Biblos.com. <https://biblehub.com/genesis/12-7.htm>
- ²⁰ Jean-Luc Nancy, *Excluding the Jew Within Us*, trans. Sarah Clift (Cambridge: The Policy Press, 2020).
- ²¹ Biblos.com <https://biblehub.com/genesis/12-7.htm>
- ²² Karl Marx, *Capital*, Vol. 1, trans. S. Mooring and E. Aveling (Progress Publishers, 2015).