The exemplarity of Europe: European identity beyond exceptionalism and universalism

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In the new von der Leyen Commission, established in 2019, the migration portfolio was replaced by a portfolio named "Protecting our European Way of Life." The new portfolio, which was given to the Greek Margaritis Schinas, generated significant controversy and was eventually renamed "Promoting our European Way of Life." Where protection implies withdrawal and mistrust of the other, promotion suggests an emphasis on welcoming and marketing to non-Europeans. This dual centripetal-centrifugal dynamic seems to offer a new way of looking at the complex question of European identity.

As a key object of the political theory of European integration, [1] the question of European identity has hitherto mainly been seen through the prism of three research perspectives. First, discipline-based research investigates the fields corresponding to the historical, philosophical, and political identities of Europe. It asks in what sense and to what extent there is such a thing as a European culture, a European mind or spirit, or a constitutional patriotism composed of specifically European principles and norms. [2] Some theorists combine this synchronic approach with a diachronic one. According to Étienne Tassin, the concept of Europe was first historical and cultural during the Enlightenment, then philosophical until the slaughter of the Second World War, and finally political, starting with

1 - Heidrun Friese and Peter Wagner, "Survey Article: The Nascent Political Philosophy of the European Polity," *The Journal of Political Philosophy* 10, no. 3 (2002): 342–64; Franz C. Mayer and Jan Palmowski, "European Identities and the EU—The Ties that Bind the Peoples of Europe," *Journal of Common Market Studies* 42, no. 3 (2004): 573–98; Jonathan White, "Europe and the Common," *Political Studies* 58, no. 1 (2010): 104–22.

2 - Justine Lacroix, "Europe des valeurs ou Europe des droits?," in *Des valeurs pour l'Europe?*, ed. Samantha Besson, Francis Cheneval, and Nicolas Levrat (Louvain-la-Neuve: Academia-Bruylant, 2008), 27–39; and by the same author, *L'Europe en procès: Quel patriotisme au-delà des nationalismes?* (Paris: Le Cerf, 2004); Dario Castiglione, "Political Identity in a Community of Strangers," in *European Identity*, ed. Jeffrey T. Checkel and Peter J. Katzenstein (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 29–51; Chantal Delsol and Jean-François Mattéi, eds., *L'identité de l'Europe* (Paris: PUF, 2010).

the first projects to integrate the continent institutionally and democratically.[3] The second research perspective is normative, pitting cosmopolitans[4] against communitarians[5] on the question of the precise amount of Europeanness that should exist in our individual and collective identities. Supported by numerous quantitative surveys, it attempts, for example, to evaluate whether people feel "more, equally, or less" European than French, Danish, or Spanish. In theory, these studies intend to reevaluate the boundaries of collective identity in order to judge whether a European *ethos* can emerge out of an *ethnos* that is both constituted by and a constituent of the community as a whole. The third research perspective is analytical and aims to refine the categories of identity using a comprehensive typology.[6] Whether anchored in a foundational, constitutive, or justificational model, discourses on European identity are determined by a particular vision of European integration, which in turn justifies a suitable *praxis*. In the foundational approach, identity is primordial: it is the *sine qua non* of existence. When applied to Europe, the foundational approach attempts to conceptualize the continent's singularity in terms of the particular circumstances that shaped it and made it unique. The constitutive and justificational understandings of identity, meanwhile, deal with a more specifically political vision of the European project. In the constitutive approach, identity becomes a medium of incarnation, of popular support, the foundation upon which a political unit is constituted and organized.[7] In the justificational approach, identity is more pragmatic, in that identification with Europe is seen as a necessary condition for the legitimization of the European Union.

As enlightening as they are, these three research perspectives are not entirely satisfactory because they do not, in themselves, enable us to think comprehensively about the paradoxical dynamics of European identity. The discipline-based approach tends to underestimate the political dimension of the EU's projects of cultural or civilizational integration. Likewise, a strictly constitutional approach to European identity risks underestimating the civilizational logic conveyed, perhaps in spite of itself, by that identity. The normative approach, by pitting the communitarian and cosmopolitan approaches to collective identity against one another, limits itself to an analysis of European identity that wavers between centripetal and exceptionalist on the one hand, and centrifugal and universalist on the other. In this article, we argue that European identity can only be understood in light of its apparent contradictions. Because it creates moral and cultural

3 - Étienne Tassin, "L'Europe entre philosophie et politique," in *L'identite philosophique européenne*, ed. Jacques Poulain and Patrice Vermeren (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1993), 189–210.

4 - Gerard Delanty, "Models of European Identity: Reconciling Universalism and Particularism," *Perspectives on European Politics and Society* 3, no. 3 (2002): 345–59; Ulrich Beck, "Réinventer l'Europe: Une vision cosmopolite," *Cultures & Conflits* 68, no. 4 (2007): 17–29.

5 - Amitai Etzioni, "The Community Deficit," *Journal of Common Market Studies* 45, no. 1 (March 2007): 23–42.

6 - Aliénor Ballangé, "L'hétérologie de l'Europe : Crise identitaire ou défi altéritaire?," *Le Philosophoire* 43, no. 1 (2015): 135–49.

7 - Janie Pélabay, "Lorsque la clarification des sources se fait politiquement constitutive," *Raison publique* 8 (2008): 165–76.

values out of political norms, and social and institutional norms out of the values it aims to promote, and because it tends to universalize the values, principles, and norms that supposedly distinguish Europe from the rest of the world, we believe that European identity integration must be understood through the prism of the amphibological logic [8] of exemplarity. To that end, we start with Jacques Derrida's analyses of the paradoxical nature of the example, which tries to universalize an intellectual model on the basis of a single phenomenon. Next, we study the eighteenth-century context in which European "universalist exceptionalism" emerged in order to define the contours of European exemplarity. Finally, we analyze the ambiguities of European exemplarity through the lens of its current manifestation in contemporary cosmopolitan thought.

The logic of European exemplarity: The relationship between exceptionalism and universalism

What is an example and how can the concept help us rethink the paradoxical logics of identity? To tackle this question, Derrida starts from the role played by the example in Platonic maieutics, which he calls a "very old children's game." [9] In Plato, the example serves to embody or temporarily materialize an abstract and universal idea. Starting with an isolated model, the teacher confers a momentary singularity upon an idea—a principle, a law—which, once it has been grasped in its singular form, can be generalized to a whole set of phenomena in different times and places from the original phenomenon-model. As Derrida writes:

> In the attempt to convince more quickly, let us take an example […]. What example? This one. […] When I say this very example, I already say something more and something else; I say something which goes beyond the *tode ti*, the this of the example. The example itself, as such, overflows its singularity as much as its identity. [10]

The example "overflows" at the same time as it "singularizes" and "identifies." It allows us to say "this" and at the same time something else that will never be entirely reducible to "this." The overflowing is part of the very logic of the example because an example is something I use in order to think about something else. The rationality of the example thus obeys a dual dynamic: centrifugal when it frees itself from the example in order to dissolve into the universal; centripetal when it determines, materializes, embodies an idea in the *tode ti*, the "this" of the singular model. In that respect, the example is an amphibological concept because it contains two distinct, perhaps antinomic principles: it is simultaneously the model and the exception; it is something that has no equivalent but that

8 - In rhetoric, an amphibology is an ambiguous clause that has a double, sometimes antinomic meaning. For example, "I shot an elephant in my pajamas." In this case, the example serves both as model and exception.

9 - Jacques Derrida, "Passions: An Oblique Offering," in *On the Name*, ed. Thomas Dutoit, trans. David Wood, John P. Leavey Jr., and Ian McLeod (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995), 3–34, here 18.

10 - Derrida, "Passions," 17.

aims to establish equivalence and resemblance. It is the amphibological nature of the example that, according to Derrida, generates the antinomy of the "exemplarist logic."[11] Bearing in mind "what a Michelet, for example, says […] of the nation, of France,"[12] Derrida argues that we should take seriously the illogicality of the phrase "France-land-of-the-universal-declaration-of-human-rights." The topological illogicality is blatant, almost provocative: How can the universality of human rights have originated in a "land" singularized by the toponym "France"? Of course, it is important to remember that all universalism is rooted in a center that tries to radiate toward its peripheries. As Derrida writes:

> The value of universality here capitalizes all the antinomies, for it must be linked to the value of exemplarity that inscribes the universal in the proper body of a singularity, of an idiom or a culture […]. […] The self-affirmation of an identity always claims to be responding to the call or assignation of the universal. […] No cultural identity presents itself as the opaque body of an untranslatable idiom, but always, on the contrary, as the irreplaceable inscription of the universal in the singular […]. Each time, the exemplarity of the example is unique.[13]

The center "overflows" because what belongs to it already no longer entirely belongs to it. Its identity consists precisely in no longer being entirely identical to the fictional time of its origin. Universalism disidentifies; but at the same time, Derrida insists, it identifies, because it distinguishes what is thought to be at the origin of this decentering. It disidentifies the defining feature of the origin while identifying what defined the origin: "The alleged universalism […] can be agreed upon only by way of the exemplarist logic in which we have recognized the profound strategy of all nationalisms, patriotisms, or ethnocentrisms."[14]

Why do we see this logic of exemplarity as more revealing of the ambivalences of European identity than the terms "Eurocentrism," "Europeanness," or even "European exceptionalism"? In their insistence on the effects—positive or negative—of the center on its "peripheries" (Eurocentrism), or on what distinguishes the center from its peripheries (Europeanness, European exceptionalism), these terms appear to us to underestimate the ambivalent dynamic at work in the concept of identity: distinction generates equivalence just as much as equivalence generates distinction. Only the absurd logic of the example—which universalizes by singularizing and singularizes by universalizing—reveals that Eurocentrism and European exceptionalism are simply two sides of the same coin, two aspects of the process that simultaneously makes the model into the exception and the exception into the model. In light of this paradoxical dynamic,

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11 - Carlos Lobo, "Les logiques de Derrida," *Rue Descartes* 89–90, no. 2 (2016): 48–69.

12 - Jacques Derrida, *The Politics of Friendship*, trans. George Collins (London/New York: Verso, 2005), 237.

13 - Jacques Derrida, *The Other Heading: Reflections on Today's Europe*, trans. Pascale-Anne Brault and Michael B. Naas (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992), 72–73.

14 - Derrida, *The Politics of Friendship*, 237.

it becomes clear that "the merits that distinguish us"[15] are the very ones that are called into service as a model for the rest of the world. Eurocentrism is founded on European exceptionalism, just as the example's suitability as a model is founded on its exceptionality. This centrifugal-centripetal dynamic of European exemplarity thus enables us to decenter the methodological bias that characterizes ideas of European identity. Indeed, whether in the cosmopolitan or the communitarian approach, European identity is primarily conceived of in terms of Europe.[16] Although the latter emphasizes what distinguishes us while the former emphasizes what "overflows" us and no longer fully belongs to us, both approaches conceptualize the non-European world in terms of Europe; in terms of the center that distinguishes itself from its peripheries or irradiates them with its goods, its representatives, and its principles. By contrast, the logic of exemplarity deconstructs this methodological Eurocentrism by showing that Europe is also constructed in terms of its others; or, more precisely, in terms of the effect that the irradiation of its goods, representatives, and principles onto the rest of the world has had in return on its process of self-definition. If the model is based on the exception, the diffusion of the model in turn leads to the redefinition of the exception; and it is precisely this centrifugal-centripetal—or universalist-exceptionalist—dynamic that makes the question of European identity so complicated.[17] As we will now see, European exemplarity has a history that must be seen through the prism of its asymmetrical identity dynamic.

The origins of European exemplarity: "European civilization" during the Enlightenment

The idea of European exemplarity, whereby Europe was perceived simultaneously as exception and model, really emerged in the eighteenth century with the concept of "civilization." Previously, Europe had projected itself toward its peripheries in a "spirit of conquest"[18] that had little retroactive effect on the image Europeans had of their own belonging to a community. The Roman Empire conquered lands and bodies, while Christian universalism conquered lands and hearts. But in both cases, the dynamic was unilateral: it was a process of projecting oneself beyond one's territory in order to subject populations—bodies and hearts—and take control of new areas. Universalism had not yet returned to a

15 - Jacques Dewitte, *L'Exception européenne: Ces mérites qui nous distinguent* (Paris: Michalon, 2008).

16 - Anthony Pagden, *Facing Each Other: The World's Perception of Europe and Europe's Perception of the World* (Aldershot: Ashgate Press, 2000).

17 - And it is also, in our view, what distinguishes it from French, British, or US universalisms. The latter were conceived from a clearly identifiable and identified center: the nation-state. In such cases, the centrifugal logic wins out over the centripetal because it operates, more unilaterally perhaps, by radiating one (single and) uniform culture toward third countries. Europe, by contrast, constitutes *itself* as a homogeneous unit precisely on the basis of the image reflected back to the center by third countries.

18 - Céline Spector, "Civilisation et empire: La dialectique negative de l'Europe au siècle des Lumières," in *Penser l'Europe au XVIIIe siècle: Commerce, Civilisation, Empire*, ed. Antoine Lilti and Céline Spector (Oxford: Oxford University Press Studies in the Enlightenment, 2014), 93–115.

continental exceptionalism that would allow Europe to elevate itself to the status of example. This retro-projection of European universalism toward its center emerged as a result of the transition from the "spirit of conquest" to the "spirit of commerce."[19] As trading posts and contracts increasingly supplemented colonization and crusades, the image that Europe conveyed (including to itself) of itself evolved, becoming more "civilized" and accommodating the principle of constitutive alterity. Instead of simply being an object to conquer, the other now became a subject against which Europe could distinguish itself. At least, that was the story Europe started to tell itself; Karen O'Brien and John Pocock call it the "Enlightened narrative."[20] From Montesquieu to Condorcet, from Hume to Robertson, a new teleology emerged that opposed the "barbarism" of former imperialism with the new reality of a civilization doubly founded on the emergence of a civil and civilized society.[21]

The term "European civilization" was coined by the Abbé Baudeau, who recommended "converting [the] natives [of North America] not only to the Christian faith, but also to European civilization."[22] During the eighteenth century, the expression gradually moved beyond the missionary sphere and into the discourse of philosophers, while thinkers like Condorcet or Mirabeau started to see in it the historic emergence of a civil society emancipated from the fetters of absolutism and religion. In the nineteenth century, the idea of a European civilization was used to justify an imperialist colonialism[23] that legitimized cultural conquest on the grounds of the "white man's burden."[24] But it is because it still retained its "dialectic"[25] dimension that the eighteenth-century understanding of "European civilization" is relevant to our discussion. Our hypothesis is that a proto-geopolitics of norms and values came into being for the first time in Europe, which aimed not just to civilize the peripheries on the European model, but also to produce the image of European exception that was retro-projected through the type of relationship Europe claimed to have with its others. In other words, the "Enlightened narrative" revealed for the first time, partly in spite of itself, the fundamentally relational nature of European exceptionalism: there is no European exception, only exceptionalist discourses generated by contingent relational strategies.

19 - Spector, "Civilisation et empire."

20 - Karen O'Brien, *Narratives of Enlightenment: Cosmopolitan History from Voltaire to Gibbon* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997); John G. A. Pocock, *Barbarism and Religion. Volume 2: Narratives of Civil Government* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

21 - Norbert Elias, *The Civilizing Process: Sociogenetic and Psychogenetic Investigations*, trans. Edmund Jephcott (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000).

22 - Antoine Lilti and Céline Spector, "Introduction: L'Europe des Lumières, généalogie d'un concept," in Lilti and Spector, *Penser l'Europe au XVIIIe siècle*, 1–15; Nere Basabe, "De l'empire à la fédération," in *L'Idée d'Europe au XVIIIe siècle*, ed. Lara Piccardo (Paris: Honoré Champion, 2009), 39–61.

23 - Michel Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics*, ed. Michel Senellart, trans. Graham Burchell (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 53–54.

24 - Rudyard Kipling, "The White Man's Burden: The United States and the Philippine Islands," *McClure's Magazine* 12, no. 4 (1899).

25 - Spector, "Civilisation et empire."

In his genealogy of the idea of Europe, Foucault sees the eighteenth century as the time of the consecration of a "Europe of collective enrichment" whose "new governmental reason" was entirely contained within the goal of "unlimited economic progress." [26] This economic rationale altered the type of relationship that Europe had with its peripheries:

> It seems to me that it is the first time that Europe appears in its own eyes as having to have the world for its unlimited market. Europe is no longer merely covetous of all the world's riches that sparkle in its dreams or perceptions. Europe is now in a state of permanent and collective enrichment through its own competition, on condition that the entire world becomes its market. [27]

Once it has become a commercial partner, the other must be maintained in a state of asymmetrical dependence that guarantees the center priority in the exploitation of resources and the associated speculation, but it must also remain compliant and solvent so that it can honor the contract that ties it to the center: "the enrichment of one country […] can only really be established and maintained in the long term by a mutual enrichment." [28] According to Foucault, it was this economic rationale that gave rise to the principle of "perpetual peace." The purpose of this new way of relating to others was not to eliminate conflicts between individuals or states. Rather, it acts as the guarantor of the "commercial globalization" [29] that turns the world into the "stake" of the European "player." To be able to enrich itself unrestrictedly, Europe must ensure peaceful relations with its neighbors (now partners); these relations are in turn maintained by a dynamic of reciprocity that is supposed to satisfy the buyer at the same time and to the same extent as the seller. This logic of reciprocity, which developed out of the economic rationale, did not just legitimize the commercial civilization that Europe would develop with "its others"; it also enabled what we have called the retro-projection of a civilizing and civilized Europe at the heart of its process of self-definition. [30]

This way of thinking can be glimpsed between the lines of Enlightenment analyses. Although he does not address the initial trigger that turned economic interest into the "tacit dimension" [31] of the new European rationality, Montesquieu clearly demonstrates the intimate coordination of "benignity" and commerce:

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26 - Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics*, 55.

27 - Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics*, 55.

28 - Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics*, 54.

29 - Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics*, 58.

30 - That is why we primarily approach authors like Montesquieu and Saint-Pierre through their reflections on the commercial, rather than political, destiny of Europe: because it relies on supposedly equitable bilateral exchange, the relational dimension of commerce shaped the image that Europeans would gradually come to see themselves in and to appropriate from their peripheries.

31 - Albert O. Hirschmann, *The Passions and the Interests: Political Arguments for Capitalism Before Its Triumph* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013 [1977]), 69.

> Commerce cures destructive prejudices, and it is almost a general rule that wherever there is benign behavior, there is commerce, and that everywhere there is commerce, there is benign behavior. […] The natural effect of commerce is to dispose us to peace. Two nations that trade together become dependent on each other; […] and all unions are based on reciprocal needs. [32]

Because commerce relies on interdependence, the partner must always be maintained in a promise of mutuality that protects the interests of each party in a supposedly equitable and symmetrical way. As the Abbé de Saint-Pierre says:

> The credit of the Union will consequently be so much greater amongst [traders in the Indies] because they will know with certainty that it seeks only security for its commerce, and that this commerce will be nothing but advantageous for them, that it has no intention of conquering them, and that it will regard as enemies only the enemies of liberty. [33]

Gradually, this promise of mutuality generated norms—commercial contracts led to legally binding codes and then commercial treaties supported by legislation—but also values that Europe boasted of to others before integrating them into its own "grand narrative." The commercial logics of mutuality and reciprocity were rephrased in terms of equality and equity when addressing the rest of the world, before ultimately being reterritorialized and used to define a specifically European spirit. As William Robertson says, [34] "The progress of commerce had considerable influence in polishing the manners of the European nations, and in establishing among them order, equal laws and humanity." [35] Similarly, the production of norms, which initially enabled Europe to protect its interests while guaranteeing that the other would honor its commitments, also enabled Europe to differentiate itself from its others by portraying itself, including to Europeans, as the guardian of reason, law, and opposition to all forms of violence or arbitrariness—understood here as deviations from the contract proposed by the Europeans and agreed to by their partners:

> Concerned with the common interests which united them, […] the nations of Europe felt the need to recognise certain rules amongst themselves, to preside over their pacific ties, independently from treaties; even in the midst of war, other rules, being

32 - Charles L. de Montesquieu, *The Spirit of the Laws*, Book XX, chap. 1–2, trad. Philip Stewart (2018 [1748]), available online: http://montesquieu.ens-lyon.fr/spip.php?article2908 and http://montesquieu.ens-lyon.fr/spip.php?article2909.

33 - Abbé de Saint-Pierre, *Projet pour rendre la paix perpétuelle en Europe* (Paris: Fayard, 1987 [1713]) [our translation].

34 - This quote, and those from Condorcet and Caraccioli, are taken from the valuable anthology compiled by Rotraud von Kulessa and Catriona Seth, *The Idea of Europe: Enlightenment Perspectives* (Cambridge: Open Books, 2017).

35 - William Robertson, *The History of the Reign of the Emperor Charles V* (1769), cited in von Kulessa and Seth, *The Idea of Europe*, 112.

> duly respected, would soften its outrages, diminish its ravages and, at the very least, prevent useless evils.[36]

This process was so effective that the universalism of the "spirit of commerce," as opposed to that of the "spirit of conquest," gave rise to an exceptionalism that allowed Europe to define itself as the center of civilization not just in the eyes of others, but also in its own. The narrativization of "European civilization" was thus not only projected toward its peripheries but also retro-projected toward its center. It radiated its norms and values—in an asymmetrical dynamic that masked a "spirit of conquest" based on influence rather than war—at the same time as it fixed a European identity, a fiction through which Europeans could resemble and recognize one another, a common "spirit" or "mind" that was both model and exception. To quote Louis-Antoine Caraccioli:

> If I examine society, I find it the same for all Europeans, albeit with some nuances. Sweetness makes up the basis, graciousness the polish. […] And so Europe is now a painting, all parts of which are admirably linked; the eye perceives in it a unity which is flattering, an order which is satisfying […].[37]

This European "sweetness," which was generated by the type of relationship that Europe claimed to have with its peripheries, was integrated into the discourse that Europeans started to produce about themselves throughout the nineteenth century and up until the two world wars. The concept of "European civilization" was gradually superseded by that of the "European mind," until war sounded the death knell of this European "graciousness," the raison d'être of its narrative identity.[38]

The current state of European exemplarity: The "European mind" of post-identity cosmopolitanism

For Derrida, Paul Valéry is the last representative of the exemplarist logic as found in the "Old Europe" of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. In his "Crisis of the Mind," a collection of letters published between April and May 1919, Valéry draws a connection between (the crisis of) the "mind" and (the crisis of) "European civilization" in a doubly paradoxical gesture: on one hand, he denounces Europeans for their nationalism while celebrating Europe's exceptionalism; on the other, he laments the fact that Europe is now hardly more than what it *is* while applauding what it *seemed* for two centuries to be. The amphibological logic of exemplarity is here taken to its extreme: the identity of Europe consists precisely of everything that overflows it. As Valéry says, "everything came

36 - Nicolas de Condorcet, *Outlines of an Historical View of the Progress of the Human Mind* (1794), cited in von Kulessa and Seth, *The Idea of Europe*, 40.

37 - Louis-Antoine Caraccioli, *Paris, the Model of Foreign Nations, or French Europe* (1777), cited in von Kulessa and Seth, *The Idea of Europe*, 94.

38 - Tassin, "L'Europe entre philosophie et politique."

to Europe and everything came from it."[39] The amphibology is aporetic because something that came to Europe cannot, logically, be part of it. Nevertheless, the centrifugal and centripetal logics are both simultaneously active here: the exception is universalized at the same time as the model is created out of everything that does not properly belong to it. In this sense, the model reflects and radiates the image of the universal to the point where it becomes what it seems to be at the expense of what it really is. Europe became what it projected of itself from its Others so thoroughly that it became a model for non-Europeans as well as Europeans. As Valéry writes:

> Will Europe become *what it is in reality*—that is, a little promontory on the continent of Asia? Or will it remain *what it seems*—that is, the elect portion of the terrestrial globe, the pearl of the sphere, the brain of a vast body? [40]

This praise of seeming over being [41] subtly reveals the mechanisms of European exemplarity. For Valéry, the identity of Europe does not consist in "becoming what it is" but in claiming to embody and reflect the world as intellectualized and formalized by "the European mind," the "brain of a vast body." Europe *is* not; it seems, reflects, verbalizes, and formalizes. It cannot and must not have any identity other than that of ordering the plurality that constitutes it while simultaneously overflowing it. In this sense, Europe is fundamentally oriented toward the Other; at least to the extent that this Other is singularized and reformulated by the European mind. And it is precisely this overbearing graciousness that Derrida sees as the fulfillment of the logic of European exemplarity. The "archeo-teleological program of all European discourse about Europe," found "from Hegel to Valéry, from Husserl to Heidegger," is both a "traditional discourse" and a "discourse of the modern Western world":

> It dates, it is dated. It is the most current, nothing is more current, but already it dates back. And this currentness reveals a familiarly disquieting wrinkle, discrete [sic] but merciless, the very stigmata of an anachrony […]. It dates from a moment when Europe sees itself on the horizon, that is to say, from its end […], from the imminence of its end. This old discourse about Europe, a discourse at once exemplary and exemplarist, is already a *traditional discourse of modernity.* [42]

If this "wrinkled" and "anachronistic" discourse is, despite everything, still "the most current," it is because, according to Derrida, it prefigures the advent of the cosmopolitan program. Derrida, the inheritor of Hannah Arendt's mistrust of "world government," denounced—at least at first—the hypocrisy of a

39 - Paul Valéry, "The Crisis of the Mind," in *The Collected Works of Paul Valéry: History and Politics*, trans. Denise Folliot and Jackson Mathews (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1956), 23–36, here 31.

40 - Valéry, "The Crisis of the Mind," 31.

41 - Which must be understood in the context of the overall structure of Valéry's thought. He restated this praise in his "A Fond Note on Myth" (1928, in Valéry, *Collected Works*, 37–44), in which he questioned the preeminence of historical science over mythological fable.

42 - Derrida, *The Other Heading*, 27–28.

post-identity philosophical current that hid its Eurocentrism behind a smugly altruistic morality. The same applies to the "transnational," or even the "trans-European," which clearly, although not explicitly, refers to the Habermassian project:[43]

> The logical schema of this argument […] is, to put it quite dryly: "I am (we are) all the more national for being European, all the more European for being trans-European and international; no one is more cosmopolitan and authentically universal than the one, than this 'we,' who is speaking to you." Nationalism and cosmopolitanism have always gotten along well together […].[44]

Because, continues Derrida, "in the logic of this […] cosmopolitical discourse, […] what is proper to Europe would be, analogically, to advance itself as a heading for the universal essence of humanity." Cosmopolitanism, by underestimating the exemplarist vagueness with which it understands its relationship to alterity, thus reenacts the identity-based logic of the modern "archeo-teleological program." Under cover of "post-traditional identity,"[45] cosmopolitanism continues to indicate the direction—the most just, the most moral as it may be—to be taken by Europeans and the rest of the world, forgetting that that direction is always still situated.[46] What Derrida seems to reproach cosmopolitan thinkers[47] for is, therefore, a form of Sartrean bad faith that consists in forgetting that one always speaks *from*—a place, a history, a language—and that this origin forces us to belong to the place, the history, or the language from which we express ourselves. To deny this fact amounts to extending the universalist illusion under cover of a discourse that has been morally reshaped by the concept of "cosmopolitanism." We can only, concludes Derrida, not belong "through and through" or "in every part" to our European cultural identity. It would be hypocritical to deny that we are "fully a part" of it, but we should not be "identical to it"; not be solely, or totally, European. "Fully a part" refers here to the situation of the speaker, while "through and through" defines a foreclosed and complete identity,

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43 - On the disagreement between Derrida and Jürgen Habermas on the subject of cosmopolitanism and Europe, see Matthias Flatscher, "Different Ways to Europe: Habermas and Derrida," in *Europe Beyond Universalism and Particularism*, ed. Susanna Lindberg, Sergei Prozorov, and Mika Ojakangas (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 84–99.

44 - Derrida, *The Other Heading*, 47–48.

45 - Jürgen Habermas, "Historical Consciousness and Post-Traditional Identity," *Acta Sociologica* 31, no. 1 (1988): 1–13.

46 - This *situatedness* is fundamental for Derrida. Even at the end of his life, when his relationship to cosmopolitanism and the destiny of Europe had changed, he remembered and noted that his work was anchored in a cultural and geographical reality from which his words could not be removed: "I am European, I am no doubt a European intellectual, and I like to recall this, I like to recall this to myself […]." (*The Other Heading*, 82). This "I" does not belong to some kind of unspecific "global," "post-national," or "trans-European" citizenship, but to a form of identity that *I* must acknowledge in order to avoid the bad faith of a supposedly post-identity universalist discourse.

47 - Cosmopolitan thinkers that Derrida makes little attempt to distinguish between; this is one of the limitations of his critical stance. On this topic, see Gerard Delanty, "The Cosmopolitan Imagination: Critical Cosmopolitanism and Social Theory," *The British Journal of Sociology* 57, no. 1 (2006): 25–47.

as it were "with nothing leftover,"[48] with no room for any kind of alterity within itself.

It is also important not to reduce Derrida's normative-critical stance to his empirico-pragmatic support for refugees or for European integration. His critique of rootless cosmopolitanism, which he accuses of reproducing the exemplarist logic of modern discourse, is actually more nuanced, or even inconsistent with certain stances he adopted toward the end of his life. Two events precipitated this normative-pragmatic rupture: the September 11 attacks and the ratification of a European Constitution. More precisely, it was the US defense policy deployed in the wake of the attacks that led to the reconciliation between Derrida's pragmatic stances and Habermas's theoretical position.[49] After agreeing to the proposal of a joint work[50] outlining their principal points of agreement and disagreement, particularly in relation to the "concept of September 11," Derrida and Habermas cowrote and signed an opinion column in *Libération* in which they called urgently for a "common foreign policy."[51] This radical article, surprising in more ways than one, implicitly reenacted most of the exemplarist mechanisms hitherto denounced by Derrida. First, they argue for the defense of a common and homogeneous "mind" throughout Europe. Not just that "there can and must be no separatism" in the future European Constitution, but that we must recognize a sort of "Western mind" based on:

> Christianity and capitalism [the heading to which Derrida's "other heading" was opposed], natural science and technology, Roman law and the Code Napoléon, the bourgeois-urban form of life, democracy and human rights, the secularization of state and society […].

Second, this "through and through" identity must adopt a civilizing role toward its peripheries, insofar as:

> The EU already *offers itself* as a form of "governance beyond the nation-state," which could *set a precedent* in the post-national constellation.[52]

Finally, the protection of an exceptional "European mind" legitimized by a universal civilizing destiny is joined by the relational dimension that characterizes the exemplarist logic: we are what we seem to be in the eyes of our peripheries:

48 - Évelyne Grossman, "Appartenir, selon Derrida," *Rue Descartes* 52, no. 2 (2006): 6–15, here 8.

49 - It is not incidental that it was precisely the United States, that "projection of the European mind" (Valéry, *Collected Works*, 329), that was able to reconcile Derrida's and Habermas's contradictory views regarding the specific identity of Europe.

50 - Giovanna Borradori, ed., *Philosophy in a Time of Terror: Dialogues with Jürgen Habermas and Jacques Derrida* (Chicago/London: The University of Chicago Press, 2003).

51 - Jacques Derrida and Jürgen Habermas, "February 15, or, What Binds Europeans Together: Plea for a Common Foreign Policy, Beginning in Core Europe," in *Old Europe, New Europe, Core Europe: Transatlantic Relations After the Iraq* War, ed. Daniel Levy, Max Pensky, and John Torpey (London/New York: Verso), 3–13.

52 - Derrida and Habermas, "February 15, or, What Binds Europeans Together," my emphasis.

> Since then, features of a common political mentality have taken shape, so that *others often recognize us as Europeans* rather than as Germans or French […].[53]

The contrast between the arguments put forward in this opinion piece and the arguments that Derrida was making just a decade earlier may seem remarkable. We should certainly refrain from making overly schematic comparisons between the complex expression of a critical work like *The Other Heading* and the partisan arguments of an opinion piece aimed at a wide audience. Nevertheless, this article illustrates the full extent of the tension between an anti-exemplarist normative-critical position and a more ambiguous empirical-pragmatic position. Although, from the normative-critical perspective, it is important to expose the pretense of a cosmopolitanism stripped of any exemplarist logic, it may be legitimate, indeed necessary, to "take sides"—if not "through and through" then at least as "fully a part"—on behalf of a particular civilizational model, even if it is essentially discursive. In response to the supposedly "blunt hegemonic politics" of its superpower ally, Europe must, according to Derrida and Habermas, exercise its responsibility as a "normative power,"[54] although without being fooled, Derrida would add, by the exemplary character of the model. One of his last articles summarized this tension *exemplarily*, so to speak:

> I am not known for being a Eurocentric philosopher. Rather, for forty years, I have been accused of the contrary. But I believe that, without Eurocentric illusions and pretentions, without the slightest pro-European nationalism, […] we must fight for what this name [i.e., Europe] represents today […]. Thus we must fight for what of Europe remains irreplaceable for the world to come, for it to become more than a market or a single currency, […] more than a new armed force. Though on this particular point, I am tempted to think that it needs a military force and a foreign policy capable of supporting a transformed UN, with its headquarters in Europe, having the means to implement its resolutions without leaving them up to the interests or unilateral opportunism of the techno-economic-military power of the United States.[55]

Conclusion

Thus, the idea of European exemplarity, in all its tension and ambiguity, still seems entirely relevant in the early twenty-first century. And perhaps it is even, to paraphrase Derrida, more relevant than ever at a time when makeshift boats continue to ferry thousands of refugees for whom Europe is both the Other and the promised land. In order to address this social, cultural, and political challenge while reassuring European nationalisms, a portfolio for the "Protection" and then the "Promotion" of the "European Way of Life" was established by the von der Leyen Commission. In light of what we have just discussed, it is clear

53 - Derrida and Habermas, "February 15, or, What Binds Europeans Together," my emphasis.

54 - On this subject, see Zaki Laïdi, *La Norme sans la force: L'énigme de la puissance européenne* (Paris: Presses de Sciences Po, 2005); Ian Manners, "Normative Power Europe: A Contradiction in Terms?," *Journal of Common Market Studies* 40, no. 2 (2002): 235–58.

55 - Jacques Derrida, "A Europe of Hope," *Epoché* 10, no. 2 (Spring 2006): 407–12.

how much this idea of "promotion," which can only be the flip side of "protection," resonates with a universalism whose singular object—"*the* European way of life"—recalls its inevitable exceptionalist twin.

One question remains: How can we become an "us," situated as "fully a part" of Europe, which wholeheartedly welcomes the Other, without yielding to the double temptation of either a bad-faith cosmopolitan rootlessness or an identity-based opportunism that consists in seeing the other as "our" own projection? Three competing options have emerged in the literature over the last few years, each of which answers the question in its own way. The oldest is expressed in the idea of hospitality to which Derrida added the notion of "unconditionality" around the turn of the millennium. Drawing on the Christian and Kantian traditions while also attempting to go beyond them, Derrida champions the ethics of a hospitality that is no longer limited to notions of integration and tolerance. As Derrida summarizes, "if […] I am tolerant, it is because I wish to limit my welcome, to retain power and maintain control over the limits of my 'home.'" [56] This hospitality is tied to the "way of life," the internal regulation to which I subject all new arrivals precisely because I am in my home and they are invited—and therefore only conditionally. Unconditional hospitality, for Derrida, is rather the welcome of the other for the other's sake, without reservations and without any requirement for him to give me anything or to respect, *a priori*, any of my laws. Derrida himself admits that this idea of a radical absence of control is ultimately incompatible with our political and legal organization. It is rather an ethic that must be upheld without any claim to fulfillment. In response to this "impossible duty" of hospitality, two other alternatives [57] have emerged in the context of a European identity that is both situated and open to alterity: Rémi Brague's notion of an "eccentric" identity, [58] and Marc Crépon's concept of an identity based on translation. [59] The former emphasizes the "inherently foreign" nature of European identity by appealing to the "Romanness" of a Europe that was created by endlessly integrating, or even assimilating, everything that came to it. The latter demonstrates that "Europe came into being through translation": there is no "common European culture" other than the one that treats Dante as a European author because he has been translated into English or German, or Goethe as a European author because he has been translated into Italian or English. Welcoming the other, recognizing his difference, which we cannot assimilate, allowing him to translate *himself* without necessarily trying to understand him—here, perhaps, is an essential form of European an-identity.

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56 - Borradori, *Philosophy in a Time of Terror*, 127.

57 - We end our article with three French suggestions for overcoming the aporias of European identity. Numerous others have been put forward from a wide range of other geographical, historical, and linguistic contexts. But, primarily for the sake of coherence, we have chosen to remain within the post-Derrida philosophical tradition; Marc Crépon and Rémi Brague themselves both refer to that tradition, although in different ways.

58 - Rémi Brague, *Europe, la voie romaine* (Paris: Gallimard, 1999 [1992]).

59 - Marc Crépon, *Altérités de l'Europe* (Paris: Galilée, 2006).

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Abstract

The exemplarity of Europe: European identity beyond exceptionalism and universalism

Although the issue of European identity is the subject of a literature that is already amply defined, few studies have so far looked into its relational dynamics. In this article, we argue that European identity is partly generated by the image that Europe first intends to produce vis-à-vis third countries. Using Jacques Derrida's work on the logic of exemplarity, we examine the paradoxical rationality of a Europe that has constantly defined itself as a model and an exception with respect to its "peripheries." By tracing the origins of European exemplarity back to the eighteenth century, and then comparing them with current philosophical controversies on the EU, we propose to qualify the theoretical opposition between universalism and European exceptionalism on the one hand, and cosmopolitan and communitarian approaches on the other.

Résumé

Une exception exemplaire : la logique paradoxale de l'identité européenne

Si l'enjeu de l'identité européenne fait l'objet d'une littérature déjà amplement balisée, peu d'études se sont jusqu'à présent penchées sur sa dynamique relationnelle. Dans cet article, nous soutenons que l'identité européenne est en partie générée par l'image que l'Europe entend d'abord produire vis-à-vis des États tiers. En recourant aux travaux de Jacques Derrida sur la logique de l'exemplarité, nous interrogeons la rationalité paradoxale d'une Europe qui n'a cessé de s'auto-définir comme modèle et exception auprès de ses « périphéries ». En faisant remonter au 18e siècle l'origine de l'exemplarité européenne, puis en la confrontant aux débats philosophiques contemporains, nous proposons de nuancer l'opposition théorique entre universalisme et euro-exceptionnalisme d'une part, et approches cosmopolitique et communautarienne de l'autre.