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“Animals Have No Hand”

An Essay on Animality in Derrida

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I. INTRODUCTION: NOT THE WORST, THE LEAST VIOLENCE

We are trying set up the possibility of a more sufficient response to what Derrida, in *L'animal que donc je suis*, calls a “war of the species.” This war is part of globalization, which is itself a form of war, a form of pacification of all opponents; it is, in fact, as Derrida says in “Faith and Knowledge,” “globalatinization” (1998a). But with globalatinization, we see as well that its universal movement erodes the borders between nation-states. The erosion of the borders, for Derrida, increases the probability of the worst happening. The structure of the worst amounts to making two into one: it is a form of totalization. Or, it attempts to separate one from the other in order to make one alone: man apart from animal, man apart from the parasite, man unscathed and apart from (to use one of Derrida’s “old names”) the “pharmakon.” In “Plato’s Pharmacy,” we encountered the

pharmakon as the “mixture-element,” the element which is itself a mixture (1972a, 146; 1981, 127). But more importantly, the *pharmakon* is ambivalent; it has no value in itself (it is nevertheless not monovalent) (1972a, 144–45; 1981, 126–27); the *pharmakon* in fact destabilizes all value positing. The *pharmakon* then is violence itself (or even radical evil in the sense of evil at the root, “arche-violence” [1967a, 164–65; 1974, 112]), violence that we are not able to eliminate, a violence that indicates a fundamental weakness or fault in us, in all living beings. The worst violence, however, consists in precisely the attempt to eliminate the evil of the *pharmakon* once and for all. *In contrast*, what we are seeking is a more sufficient response to this worst violence, a response that is more sufficient than the reductionism of biological continuity and the separationism of a metaphysical opposition. All attempts bound up with the question of the self (the *autos* or *ipse*), such as animal rights (based on the idea of human rights), fall into one of these two sides: biological continuism or metaphysical separationism. The more sufficient response means that we do not and *should not* want to completely eliminate the minimal violence. What we are seeking is a lesser violence, even the *least* violence.

To approach this more sufficient response, we are going to enter into some of Derrida’s most difficult but also most powerful argumentation. It is well known that all of Derrida’s reflections on animality engage his reading of Heidegger, especially in “Heidegger’s Hand (*Geschlecht 2*).” For Derrida, what always defines Heidegger’s thinking (or, more precisely, what defines one of the voices of Heidegger’s thinking) is the idea of gathering, *Versammlung*, *rassemblement*. As Derrida says: “gathering together (*Versammlung*) is always what Heidegger privileges” (1987c, 438; 1987b, 182). Thanks to this article, we shall see that Heidegger’s claim, found in *What is Called Thinking*, that apes (and more generally animals) have no hand (and have no hand precisely in the singular) implies that they do not have access to gathering, and that means to the phenomenological “as such” (1987c, 355; 1987b, 173). And especially they have no access to the “as such” of death (Heidegger 1961, 51; 1968, 16; 1959, 90). The lack of access to death proper explains why, for Heidegger, animals cannot be the privileged beings by means of which

one is able to reopen the question of being. They do not question their own being. In contrast, as is well known, *Dasein* is able to question its own being since the possibility of death as such defines its proper being. Only from this possibility is it possible to reopen the question of being. To render the claim *uncertain* that we, as human existence, as *Dasein*, have access to the “as such” of death therefore will do nothing less than destabilize the entire transcendental architectonic structure of *Being and Time*. As Derrida says on the final page of *L’animal que donc je suis*, “the stakes naturally—I’m not hiding this—are so radical that what is at issue is the ‘ontological difference,’ the ‘question’ of being, the whole structure of Heidegger’s discourse” (2006, 219). The whole structure of Heidegger’s thought is at stake when we make the separation between human existence and animal life *uncertain*.

Here, we are going to take up, as I have already said, Derrida’s very difficult and powerful argumentation; this argumentation is directed against the “as such,” the appearance of something as such, as essence. This argumentation, which is found in the second essay of the 1992 *Aporias*, “Awaiting (at) the Arrival,” concerns the possibility of a pure or proper autoaffection. I am going to elaborate on this argumentation by examining three other arguments against pure autoaffection that Derrida has presented—arguments that are just as important and just as powerful: the argument against hearing oneself speak, found in his 1967 study of Husserl, *La voix et le phénomène (Voice and Phenomenon)*;¹ the argument against keeping a secret, found in his 1986 essay “Comment ne pas parler”; and finally the argument against sovereignty, found in “The Reason of the Strongest,” the first essay in *Rogues* from 2002. This elaboration will allow us to understand the poverty of world that Heidegger attributes to animals in *Fundamental Problems of Metaphysics* (the course from 1929–30, *Gesamtausgabe* 29/30); we will understand this poverty as *suffering* (Heidegger 1983, 175; 1995, 186). What becomes undeniable, as we move forward, is that animals suffer.

II. THE “CONFRONTATION” WITH HEIDEGGER’S THOUGHT

Introduction: The Three Points of the “Confrontation”

At the beginning of any examination of the relationship between Derrida and Heidegger, it seems to me that it is very important to recall the following comment from “Heidegger’s Hand”: “For I [Derrida] never ‘criticize’ Heidegger without recalling that this can be done from other places in [Heidegger’s] own text. His text could not be homogeneous and is written with two hands, at least” (1987c, 447; 1987b, 189). We must never forget, it seems to me, that Derrida’s thought is always very close to that of Heidegger. In fact, I think that we have to say that Derrida’s thought would not exist without that of Heidegger. Nevertheless, we also know that Derrida’s thought is very far away from that of Heidegger. Let us accentuate this distance as Derrida himself has done in “Acts: The Meaning of a Given Word,” at the end of *Memoirs for Paul de Man*. There, he lays out three “points” of an “Auseinandersetzung” (literally, a “setting over and against one another”)—a “confrontation,” as we say in English, between his own thought and, as he says, “a certain voice of Heidegger” (a phrase that makes us recall the heterogeneity of Heidegger’s text) (1988, 134; 1986, 139). The three points are as follows. *First*, for Heidegger, the essence of technology and, by extension, rhetoric (Derrida has been speaking of de Man’s understanding of rhetoric) is nothing technological or rhetorical. In contrast, for “deconstruction” (that is, Derrida’s thought), the essence of technology and the thinking of this essence retain something technological; similarly, the thinking of rhetoric is not foreign to rhetoric. Not being foreign to one another, the opposition between technology, which is the accident, and the essence of technology becomes impossible. In deconstruction, there is always “parasitical contamination,” and contamination always disturbs architectonic order. The second point also concerns architectonic order. So, *second*, Derrida claims that “memory without anteriority” cannot become a Heideggerian theme. Heidegger’s text maintains an indispensable reference to “originary.” This point means that, in Heidegger, memory is

always a modification or repetition of an origin, of a past that was present. In Derrida, however, memory is first, which means that repetition (and therefore writing and technology) is first: the memory *not* of a past present but the memory of a past that was never present. Any “originairism,” outside of and sheltered from technology and writing, is, therefore to be deconstructed (1988, 136; 1986, 141). And then most importantly, we have the *third* point. According to Derrida, for Heidegger, the essence of memory resides in gathering.² Gathering, in Heidegger, determines the *logos* and language through the idea of *legein*. The *logos* gathers into an “as such,” into essence, into the unconcealment of truth in presence and nakedness, into simplicity and propriety. In contrast, in deconstruction, in Derrida’s thought, there is no gathering that does not have a “nodal resistance” (1987d, 24; 1989b, 9). Gathering never reduces the “disjunctive difference” (1988, 136; 1986, 141); there is always dispersion, complexity, and impropriety. There is always violence. A different kind of *logos* violently prevents the gathering of the disjunction. To put this as simply as possible, it prohibits the gathering of the disjunction into presence, which means that something presents itself without any mediation right before my eyes right now, in the moment.

*Section 1: Animals Have No Hand (The Privation
of the “As Such” of Beings)*

It is this idea of gathering that supports Heidegger’s claim in *What is Called Thinking* that animals “have no hand” (there is not even a “perhaps,” “vielleicht,” or “peut-être” here) (see Derrida 1987c, 428; 1987b, 173). The context for this claim is, as the title of the book indicates, thought. Heidegger calls thinking *Handwerk*, a work of the hand. But handiwork is not grasping, and here Heidegger plays on the literal meaning of the word “concept” [*Begriff*], which implies grasping or taking. For Heidegger, thinking is not conceptual; the hand is not for grasping. Apes therefore do not think because they have no hand [*er hat keine Hand*]; they have only prehensile organs. Heidegger says, “the hand is infinitely different from all grasping organs—paws, claws, or fangs—different by an *abyss* of essence” (1961, 51; 1968, 16; 1959, 90). This abyss of essence places a gap or separation between

the hand and the prehensile organs, between “the human *Geschlecht*, our *Geschlecht*, and the animal *Geschlecht*” (Derrida 1987c, 428; 1987b, 173).³ The hand is a *thing apart* from the prehensile organ.

Now, according to Derrida in “Heidegger’s Hand (*Geschlecht* 2),” the separation between prehensile organs and the hand really concerns the difference between giving and taking (1987c, 430; 1987b, 174–75). In *What is Called Thinking*, Derrida stresses that Heidegger’s hand is not just for giving something, but for giving *itself* (“sie recht sich, s’offre”) (Derrida quotes this passage at length). In this reflexive verb, we see the problem of autoaffection: the hand gives purely when it gives itself, when it gives the same, *autos*. This nontransitive gift, this gift of itself (in English, of course, we can say “give me a hand”) is what really defines the hand for Heidegger. For Heidegger, as Derrida stresses, “the prehensile organ can *only* take hold of [*prendre*] and manipulate the thing insofar as, in any case, it does not have to deal with the thing as such, does not let the thing be what it is in its essence. The organ has no access to the essence of the being as such” (1987c, 431–32; 1987b, 175; emphasis Derrida’s).⁴ Let me anticipate a bit here: Derrida is questioning if it is possible to make a separation between giving and taking. It seems to me that, in order to give itself, the hand must *take* the place of something else. For example, if I give my life for you, I take my life from myself. If I give my hand to your hand, I take the place of the space open in your palm for your other hand or for any other hand. If it is not possible to separate giving and taking, then, in the background in “Heidegger’s Hand (*Geschlecht* 2)” we see Derrida’s old problem with the difference between indication and expression, in particular with the general sense of “pointing,” “montrer,” or “zeigen.”⁵ This old problem concerns the indeterminate sense of showing, a sense that is prior to the distinction between indication and expression. If man is a sign (as Heidegger quotes Hölderlin’s “Mnemosyne” in *What is Called Thinking*), then doesn’t he rely on the structure of replacement that precedes giving and taking (1967b, 98–99; 1973, 88–89), on the indeterminate structure of pointing, a structure on which the sign making of animals also relies? Is it possible to separate the pointing with the finger of man from the sign making of animals when they trace paths with their paws? So, we can see that what Heidegger calls an abyss of essence depends on the question of

language. For Heidegger, the animal cannot name (and as we see in *L'animal que donc je suis*, it is always named). Yet, to quote Derrida once more (this time from *Of Spirit*), “this inability to name is not primarily or simply linguistic; it derives from the properly *phenomenological* impossibility of speaking the phenomenon whose phenomenality as such, or whose very *as such*, does not appear to the animal and does not unveil the being of the being [*étant*]” (1987d, 84; 1989b, 53; emphasis Derrida’s). For Heidegger, animalistic signs, quite simply, do not grant access to the “as such.” In other words, animals cannot do phenomenology (although—this is also a strange consequence—Heidegger’s “abyss of essence” implies that animals think conceptually, maybe like machines). In any case (and this is the central point), animals do not have access to the “as such” or to gathering. Animals therefore are deprived of the hand, which means that they are *deprived* of language. What is the nature of this privation?

Derrida’s crucial discussion of privation occurs, *not* in “Heidegger’s Hand (*Geschlecht 2*),” but in *Of Spirit*. *Of Spirit* is a chronological study of Heidegger’s use of the word “Geist,” starting with *Being and Time* and ending with Heidegger’s discussion of Trakl’s poetry in the 1950s.⁶ For obvious reasons (Heidegger’s political involvements) Derrida pauses at Heidegger’s writings from the 1930s, in particular at *Introduction to Metaphysics*. In *Introduction to Metaphysics*, Derrida reminds us that Heidegger says, on the one hand, that the world is always a spiritual world [*geistig*], and on the other, that the animal has neither world nor environment [*Umwel*] (1987d, 75; 1989b, 47). According to Derrida, these comments mean that “animality is not of spirit” (not being “of spirit” also implies that they are not evil or finite), since, as we can see, being “geistig” defines a world, of which they have none (1987d, 76; 1989b, 47). But, as Derrida immediately points out, these comments from *Introduction to Metaphysics* seem to contradict the three “theses” about world that Heidegger presented three years earlier in *Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics* (see also 1992b, 291; 1995, 277). The three well-known theses, are (1) the stone is without world [*weltlos*]; (2) the animal is poor in world (*weltarm*); and (3) man is world-forming [*weltbildend*]. The question for Derrida is: what does world poor mean? This is still the question of privation.⁷

The word “poverty” [*Armut, pauvreté*] found in the second thesis could enclose, Derrida claims, two hypotheses (1987d, 77; 1989b, 48).⁸ *First*, poverty could imply a *difference of degree* separating indigence from wealth, in which case man would be rich in world and in spirit, while the animal would be poor. *Second*, if the animal is poor in *world*, the animal must have *some* world—a little, not a lot—and thus some spirit. After all, Heidegger distinguishes the animal from the stone, which is indeed worldless and aspiritual. Heidegger, however, rejects the first “difference of degree” hypothesis. If the animal has a world, its world is not a species or a degree of the human world. The difference is not one of degree, but one of essence. The animal “lacks” world; it does not have enough world, but this is not a quantitative relation to the entities of the world. It is not the case that the animal has *less* access to things than does the human: “[the animal] has an *other* relation to beings” (1987d, 78; 1989b, 49; emphasis Derrida’s). In this discussion, we are very close to Derrida’s own thinking. As he shows quite clearly, Heidegger’s logic seems to want to combine a lack, a “privation” [*Entbehrung*], which implies degrees, with a difference of alterity. “The lack of the world for the animal,” Derrida says, “is not a pure nothingness, but it must *not* be referred, on a scale of homogeneous degree, to a plentitude, *or* to a non-lack [*weltlos*: no world] in a heterogeneous order, for example that of man” (1987d, 78; 1989b, 49; emphasis mine). Derrida is saying that, for Heidegger, animals in their world poverty have something of the world—their lack is not a “pure nothingness”; they are not “*weltlos*.” But insofar as they have “some,” insofar as they have something positive, their “world” must not be measured, on a homogeneous quantitative scale, by the “plentitude” of the human world. However, in order to remove the animal “world” from a quantitative scale determined by the human world, one must *not* assert that they have nothing at all like a world, nothing at all like a human world. If one did that, one would turn the animal poverty into a mere negation, which would turn the animals into stones. So, as Derrida concludes, the poverty of the animal has to be absolutely different from that of the stone. The animals have some world; they are not *weltlos*, and yet, the poverty of the animals must be absolutely different from the having world of man, since the animals’ world is not a mere difference of degree from the human world. This is a difficult idea.

The difficulties of the logic, for Derrida, seem to evolve out of the fact that Heidegger claims that animals can have world, that they have a power, but a power not actualized. But, if their poverty comes from an inactualized possibility, then isn't it possible to say that man, too, may be deprived of world? He has possibilities that are not actualized (Derrida 1987d, 79; 1989b, 49–50). He *may not* form a world; world may remain hidden in him just as it is hidden in animals. We are in the vicinity of the risks that are associated with this thinking: biological continuism and metaphysical separationism. Heidegger's analysis respects a difference of structure and looks to break with a difference of degree, with continuism. But it does not seem to avoid anthropocentrism because of the idea of privation. Lack or privation, according to Derrida, can take on meaning only from a nonanimal world; a negation *separates* animal world poverty from the human world. Now, the idea of nonanimal world refers us back to the questioning "we" of *Dasein*. In order to be world-forming, in order to have an understanding of the world [*Weltverstehen*], we must have access to the "as such" of beings. And to have access to the "as such" of beings, we must question our own being. We cannot be indifferent to our own being (see also Derrida 1987d, 79; 1989b, 49–50). For Heidegger, however, even with their prehensile organs, animals never point at themselves (even though we seem to have a fragile distinction between giving and taking). For Heidegger, they never say "ego sum." The reason for this lack lies in the fact that animals do not properly die: animals only perish [*verenden*] (see also Derrida 1996a, 76; 1993a, 39). Human existence, however, *Dasein*, we have access (according to Heidegger) to death as such: we die [*sterben*]. For this reason, we are the privileged "we" with which *Being and Time* opens. The privileged "we" sets up the transcendental architectonic that organizes all of *Being and Time*, making all other empirical investigations of death derivative. I have already quoted this comment from Derrida, but it bears repeating: "The stakes naturally—I'm not hiding this—are so radical that what is at issue is the 'ontological difference,' the 'question' of being, the whole structure of Heidegger's discourse" (2006, 219; translation mine).

*Section 2: Dasein Stands before Itself (The Privation
of the “As Such” of Death)*

It seems to me that the argumentation that Derrida uses to destabilize “the whole structure” occurs in *Aporias*, especially in the second essay, “Awaiting (at) the Arrival” (“S’attendre à l’arrivée”).⁹ His target is indeed the transcendental architectonic of *Being and Time*. In “Awaiting (at) the Arrival,” Derrida says, “[Heidegger’s] order of order [that is, the method Heidegger follows in *Being and Time*] belongs to the great ontological-juridico-transcendental tradition, and I believe it is undeniable, impossible to dismantle [*indémontable*], and invulnerable (at least this is the hypothesis that I am following here)—except [*sauf*] perhaps in this particular case called death.” The uniqueness of the case of death, as Derrida is going to show, “excludes it from the system of *possibilities* and specifically from the order that it may, in turn, condition” (1996a, 86–87; 1993a, 45; emphasis mine). The word “possibility” in this quote is very important. As we have already stressed, the result of the dismantling will not be that now we have to say that animals have access to death as such. Rather, what Derrida is trying to show is that humans, as *Dasein*, like animals, do *not* have that access either.

The weight of Heidegger’s structure for Derrida bears upon the ontological difference between *Dasein*’s being and *Vorhandenheit* and *Zuhandenheit* (present-at-hand and ready-to-hand, as we say in English). In *Being and Time* (para. 49), Derrida points out that Heidegger’s claim that all of the anthropological or biological ways of interpreting death forget the essence of *Dasein*. The essence of *Dasein* as a being, its proper being, is precisely possibility, the being-possible: *Möglichkeit*. The idea of possibility—and the composition of this idea—is crucial for Derrida, as it “brings together *on the one hand* [emphasis mine] the sense of the virtuality or of the imminence of the future, of the ‘that can always happen [*arriver*] at any instant,’ it is *necessary to expect it, I am expecting it, we are expecting it* [*il faut s’y attendre, je m’y attends, nous nous y attendons*; emphasis Derrida’s] and *on the other hand* [emphasis mine] the sense of ability, of the possible as that of which I am capable, that for which I have the power [*puissance*], the ability [*pouvoir*] or the potentiality” (1996a, 113; 1993a, 62). In short, “*Möglichkeit*” has two

senses: imminence and ability.¹⁰ On the basis of these two senses of possibility, Derrida extracts from *Being and Time* “two typical ontological statements” concerning possibility, but these two statements are inseparable, forming “a single aporetic sentence” (1996a, 115; 1993a, 64).

Here is the *first* ontological statement. Death is *not* just a possibility for *Dasein*, it is *Dasein*'s *most proper possibility*. In other words, the possibility of death defines what most belongs to *Dasein*—what *Dasein* most owns. Derrida stresses the following passage from paragraph 50: “Death is a possibility-of-being that *Dasein* itself has to *take over* in every case [zu übernehmen: with the verb “nehmen,” “take,” we are not very far from the problem of the hand; but let us continue with the quote]. With death, *Dasein* stands before itself [steht sich . . . bevor] in its own potentiality for being (p. 250)” (Heidegger 1962 quoted in Derrida 1993a, 64; 1996a, 115–16; emphasis in Heidegger's quote mine). This quote makes use of the Macquarrie-Robinson English translation of *Being and Time*, which renders “steht sich bevor” as “stands before itself.”¹¹ Derrida, however, renders “steht sich bevor” by means of the French verb “s’attendre.” There are three ways of interpreting the French reflexive verb “s’attendre,” according to Derrida. *First*, there can be a reflexive construction with no object, in which case I await myself: one simply awaits oneself [on s’attend soi-même]. This interpretation is *tautological*; *Dasein* awaits *itself* as waiting for the possibility that is most *its own*, the same as itself. But then, *second*, we can add an object to the sentence, which requires a preposition, the “à,” or the “to.” Then we have transitivity, which relates the waiting to something else, to the other, which brings us to what might happen, to what Derrida here calls the “arrivant” (1996a, 117; 1993a, 65). This interpretation is *heterological*. *Dasein* awaits itself but this “itself” is, in the second interpretation, other than itself. This composition of same and other brings us to the *third* interpretation, which associates the tautological with the heterological. The verb “s’attendre” can be interpreted as both transitive and reflexive: “wait for each other,” “s’attendre l’un l’autre.” This construction amounts to a kind of double transitivity (*to* oneself and *to* the other). But the construction is even more heterological when the waiting for each other is related to death (1996a, 117; 1993a, 65). Even though death is what most defines *Dasein*'s propriety, it is

always other since this (“what can always happen or arrive”) takes what is most one’s own away. It takes all possibilities away.

But in order to really understand the heterological nature of the construction, we must return to Heidegger’s German preposition “bevor.” As in English—and here Derrida explicitly quotes the Macquarrie-Robinson English translation of *Being and Time* (1996a, 119; 1993a, 66)—this preposition can have a temporal sense and a spatial sense. In fact, Derrida splits the two senses into two French prepositions, “avant” (which is temporal) and “devant” (which is spatial). If in death I am “standing before myself,” then “before” is “devant,” which implies some distance from myself, myself *as* another; as in “standing before a mirror” (1996a, 119; 1993a, 66): the other then is over there; death is over there. There is, as Derrida would say, “espacement.” Passing now to the temporal sense of the preposition, we can say that, in death, I stand “before” myself, “avant,” earlier, which means that I, *me myself*, am *already* out there at the limit of death. If I am already out there, over there and not here, then I have already (earlier) died. If I have already died, then my waiting for myself is late, or, more precisely, later; I’ve missed my rendezvous. The simplest way to understand this lateness is to recognize that, if what most properly defines me is the possibility of death, then what I am most fundamentally is a process of dying. From the very first moment, as soon as I have taken the very first breath or have the very first heartbeat, I have the possibility of dying, of suffocating or having a heart attack, which means that, in a sense, I have already died, which means that my death is always already in the past. My death is what I find myself with from the very first moment. Or, we can think about the lateness in the following way. The lateness is an essential necessity when what I am waiting for is my death: if I made the rendezvous, then I would be dead. I would therefore no longer be there and I would miss the rendezvous. Or, if I am still alive and still here, then I am not there, not dead, and once again the rendezvous has been missed. In short, *Dasein*’s standing before itself in death makes the simultaneity of the one and the other impossible. As Derrida says, “death is ultimately the name of the impossible simultaneity and of an impossibility that we know simultaneously, at which we await for each other however together, at the same time, *ama* as one says in Greek: at

the same time, simultaneously, we wait for each other at this anachrony” (1996a, 117–18; 1993a, 65). The first ontological statement therefore concerns lateness or anachrony (which means nonsimultaneity). The second concerns the “as such” of death.

So, let us now pass to the second ontological statement concerning possibility that Derrida extracts from *Being and Time*. In paragraph 50, Heidegger ultimately says that death is for *Dasein* the possibility of an impossibility. As Derrida says, this “nuclear proposition” is frequently cited, but the question is, where do we situate it: in the possibility of an impossibility, or the impossibility of a possibility (1996a, 121; 1993a, 68)? Heidegger first describes the impossibility as “the possibility of no longer being able to be there” (*Sein und Zeit*, 1979, 250, para. 50). This is indeed the possibility of no longer being able, but not the impossibility of a being able to. We are again very close to Derrida’s own thinking. Derrida says, “the nuance is thin, but its very fragility is what seems to me both decisive and significant, and it is probably most essential in Heidegger’s view. Death, the most proper possibility of *Dasein*, is the possibility of a being-able-no-longer-to-be-there or of a no longer being able to be there as *Dasein*” (1996a, 122; 1993a, 68). Heidegger, for Derrida, seems to be speaking of an ability to be unable or an inability to be able.

We come now to an important transition in the analysis. In paragraph 52, however, Heidegger opens the question of truth because of the everyday *certainty* of death. The association we need to make here is to truth as certainty. Now, according to Derrida, Heidegger seems to see, in the contradiction between possibility and impossibility, the condition of truth—its very unveiling, where truth is *no longer* measured in terms of the logical form of the judgment (1996a, 124; 1993a, 70), where it is no longer measured by certainty, where truth is originary truth, *aletheia*. The question of truth as unconcealment [*aletheia*] takes us into the question of the “as such.” Derrida turns to paragraph 53, where Heidegger says: “The nearest nearness of being-towards-death as possibility is as far removed as possible from anything real [*Wirklichen*]. The more clearly this possibility is understood, the more purely does understanding penetrate it as [*als*] the possibility of the impossibility of existence [*Existenz*] in general” (*Sein und Zeit* 1979 262;

emphasis mine). Derrida comments on each of these two sentences in turn. The *first* sentence, as we just saw, concerns the relation between death and actuality or reality [*Wirklichkeit*]. It means that death is what is closest to us; we have the absolute proximity of death. But death is also as far away as possible and as far away as possible from any actual reality. Therefore death is not a possibility that modifies an actual reality; it is not the possibility of *something*. If it does not give us something to actualize, then death must be thought of as the possibility of something that is not real, of something that is impossible, as the possibility of an impossible. The possibility of death therefore exceeds the standard relation of potentiality and actuality. But then, Derrida turns to the *second* sentence, which concerns understanding, saying “in the [second] sentence, the figure of unveiling, that is, the truth of this syntax, makes the impossible be, in the genitive form, the complement of the noun or the aporetic supplement of the possible (possibility of the impossible), *but also* the manifestation of the possible *as* impossible, the ‘as’ (the ‘als’) becoming the enigmatic figure of this monstrous coupling” (1996a, 124; 1993a, 70; emphasis mine). The “als” in the second sentence means that the possibility is understood, that is, both unveiled and penetrated *as* impossibility. It is possibility *as* impossibility, the proper possibility of *Dasein* *as* its proper impossibility.¹² For Derrida (and this is crucial), if possibility is what most properly defines *Dasein*’s being—*Dasein* is not *Vorhandenheit* or *Zuhandenheit*, nor is *Dasein* an animal—then *Dasein*’s proper possibility *as* impossibility, proper possibility *as* the negation of *Dasein*’s proper possibility, this “as” makes death *Dasein*’s “least proper” possibility (1996a, 125; 1993a, 71). Derrida points to the following as being an important quote:

The *als* (*as*, considered *as*) keeps in reserve the most unthinkable but it is not yet the *als solche* (*as such*): we will have to ask ourselves how a most proper possibility *as* impossibility can still speak *as such* without immediately disappearing, without the “*as such*” already sinking beforehand and without its essential disappearance making *Dasein* lose everything that distinguished it—both from other forms of entities and even from the living animal in general, from the beast. And without its properly dying being,

originarily contaminated and parasited by the perishing and the demising.
(1996a, 125–26; 1993a, 71)

The question we must ask now is obvious: if *Dasein* does not have access to the “as such” of death, if *Dasein* has access to its most proper possibility only as mediated by the “as” of impossibility, then is *Dasein*’s hand separated by “an abyss of essence” from the ape’s prehensile organ?

III. THE ELABORATION OF THE ARGUMENTATION AGAINST THE “AS SUCH”

Let me say again that the argumentation that we have just gone through, from “Awaiting (at) the Arrival” in *Aporias* (from a lecture given in 1992), ranks among the most important that Derrida produced. Minimally, we can say that, insofar as the argumentation focuses on *Dasein* standing before itself, the argumentation concerns the mirror, “une psyché,” as Derrida would say: “a mirror is sufficient [*un miroir peut y suffire*]” (2006, 167; 2002a, 124). One could say that fundamentally what Derrida is trying to do in his writings on animality is move Lacan’s mirror stage back (in which Lacan divided human from animals); Derrida tries to place this division, or even the symbolic, into animal life itself. Overall the mirror stage concerns autoaffection. In *L’animal que donc je suis*, Derrida tells us what he is trying to do with autoaffection: “if the auto-position, the auto-monstration of the auto-directedness of the I, even in man, implied the I as an other and had to welcome in the self some irreducible hetero-affection (which I [Derrida] have attempted elsewhere), then this autonomy of the I would be neither pure nor rigorous; it would not be able to give way to a simple and linear delimitation between man and animal” (2006, 133; translation mine). Of course, no one would deny autoaffection of animals. In other words, what is at issue is animal narcissism (2006, 77; 2002a, 418). It is not hard to find arguments that would lead toward the assertion of animal narcissism. For instance, one member of a species always recognizes another of the same species and thus we can say that there is some self-recognition (2006, 88). There is also the fact that animals become sexually aroused at the sight of a

partner, which means the animals have some sense of erotic exposure and thus nudity (2006, 89). And there is also the common experience that all of us have had with our house pets: the cat stops for a moment to watch television when there are cats in the program on the screen. If we can respond in the affirmative to the question of animal narcissism, then we have to say that the animal is caught in the same mirror as we are, even that the animal is in us, as the other in us (2006, 77, 181; 2002a, 418; 2003a, 134). But, in order to elaborate on the powerful argumentation of *Aporias*, let us look at three of these “other places” where Derrida has spoken of an irreducible heteroaffection in autoaffection.

The first occurs, as I said at the beginning, in *La voix et le phénomène* (*Voice and Phenomenon*), Derrida’s 1967 study of Husserl. Here, Derrida argues that, when Husserl describes lived-experience [*Erlebnis*], even absolute subjectivity, he is speaking of an interior monologue, autoaffection as hearing-oneself-speak. According to Derrida, hearing-oneself-speak is, *for Husserl*, “an absolutely unique kind of auto-affection” (1967b, 88; 1973, 78). It is unique because there seems to be no external detour from the hearing to the speaking; in hearing-oneself-speak, there is self-proximity. It seems therefore that I hear myself speak immediately in the very *moment* that I am speaking. According to Derrida, Husserl’s own description of temporalization undermines the idea that I hear myself speak immediately. On the one hand, Husserl describes what he calls the “living present”—the present that I am experiencing right now—as being perception, and yet Husserl also says that the living present is thick. The living present is thick because it includes phases other than the now, in particular, what Husserl calls “protention,” the anticipation (or “awaiting,” we might say) of the approaching future and “retention,” the memory of the recent past. As is well known, Derrida focuses on the status of retention in *Voice and Phenomenon*. Retention in Husserl has a strange status since Husserl wants to include it in the present as a kind of perception and at the same time he recognizes that it is different from the present as a kind of nonperception. For Derrida, Husserl’s descriptions imply that the living present, by always folding the recent past back into itself, by always folding memory into perception, involves a *difference* in the very middle of it (1967b, 77; 1973, 69).¹³ In other

words, in the very moment, when silently I speak to myself, it must be the case that there is a minuscule hiatus differentiating me into the speaker and into the hearer. There must be a hiatus [*un écart*] that differentiates me from myself, a hiatus or gap without which I would not be a hearer *as well as* a speaker. This hiatus defines what Derrida has always called the trace, a minimal repeatability. And this hiatus, this fold of repetition, is found in the very moment of hearing-myself-speak. Derrida stresses that “moment” or “instant” translates the German “Augenblick,” which literally means “blink of the eye.” When Derrida stresses the literal meaning of “Augenblick,” he is in effect “deconstructing” auditory autoaffection into visual autoaffection. When I look in the mirror, for example, it is necessary that (“il faut que,” Derrida would say) I am “distanced” or “spaced” from the mirror. I must be distanced from myself so that I am able to be *both* seer *and* seen. The *space* between, however, remains (as Foucault would say) “obstinately invisible.”¹⁴ Remaining invisible, the space gouges out the eye, blinds it. I see myself over there in the mirror and yet, that self over there is other than me, so I am not able to see myself as such. What Derrida is trying to demonstrate here is that this “spacing” (*espacement* again) or blindness is essentially necessary for all forms of autoaffection, even tactile autoaffection, which seems to be immediate. Here again we could open the question of the hand. For Derrida (and here he is perhaps quite distant from Merleau-Ponty), the touching-touched relation is a variant of the seeing-seen relation because in vision there is always spacing. When one hand touches the other, even in prayer, the coincidence of the touching-touched is only ever imminent, fusion only ever about to happen or arrive. It is as if in the gathering of the fingers, there is a gouged out eye that forbids the gathering of being into any “as such.”¹⁵

Now, let us go to another “other place,” which can be found in “Comment ne pas parler.” Here Derrida discusses negative theology by means of the idea of “dénégation,” “denegation” or “denial.” The word “dénégation” translates Freud’s “Verneinung,” which is in fact a denial, but one that is also an affirmation. The fundamental question then for negative theology—but also psychoanalysis and for Derrida—is how to deny and yet also not deny. This duality between not telling and telling is why Derrida takes up

the idea of the secret. In “Comment ne pas parler,” Derrida says, and this is an important comment for understanding the secret in Derrida: “There is a secret of denial [*dénégation*] and a denial [*dénégation*] of the secret. The secret *as such*, as secret, separates and already institutes a negativity; it is a negation that denies itself. It de-negates itself” (1987a, 557; 1989a, 25; emphasis mine). Here Derrida speaks of a secret *as such*. A secret as such is something that must not be spoken; we then have the first negation: “I promise *not* to give the secret away.” And yet, in order to possess a secret *really*, to have it *really*, I must tell it to myself. Here we can see the relation of hearing-oneself-speak that we just saw in *Voice and Phenomenon*. Keeping a secret necessarily includes autoaffection. We might, however, say more; we might even say that I am too weak for this not to happen. I must have a conceptual grasp of it. Even more, we might say that I have to frame a representation of the secret. With the idea of a representation, we also see retention, repetition, and the trace of a name. A trace of the secret must be formed, in which case the secret is, in principle, shareable. If the secret must be necessarily shareable, it is always already shared. In other words, in order to frame the representation of the secret, I must negate the first negation in which I promise not to tell the secret; I thereby make a second negation, a “denegation,” which means I must break the promise not to tell the secret. In order to keep [*garder*] the secret (or the promise), I must necessarily not keep the secret (I must violate the promise). So, I possess the secret and do not possess it. This structure—once again we could speak of a kind of anachronism or *espacement* in autoaffection—has the consequence of there being no secret *as such*. A secret is necessarily shared [*partagé*]. As Derrida says in “Comment ne pas parler,”

This denial [*dénégation*] does not happen [to the secret] by accident; it is essential and originary. . . . The enigma . . . is the sharing [*le partage*] of the secret, and not only shared to my partner in the society but the secret shared within itself, its “own” partition, which divides the essence of a secret that cannot even appear to one alone except in starting to be lost, to divulge itself, hence to dissimulate itself, as secret, in showing itself: dissimulating its dissimulation. There is no secret as such; I deny it. And this is what I

confide in secret to whomever allies himself to me. This is the secret of the alliance. (1987a, 557; 1989a, 25)

This quote presents the condition for joining what I would call “the alliance of a more sufficient response”: the denial of the “as such.”

Now, finally, let us go to one of the most recent of Derrida’s writings: his text “The Reason of the Strongest,” the first essay in his book *Rogues*. There, Derrida discusses the United Nations, which he says combines the two principles of Western political thought: sovereignty and democracy.¹⁶ But, “democracy and sovereignty are at the same time, but also by turns, inseparable and in contradiction with one another” (2003b, 143; 2005, 100). Democracy and sovereignty are inseparable because, in order for democracy to be effective, it must have a sovereign force. And yet, sovereignty contradicts democracy because sovereignty, pure sovereignty, the very “essence of sovereignty” (2003b, 143; 2005, 100), is silent; it does not have to give reasons. It “always keeps quiet in the very ipseity of the moment proper to it, a moment that is but the stigmatic point of an indivisible instant. A pure sovereignty is indivisible or it is not at all” (2003b, 143; 2005, 100–1). In other words, sovereignty attempts to possess power indivisibly. It tries *not* to share, and not sharing means contracting power into an instant—the instant of action, of an event, of a singularity. We can see the outline here of Derrida’s deconstruction, not only of the hearing-oneself-speak autoaffection, but also of the autoaffection of the promising-to-oneself to keep a secret. When power is contracted into an instant, there is no temporal thickness; the instant is withdrawn from temporalization and even from history. But such a withdrawal explains why sovereignty is always silent; it tries to keep its power secret. If power is to be sovereign and indivisible, it cannot participate in language, which introduces universalization and sharing [*partager*]. Sovereignty is incompatible with universalization—with the minimal repetition of the trace, which divides the instant and opens up the distance of the hiatus. And yet, the concept of democracy calls for universalization, even though there can be no democracy without force, without freedom, without a de-cision, without sovereignty. In democracy, a decision is always urgent, and yet (here is the contradiction), democracy takes time,

democracy makes one wait. Power can never be exercised without its communication. As Derrida says, “as soon as I speak to the other, I submit to the law of giving reason(s), I share a virtually universalizable medium, I divide my authority” (2003b, 144; 2005, 101). As soon as there is sovereignty, there is abuse of power; sovereignty can reign only by not sharing. There must be sovereignty, and yet, there can be no use of power without the sharing of it through repetition. More precisely, as Derrida says, “since [sovereignty] never succeeds in [not sharing] except in a critical, precarious, and unstable fashion, sovereignty can only *tend* [*tender*; emphasis Derrida’s] for a limited time, to reign without sharing. It can only tend toward imperial hegemony. To make use of the time is already an abuse—this is true as well for *the rogue that I therefore am* [*le voyou que donc je suis*: the rogue that therefore I follow]” (2003b, 146; 2005, 102; emphasis mine). This tendency defines the worst: a tendency toward the complete appropriation of all the others, including the animals. I do not need to stress, of course, that with the idea of rogues (especially through the English word), we have not left behind the question of animals. Sovereign power is never given as such, even to the sovereign, who is frequently described as an animal: the leviathan.¹⁷

IV. CONCLUSION: THE UNDENIABILITY OF ANIMAL SUFFERING

We have now seen four variants of the same argument against the “as such” or against presence: one in “Awaiting (at) the Arrival”; one in *Voice and Phenomenon*; one in “Comment ne pas parler”; and, finally, one in “The Reason of the Strongest.” These arguments attack an “axiom” that Derrida says is an “unvarying truth” in every discourse concerning the animal, especially those found “in the Western philosophical discourse” (2006, 70; 2002a, 413). This axiom allows man to grant to himself precisely that of which the animal would be deprived (2006, 133). Let us consider the animal privation one more time (this time I am going to add more implications). According to Heidegger, the ape, and animals in general, are deprived of the hand. This first “manual” privation of the animal implies that animals do not possess the ability to speak, or more precisely, to make apophantic language.

They cannot say “S is P” because they do not have access to the “as such” of beings (see also Derrida 1967b, 81; 1973, 72–73). In a word, animals are deprived of *gathering*. Now, here is an implication we have not yet seen. Being deprived of the “as such,” or the essence of things, the animal is not able to lie (2006, 175; 2003a, 130). Not being phenomenologists, animals are not given things in their unconcealment, in their truth, which would grant them the possibility of trying to hide the truth, to keep the truth secret. This privation of the lie implies, of course, that animals do not know good from evil (2006, 178; 2003a, 132). The *lack* of knowledge seems *then* to imply a kind of perfection or *plentitude* to the animal (2006, 167; 2003a, 124). With the “then” we have just crossed a strange transition in which a lack leads to a plentitude. *Because of a fault*, man conceives animals as being absolutely innocent, prior to good and evil, “without fault or defect” [*sans faute et sans défaut*] (2006, 133). The animals therefore do not seem to suffer a fall. But the perfection that animals possess is that of a machine, the “animal-machine” (2006, 172; 2003a, 127).¹⁸ Like writing, animals only ever react. They do not ask questions and they do not respond (1987d, 82; 1989b; 2006, 24–25, 168; 2002a; 2003a, 124). *In contrast*, man is *not* perfect—he has fallen and has a fault, which allows him to question. The ability to question brings us to the axiom: it is precisely “a fault or defect [*une faute or un défaut*]” *in man*, in us, that allows *us* to be master over the animals—in other words, the superiority of animals makes them inferior to us (2006, 40; 2002a, 389). Derrida says, “what is proper to man, his superiority over and subjugation of the animal, his very becoming-subject, his historicity, his emergence out of nature, his sociality, his access to knowledge and technics, all that, everything (in a non-finite number of predicates) that is proper to man would derive from this originary defect [*défait*], indeed from this defect in propriety, what is proper to man as defect in propriety” (2006, 70; 2002a, 413). To use the mythological language to which Derrida refers, because man is not a perfect being like the animals, because man is born nude, he receives fire (2006, 40; 2002a). Or, to use the language of Lacan to which Derrida also refers, it is man’s “pre-maturity” that separates him from the animals and allows man to enter into the symbolic (2006, 167; 2003a, 124). Simply put, with this fault, we are speaking of *human finitude* (2006, 49;

2002a, 396).¹⁹ It is precisely human finitude that allows man to sacrifice (do we say *murder* [see also 1992b, 297; 1995, 283]?)²⁰—animals (1992b, 291; 1995, 277). Remember that Abraham substitutes a ram for the sacrifice of Isaac. In order to reach a more sufficient response, what must be sacrificed is sacrifice itself.²¹

This axiom about finitude must be questioned. It seems to me that the axiom can be questioned only in the arguments we have seen here. In an essay from 2000 called “Et Cetera,” Derrida presents the principle that guides the arguments—or, as he says “the demonstrations”—that we have just gone through. It in fact defines deconstruction:

Each time that I say “deconstruction and X (regardless of the concept or the theme),” this is the prelude to a very singular division that turns this X into, or rather makes appear in this X, *an impossibility* that becomes its proper and sole possibility, with the result that between the X as possible and the “same” X as impossible, there is nothing but a relation of homonymy, a relation for which we have to provide an account. . . . For example, here referring myself to demonstrations I have already attempted . . . , gift, hospitality, death itself (and therefore so many other things) can be possible only *as impossible*, as the im-possible, that is, unconditionally. (2004c, 32; 2000, 300)

Let us strip the demonstration down one more time to its essential structure. If what most properly defines human existence is the fault or defect of being mortal (or, more precisely, if *understanding* the *possibility* of mortality *as possibility* is what most properly defines us), then we are able to say that we truly understand that possibility *only if* we have access to death *as such* in the presence of a moment—in the blink of the eye, in indivisible and silent sovereignty, secretly. But, since we only ever have access to the possibility of death as something other than possibility—that is, *as impossibility*, as something blinding, as something shared across countless others—we cannot say that we understand the possibility of death *truly*, naked even. *Then, the being of us, our fault, resembles the fault of animals.*²² The fault now has been generalized, and therefore so has evil. The resemblance between us and them in regard to the fault or evil, however, does not mean that

we have anthropomorphized the animals; it does not mean that we have succumbed to the risk of biological continuism. With this resemblance, we have what Derrida, in *Of Spirit*, calls “une analogie décalée”: “a staggered analogy” (1987d, 81; 1989b). There is a nonsimultaneity between us and them, between us and the other. This nonsimultaneity comes with time or, rather, is “from time” (“depuis le temps”), as Derrida says in *L’animal que donc je suis* (2006, 40; 2002a, 390), “from always” (“depuis toujours”), as he says in “The Ends of Man” (1972b, 147; 1982, 123). What these phrases mean is clear: there is a fault, and yet there is no fall. The nonsimultaneity is always there, in all of us, in the *Geschlecht* or genus or genre or gender or race or family or generation that we are. The *Geschlecht* is always *verwesende*, “de-essenced” (1987d, 143; 1989b, 91). The fault that divides, being there in us, means that all of us are not quite there, not quite *Da*, not quite dwelling, or rather all of us are living out of place, in a sort of nonplace, in the indeterminate place called *khōra*, about which we can say that it is neither animal nor divine—nor human, or that it is both animal and divine—and human. Indeterminate, the nonplace contains countless divisions, countless faults. All of us living together in this nonplace, we see now, is based in the fact that all living beings can end (“Finis,” as in the title of the first essay found in *Aporias*) (see also 1996a, 76; 1993a, 39). All the living beings are mortal (2006, 206), and that means we can speak of “the ends of animal” (113; translation mine). All the living beings share in this weakness, in this lack of power, in “this impotence [*impuissance*] at the heart of power” (2006, 49; 2002a, 396). All of us have this fault. Therefore we can return to a question we raised earlier: are not *all of us* “poor in world”? This “poverty” (“Ar-mut,” in German) implies a “feeling oneself poor,” a kind of passion, a kind of suffering (2006, 213; translation mine).²³ Therefore, when an animal looks at me, does it not address itself to me, mutely, with its eyes? Does it not implore, just as Derrida’s cat looks at him, imploring him to set it free (from the bathroom)? And does not this look imply that, like us, animals suffer? The suffering of animals is undeniable (2006, 49; 2002a, 396). As Derrida always says in relation to these sorts of formulas, this undeniability means that we can only deny it, and deny it in countless ways. Yet, none of these denials of the suffering of animals will have been sufficient!



NOTES

This text is based on a lecture course that was presented in 2006 at the Collegium Phaenomenologicum, Città di Castello, Umbria, Italy, on July 24, 26, and 28. It is also part of a book project to be called *This is Not Sufficient: An Essay on Animality in Derrida*, which is forthcoming from Columbia University Press, due in October 2007. Unless specifically noted, translations are my own.

1. I have insisted on using the correct title for this book instead of the title the English translation bears, “Speech and Phenomena.” See *Derrida and Husserl* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2002).
2. See also Derrida (1987c, 439); (1987b, 182).
3. Derrida also thinks that Descartes, Kant, Levinas, and Lacan open up the same separation or limit between man and animal (see Derrida 2006, 125–27).
4. Here Derrida cites Heidegger (1995, 290). Derrida revised this passage for the essay’s inclusion in *Psyché*; he replaced the word “organ” with “animal.” An English translation of the revised passage would look like this: “One could say also that the animal can only take or manipulate the thing insofar as it has nothing to do with the thing *as such*. It [the animal] does not let be what the thing is in its essence. It [the animal] has no access to the essence of the being *as such* (*Gesammtausgabe*, vols. 29/30, 290).”
5. See Derrida (1967b, 24, 63, 80) and Derrida (1973, 23, 56, 72).
6. See, for instance, Wood (1993).
7. For other analyses of this distinction in Heidegger, see Llewelyn (1991, 155–56) and Krell (1992, 112–34).
8. See also Derrida (2006, 113).
9. See also Dennis Keenan’s excellent reading of “Awaiting (at) the Arrival” (2005, 140–46).
10. We can now define a weak force: an inability to be unable to stop an event that is imminent from happening.
11. Stambaugh’s English translation also renders “steht bevor” as “stands before” (Heidegger 1996, 232).
12. For another discussion of Derrida’s interpretation of this “als,” see Francois Raffoul, “Derrida et l’éthique de l’im-possible,” forthcoming in a special issue of *Revue de métaphysique et de morale* that focuses on Derrida.
13. Derrida of course calls this difference, “différance.” It is here that we encounter the entire problem of repetition and memory.
14. See Foucault (1966, 21) (anonymous English translation as *The Order of Things* [New York: Random House, 1970], 5).
15. But Merleau-Ponty’s remarkable contribution to the human-animal relation must be acknowledged. See Ted Toadvine (2006, 17–32).

16. Democracy (majority rule) can be seen in the General Assembly, while sovereignty is seen in supremacy of the permanent members of the Security Council and, chief among them, the two superpowers (Derrida 2003b, 143; 2005, 100).
17. See Derrida (2004a, 433–76).
18. The mechanical character of the animal also means that animals cannot look at or gaze upon (*Blick, regard*) me (Derrida 2006, 32; 2002a, 383). When animals look at me (Derrida speaks at length of Levinas’s humanism in *L’animal que donc je suis*) they do not seem to be the “other” who puts me in question; the gaze is reserved only for the “other man” (2006, 147).
19. Krell also stresses that Heidegger seems to reserve finitude only for humanity (1992, 118).
20. In *Acts of Religion*, Derrida says that, if I let someone die, “it means that I interpret it as a murder” (2002b, 384).
21. This point is fully developed in chapter 3 of *This Is Not Sufficient*.
22. In “For the Love of Lacan,” Derrida says, “In short, it would be a matter of contesting that death happens to some mortal being-for death; rather, and this is a scandal for sense and for good sense, it happens only to some immortal who lacks for lacking nothing” (1996c, 85; 1998b, 66).
23. Krell also stresses the literal sense of the term and its connection to misery (1992, 118).

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