

POLITICS IN EXCESS OF LIFE

POLITICS IN EXCESS OF LIFE:
AUTOIMMUNITY, ANIMALITY,
AND DERRIDA'S RESPONSES TO SEPTEMBER 11

By

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ABSTRACT

This thesis examines how the late work of Jacques Derrida challenges the efficacy of the concept of biopolitics to describe the relationship between life and politics. The central question that occupies this thesis is how life becomes part of the political, how it exits the putative spontaneity of nature and enters the calculation of sovereignty. In order to posit this question, my work is organized according to two horizons. The first horizon centers on the ways in which Derrida configures the relationship between life and politics. The second horizon is that the 2001 attacks on the World Trade Center or what is now known as September 11 or 9/11 became an event around which Derrida bends this critique of life in politics.

My first chapter looks to Derrida's concept of autoimmunity as a way to articulate the problematic conflation of life and politics by the term "biopolitics." While Derrida does not explicitly state his complication of this term, I argue that "autoimmunity" positions life as an impossibly unstable concept, one that cannot and should not be confined to a single understanding. My second chapter turns to the first volume of Derrida's final seminars *The Beast and The Sovereign*. This chapter continues many of the themes pursued in the first chapter, but changes the focus from an autoimmune critique of democracy toward a more generalized critique of human life as political and non-human life as apolitical. Ultimately I pursue the idea that Derrida sought to rethink a configuration of the political that apprehends life in excess of politics. Derrida imagines a politics that escapes being pulled into the political and contoured into so many configurations of death and subjugation.

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Politics in Excess of Life: Autoimmunity, Biopolitics, and Derrida’s Responses to

September 11

Introduction:

Before or Beyond Biopolitics?

Since Michel Foucault conceived of his theory of “biopolitics” in the late 1970s, it has become the major frame for the investigation of life in politics. Foucault argued that “after a first seizure of power over the body in an individualizing mode, we have a second seizure of power that is not individualizing, but, if you like, massifying, that is directed not at man-as-body but at man-as-species” (243). Foucault describes a form of power, stemming from knowledge from both life sciences and natural sciences, that apprehends human life as the life of a species. For the first time in history, Foucault argues, human life is seen as a biological species rather than an “anthropo-theological” (Derrida, “Faith” 87) entity that levitates between theological existence and biological life. Foucault defined biopolitics as a form of political organization that is generally concerned with the power “to ‘make’ live and ‘let’ die” (Foucault 241). He describes biopolitical power not necessarily as a derivative of life sciences, but as a mobilization of certain knowledge within political strategies. Foucault is more interested in theorizing a historical break from political strategies that place sovereign power at their center; instead, he posits that the center of politics shifts towards processes of life. However, as

Thomas Lemke points out, “biopolitics does not supplement traditional competencies and structures through new domains and questions. It does not produce an extension of politics but rather transforms its core, in that it reformulates concepts of political sovereignty and subjugates them to new forms of political knowledge” (Lemke 33). Biopolitics describes an assemblage of political practices by which the human species is brought into governance as a result of the sublimation of scientific knowledge into political frameworks. Rather than a classical formation of politics that organizes lives according to legal subjectivity, biopolitics organizes subjectivity based on the life processes of the population.

As Nikolas Rose suggests, biopolitics “is more a perspective than a concept” (qtd. in Barder & Debrix 8). Because Foucault thought of biopolitics as a paradigmatic transformation of political administration, Rose points out that the focus of biopolitics is one of perspective rather than a universal principle, and this is why Foucault organizes his theory around what he calls a “threshold of modernity” (qtd. in Lemke 34). While I discuss how Derrida problematizes Foucault’s temporal frame below, it is important to mention here because it is a key component of how biopolitics has been taken up by other philosophers. There are two markers of Foucault’s temporal frame. The first marker is the concept of a “threshold of modernity” and the second is Foucault’s reference to Aristotle. Again, while it is important to keep in mind that biopolitics should be considered a perspective and not a concept, it is still curious that Foucault’s argument rests both on the concept of a threshold of time and also on Aristotle’s notion of humans as animals with “the additional capacity for a political existence” (qtd. in Lemke 34). It is on the basis of

Foucault's temporal markers that perhaps the most prominent contribution to reformulations of Foucault's initial conception of biopolitics is made. Giorgio Agamben argues that Foucault did not properly situate the threshold of biopolitics and rests his central concept on this claim. According to Agamben, "it is the basic separation of 'bare life'—the form of existence reduced to biological functions—and political existence that has shaped Western political history" (Lemke 6). Agamben asserts that this fundamental separation reached its pinnacle (or "threshold") during the totalitarian regimes of the twentieth century. Agamben's primary thesis is that there exists an "inner solidarity between totalitarianism and democracy" (10) and argues that the ultimate "biopolitical paradigm of the West" (10) is to be found in the concentration camps of Nazi Germany. He outlines this hidden foundation of sovereign power through a figure of ancient Roman law called "homo sacer". This figure refers to a person that one could kill with impunity. Agamben uses the figure of homo sacer to theorize an inverse of Foucault's biopolitics—the one that Foucault's untimely death apparently kept him from discovering. Rather than the body of the human entering politics as an entity that must be kept alive, Agamben theorizes the center of politics as the "production of bare life" (181) from the ban of the homo sacer. For Agamben, the homo sacer is the "renounced yet constitutive" (Lemke 65) part of western political logic that is the form of life that all citizens take in modern liberal democracy: "in our age all citizen can be said, in a specific but extremely real sense, to appear virtually as homines sacri" (111). Furthermore, Agamben argues that the boundary that once ran between individuals or social groups is now incorporated without limit into the bodies of individuals: "bare life is no longer confined to a particular place

or definite category. It now dwells in the biological body of every living being” (140). However, as Thomas Lemke states, Agamben “leaves this aggravation [of the living being] extremely vague” (Lemke 58) and rests many of his arguments on inversions of Foucault’s initial arguments. Agamben wants to extend Foucault’s biopolitics, or at least amend it: “Foucault shows that sovereign power is by no means sovereign, since its legitimacy and efficiency depend on a ‘micro physics’ of power, whereas Agamben’s work produces and dominates bare life” (Lemke 59). For Agamben, the production of a “biopolitical body is the original activity of sovereign power” and therefore “biopolitics is at least as old as the sovereign exception” (6). Agamben’s “amendment” of Foucault has two parts. First, biopolitics is not a distinctly modern phenomenon and it does not result in the diminishing of sovereignty. Second, Agamben takes issue with how Foucault makes use of Aristotle’s notion of humans as political animals. While Foucault’s biopolitics involves the Greek word *bios* (qualified political life), Agamben argues that it is *zōē* (bare life) that is the true source of biopolitics. In other words, Agamben rests his entire argument on the absolute distinction between *bios* and *zōē*, a distinction that Foucault (and as Derrida argues, Aristotle) never makes. I take the time to bring Foucault and Agamben together in this introduction because it is out of both of these philosophers’ accounts of Aristotle that Jacques Derrida formulates his critiques of life and politics that I trace in this thesis.

While my end point in this thesis is Derrida’s direct encounters with Foucault and Agamben, I suggest that it is this frame of biopolitics that Derrida has in mind in all of his theorizations of life. I use the concept of biopolitics to situate how Derrida

complicates the definitions of life and politics. I suggest that Derrida brings life—or a volatile conception of “life”—to the center of his political writing after September 11 because he saw it, and the resulting war on terror, as evidence that a certain relationship between life and politics was being solidified. I say solidified because Derrida had been writing and speaking about the intricacies of what life signifies in political discourse since the 1980s, but September 11 precipitated an urgency for Derrida to rethink the centrality of life in politics. In Jane Bennett’s terms, whereas biopolitics exposes “the various micropolitical and macropolitical techniques through which the human body was disciplined, normalized, sped up and slowed down, gendered, sexed, nationalized, globalized, rendered disposable, or otherwise composed” (Bennett 1), I argue that Derrida looks beyond these constructions to problematize the assumption that the human body and life are configured as inseparable. Is life in the body *alone*? What about death, where is it? I suggest that in order to rethink relationships between life, the body, and death we first need to understand how biopolitics reduces life to a consideration of the body. There is inevitably more at stake in the question of life than the body alone, even if the body is often the means for its entry into political discourse. I understand Derrida’s concept of autoimmunity as a way to think life and the body without rendering them synonymous. Following Michael Naas, I understand Autoimmunity as an inevitable process that Derrida identifies in all conceptual frameworks that seek to immunize life against non-life, against “the technical apparatus, the prosthesis, the simulacrum” (*From Now On* 129). However, immunization of life is impossible because life already contains non-life and therefore the discourses that originally sought to immunize life end up turning on it.

In terms of biology, autoimmunity is a process that turns the body's defenses against its own cells and hence names a process that occurs from *within*. Autoimmunity names the break-down of the self that is located *only* within the body, a breakdown of the supposedly unbridgeable gulf between the self and other, life and death. Derrida inscribes these ideas within a term from the medical sciences precisely in order to bring his philosophy of life into dialogue with biopolitics and to challenge the absolute position Foucault bestows upon the body of the human. The autoimmune breakdown of the self-in-body leads Derrida into an investigation of life before the self is reduced to the body, before politics is reduced to a separation of humanity and nature, biology and zoology.

In *The Beast and the Sovereign* Derrida changes focus from an examination of autoimmunity within democracy to a more generalized critique of the notion of human life as political and non-human life as apolitical. Derrida finds that biopolitics rests uncomfortably on a relationship between ancient Greek definitions of life that Aristotle uses in *Politics*: the relationship between bios (defined as “qualified life”) and zōē (defined as life itself). Derrida returns to the passage where Aristotle uses bios and zōē to define his famous characterization of humans as political animals. Derrida argues that this phrase is at the core of biopolitics, but that Foucault chose instead an inversion of Aristotle's schema that he then uses to characterize a modern paradigm of life in politics. Before concluding my introduction, it is helpful to briefly consider the passage where Foucault introduces his paradigm of modernity. In *The History of Sexuality*, Foucault describes a paradigm of modernity that shapes his definition of a new kind of governmental control whereby life is made ‘not only “the object of politics and external

to its decision-making” instead, “it affects the core of politics—the political subject”

(Lemke 4). “For the first time in history” Foucault argues,

Biological existence was reflected in political existence [...] But what might be called society’s ‘threshold of modernity’ has been reached when the life of the species is wagered on its own political strategies. For millennia, man remained what he was for Aristotle: a living animal with the additional capacity for a political existence; modern man is an animal whose politics places his existence as a living being into question. (qtd. in Lemke 34)

While Foucault’s definition of a distinctly modern political existence will be discussed at length in chapter two, it is worth quoting Foucault initially because it allows us to see that what is at stake in Derrida’s complication of the biopolitical is in two senses historical. Foucault rests his argument on the millennia between himself and Aristotle; however, he also calls for a break between them. How do we account for this contradiction? At the onset, we say the “additional capacity” that Foucault identifies signals the *commencement* of a division and it is this commencement that Derrida wants to complicate. What begins here with the ‘additional capacity’ of human life to be political, and why does Foucault cite it?

My thesis considers how life becomes part of the political, how it exits the putative spontaneity of nature and enters the calculation of sovereignty. My work is organized according to two horizons. The first horizon centers on the ways in which Derrida configures the relationship between life and politics. The second horizon is that the 2001 attacks on the World Trade Center or what is now known as September 11 or 9/11 became an event around which Derrida bends this critique of life in politics. Along with the interests of these horizons, I have divided remarks into two chapters. The first

chapter deals with Derrida's concept of autoimmunity because this concept is the primary tool that he uses to deconstruct how life is defined by politics. This chapter examines autoimmunity from *Specters of Marx* to *Rogues* in the interest of tracing the trajectory of this concept across Derrida's late work beginning in the early 1990's after the fall of the Soviet Union. I trace autoimmunity from *Specters of Marx* to *Rogues* in order to follow how it shifts from a rhetorical device to the center of Derrida's thinking after September 11. I argue that Derrida brings autoimmunity to the center of his thinking because he was worried that the event of September 11 would solidify an identity of life within politics that equates freedom with sovereignty and pretends that fear can be exchanged for subjectivity. I frame this chapter around the question of what is life to politics.

Autoimmunity allows for a deconstruction of this question because it lets Derrida position life in relation to death, to position life as always already containing death. Furthermore, in *Rogues* autoimmunity becomes the concept around which Derrida deconstructs democratic politics by exposing its fundamental relationship to sovereignty. I conclude this chapter by considering how Derrida sees the productive potential for an autoimmune democracy that is able to remain open to otherness by grasping the relationship between life and death. The second chapter turns to the first volume of Derrida's final seminars *The Beast and The Sovereign*. This chapter continues many of the themes pursued in the first chapter, but changes the focus from an autoimmune critique of democracy toward a more generalized critique of human life as political and non-human life as apolitical. Across both of these chapters is a constant focus on how Derrida conceives of these questions as within an ethical paradigm that resists the notion

that he calls “the reason of the strongest” (*Beast* 7). This line from Lafontaine’s classic fable becomes a beacon for Derrida’s concerns about the rule of force in global politics, but also for his encounters with discourses and philosophies as disparate from medical science and political philosophy. Ultimately I pursue the idea that Derrida sought to rethink a configuration of the political that apprehends life in excess of politics. Derrida imagines a politics that escapes being pulled into the political and contoured into so many configurations of death and subjugation. In the first chapter, this investigation takes the form of a deconstruction of the most basic formulation of sovereignty, what Derrida calls “ipseity” (*Rogues* 11). Ipseity is the principle by which individuals are invested with a form of sovereign self-decision that takes shape as a distinctly political sovereignty. I argue that if we follow Derrida’s increased attention to autoimmune functions of the political it will reveal the ways in which all forms of government focus on this principle as a model and justification for state forms of sovereign force.

Chapter One: Autoimmunity and The Life of Democracy

In an interview two months after the 2001 attacks on the World Trade Center (WTC), Giovanna Borradori asks Jacques Derrida if September 11 “was one of the most important historical events we have witnessed in our lifetime” (Borradori 86). Derrida is careful to respond, as if a trap has been set for him to reiterate the endless citations of victimhood that filled (and continues to fill) public discourses of the WTC attacks. We have to be careful, Derrida responds, not to “cite” September 11 as a universal “feeling” that has been “conditioned, constituted, if not actually constructed, circulated at any rate through the media by means of a prodigious techno-socio-political machine” (Borradori 86). We have to be careful not to be taken in by a narrative of the attacks that has been shaped by a combination of government and media organizations. This narrative positions the United States by telling a story of its involvement as both a witness and a victim to a unique brand of terror labeled “international terrorism”. By referring to the attacks as simply September 11 (or 9/11) we are falling into a citation of this story that perpetuates a limited understanding of what the attacks mean, and we will fail to see the potential for how they can reshape America’s actions in global politics. “The minimalist aim of this dating [September 11] also marks something else,” Derrida urges, “namely the fact that we perhaps have no concept and no meaning available to us to name in any other way this ‘thing’ that has just happened, this supposed ‘event’” (Borradori 86). “Something” happened to be sure, but exactly what happened was, and remains,

impossible to know. Derrida begins with the language of September 11 because of the demand for repetition that is embedded within the economy of this language. By responding with an assertion that we do not know what we are saying when we cite September 11 Derrida directs the conversation away from re-telling a narrative already preconfigured by the vast media apparatus that demands certainty. Derrida is careful to acknowledge both the outrage at the violence of the attacks and that the demand for certainty originates in this outrage. However, this outrage has never been “what it's all about” (Borradori 87). An exploration of how this outrage translates into something else is what I undertake in this chapter. When we talk about the traumatism of September 11, are we referring to the lives lost in the events, or the breach of a symbolic investment in security? When we talk of security what kinds of divisions are created to produce and maintain it?

Attentive to the conflation of life and security in current politics, Derrida understands terror as an “autoimmunitary process, [that] strange behavior where a living being, in *quasi-suicidal* fashion, ‘itself’ works to destroy its own protection, to immunize itself *against* its ‘own’ immunity” (“Autoimmunity” 94). While autoimmunity appears in Derrida’s work as early as the 1990s, it is not until after September 11 that the concept forms the center of his political discussions. The wager of this chapter is that September 11 intensified Derrida’s pursuit of this metaphor because it confirmed a shift in global politics that decentralized the nation state as the primary organizing agent of that system. As Naas points out, after September 11 the United States and other western countries began to locate a threat “not primarily in ‘outlaw regimes,’ pariah nations,’ or ‘rogue

states' [...] but in non-states or trans-state entities that do not declare war like nation-states once did but work instead by turning the resources of a state [...] against the state itself" (Naas 124). The tools of this new system are the United States' own tools turned against itself and involve a defense of the very structures that are meant to defend.

However, America and other nation-states also use this decentralization and dislocation of threat as an alibi to pursue their political interests indiscriminately. Because the "threat" after September 11 is not identifiable by classical definitions of a nation state, it is similarly not accountable to concepts of war, or even conflict. Given the centrality of war to the western political imaginary, Derrida worries that the war on terror will solidify American sovereignty over global politics. However, Derrida also sees September 11 as a chance to rethink the centrality of concepts such as "security" and "defense" to international relationships. What would a configuration of the state look like if instead of configuring the other as only a threat, it apprehended the risk of the other as a positive potential? I suggest that Derrida's focus after September 11 shifts from an investigation of alibis for political self-interest (legible in his interview with Borradori) to a pursuit of the relationship between life and politics in *Rogues* and *The Beast and The Sovereign*. While chapter two is devoted more strictly to how Derrida rethinks life and sovereignty in *The Beast and The Sovereign*, in chapter one I draw some preliminary lines between *The Beast and The Sovereign* and *Rogues* to articulate the shift I see in Derrida's thought after September 11. By reframing the work done in texts like *Rogues* and "Autoimmunity: Real and Symbolic Suicides," I hope to gain a better understanding of the potential Derrida saw in September 11 to rethink the notion of life "before any

opposition between life (bios or zōē) and its others (spirit, culture, the symbolic, the specter, or death)” (*Rogues* 109). After September 11, Derrida more directly interrogates the justifications for force that are inscribed into the fierce opposition of life to any other form of animated existence. To complicate the relationships between life and “its others” Derrida begins to use the figure of autoimmunity because it allows him to inscribe a more active breakdown of the meaning of life within political discourse, but with a special focus on how “life” is made to “defend” itself against what is supposedly without life. However, autoimmunity calls attention to the inevitable breakdown of the identity of life in the midst concepts such as death because each are inscribed within the other. Autoimmunity is a way for Derrida to expose how life is always defined in order to indemnify certain ways of living and to justify violence. By focusing on autoimmunity I aim to bring Derrida’s conceptions of life and politics into dialogue with Foucault’s notion of biopolitics. I suggest that what we call biopolitics can be understood as a process of the autoimmunization of life, and that Derrida understood this concept as an alternative critique to how life and death operate within concepts of the political. I speculate that autoimmunity proceeds from Foucault’s original concept of biopolitics, but also that it complicates the relationship between life and politics that positions the human as “an animal whose politics places his existence as a living being into question” (qtd. in Lemke 34).

I divide chapter one into two main sections. Section one considers Derrida’s configuration of autoimmunity before September 11 as a device for analyzing the self-destructive tendencies of political theories that maintain an exclusive focus on the human

self and those of religious discourses that sacrifice notions of biological life for transcendental life. My analysis is in large part guided by Michael Naas' explorations of what autoimmunity means for Derrida's larger repertoire of concepts and interventions before *Rogues*. However, Naas tends to skim over the deeper implications of autoimmunity for concepts of life and critiques of biopolitics in favor of a critique of religion. I refocus some of Derrida's implicit remarks about definitions of life by bringing autoimmunity to the center of the discussion of two of Derrida's works, *Specters of Marx* and "Faith and Knowledge." Section two of this chapter looks to Derrida's work after September 11, primarily his interview with Giovanna Borradori and *Rogues*. I trace Derrida's interests in the relationships sovereignty, democracy, and the definition of life by focusing on congruencies between the interview and *Rogues*, his framing of the attacks by a shift in global political organization, and the desire of sovereignty at the heart of the war on terror.

I. A Political Living Being? Autoimmunity Before September 11

In *Specters of Marx* Derrida takes up Karl Marx's and Frederic Engels' famous statement in *The Communist Manifesto*, "A specter [is] haunting Europe" (qtd. in *Specters* 2). Derrida is interested in the figure of the specter because of what it can tell us about the double relationship between life and death, but also how this relationship provides the grounds for a new way of thinking about what it means to live (as a living

being). In the “Exordium” section Derrida offers a phrase that has been haunting him (and continued to haunt him for the rest of his life): “I would like to learn to live finally” (*Specters* xvi). “Who would learn?” Derrida questions, “Will we ever know? Will we ever know how to live and first of all what ‘to learn to live’ means” (*Specters* xvi)? Because of its impossibility, one cannot learn to live: one simply lives; and “yet nothing is more necessary than this wisdom. It is ethics itself: to learn to live—alone, from oneself, by oneself. Life does not know how to live otherwise” (Derrida, *Specters* xvii). Ethics is tied to life; It resides in what one does with his or her life, and in turn, ethics is supposed to be what we live by. Derrida’s point however is that if an ethics does not come to terms with death, it remains “a sententious injunction” (*Specters* xvii). Ethics must come to terms with the *between* of life and death, for learning to live can only happen within this in-between, “neither in life or death alone” (Derrida, *Specters* xvii). It is important for ethics to not think life and death apart and to fabricate a certain kind of living that achieves this separation. A life without death can be too easily used to indemnify someone or a set of people, an institution perhaps, and this is why “life” must be understood as a specter, “even and especially, if this spectral [...] *is never present as such*” (Derrida, *Specters* xvii). The idea of a specter that is never present as such guides Derrida’s reading of communism and democracy (and of how life is conceived between the two concepts) but he also demonstrates how Marx himself protects a certain kind of life. I argue in what follows that in order to begin to understand how autoimmunity functions in Derrida’s later texts it is vital first to parse through the relationship between autoimmunity and the specter. If the specter apprehends the in-between of life and death

at the heart of an ethics of living, autoimmunity broadens this apprehension into a question of what actually exists between life and politics. From its earliest application, Derrida saw autoimmunity as a way to complicate the question of the living (bio- or zoological) being by shifting the focus to the *between* of life and death.

“What is a ghost?” Derrida invites us to ask, and what “is the effectivity or *presence* of a specter [that] seems to remain as ineffective, virtual, insubstantial as a simulacrum” (*Specters* 10)? A ghost appears as a questionable presence as a presence that either is not supposed to exist, or one that in fact does not exist, *not really*. Yet, when we speak of a ghost, we speak of a presence nonetheless. Derrida’s point is precisely to question the oppositions between “the real and the unreal, the actual and the inactual, the living and the non-living, being and non-being” (*Specters* 12). Because a ghost does not exist does not mean that it is nothing. Because something is impossible does not mean it does not exist. Every opposition between life and death, real and unreal involves a qualification that gives presence or substance to one and not the other. Derrida is suspicious of how these qualifications are put to use within the political as a justification for certain things, ideas, or beings to be protected or immune. However, immunity is inevitably impossible because what is immunized or protected is haunted by its opposite. Derrida interrogates the precarious presence of the specter through the fear of communism that Marx characterizes as a specter, the lasting and seemingly timeless influence this political theory continues to have. While the idea of the specter cannot be underestimated in Derrida’s text, I am more interested in how Derrida symptomatically reads Marx’s own fear of the specter as an auto-immune fear that threatens precisely what

protects life itself. Before looking to the passage where Derrida identifies this auto-immune fear that Marx harbors it is important to probe further into how the specter comes to represent life and death, but also both and neither. The figure of the specter captures the complicated relationship between life and death without failing to grasp the double bind between these concepts whereby “life does not go without death, and that death is not beyond, outside of life, unless one inscribes the beyond in the inside, in the essence of living” (Derrida, *Specters* 177). What would it mean to inscribe the beyond of death inside life? With this question, we are at the center of deconstruction: life and death are not outside each other, they are already inscribed within each other. Life-death, death-life, each inhabits the other; the specter is this inhabitation of death by life and vice versa. Derrida imagines living as spectral; a kind of living that is not defined by oppositional limits; that cannot be used to secure life as a justification for exclusion and violence. The concept of the specter registers the fact that “life itself, in order to sustain life, in order to live on, requires the introduction of the non-living and the foreign body” (Naas 129). By refusing death within life, Marx prohibits himself from thinking outside the notion of life *alone*. Because Marx “loves life,” he maintains an “unconditional preference for the living body” (Derrida, *Specters* 177). While this may seem a strange remark, it is important for Derrida because it is Marx’s love for the concept of the living body that leaves him blind to a certain ethics that apprehends a politics of living that is neither life nor death. Because Marx is so set on the concept of life as applying only to the human body, he wages “an endless war against whatever represents it, whatever is not the body but belongs to it” (Derrida, *Specters* 177). In the name of a proper living life of the

human body, Marx casts out all other concepts, ideas, and objects that surround the notion of life, such as the specter. A concept of the political that does not result in the categorization of life into hierarchies of difference must let go of the desire to define a proper-to-life and to come to terms with the fact that “the living ego is auto-immune” (Derrida, *Specters* 177). In order to “protect its life,” the living ego constitutes itself “as unique living ego, as the same, to itself it is necessarily led to welcome the other within [...] it must therefore take the immune defenses apparently meant for the non-ego, the enemy, the opposite, the adversary and direct them at once for itself and against itself” (Derrida, *Specters* 177). Life must admit non-life in order to maintain its special position as the most cherished, most labored after concept within the political. However, this admittance of non-life already begins to deconstruct itself, making the concept nervous of itself and its supposed other, death. Autoimmunity begins to politicize the concept of the specter by explaining how certain discourses try to immunize life against death, but in the process end up with an autoimmunity that turns life against itself. Each concept takes into account the non-living at the center of the living. Similar to the way that life needs the specter to continue living, biological life needs autoimmunity to constitute and protect itself. To come back to the concept of an ethics of living, we can say that autoimmunity also carries an ethical responsibility towards the other because autoimmunity is also required for any encounter with the non-self. Autoimmunity involves “facing up to the others, before the others” (Derrida, *Specters* 190) by acknowledging one’s own inevitable opening to the possibility of encountering the other. Autoimmunity captures both the protective and destructive, both threat and chance that an ethics of living must apprehend

simultaneously. Threat and chance are vital for thinking through exactly what the implications of autoimmunity are for Derrida's philosophy of the living, for how can an ethics of living be closed off to the other or to a contamination of the other? It is impossible to immunize oneself from the other because nothing would exist; nothing could be learned, nor communicated without the other. Both the specter and autoimmunity offer ways of maintaining an ethics that welcomes the other—as a chance of threat—by changing the focus away from an impossible unity of the unique living body as self.

After this brief discussion of how Derrida begins to fashion autoimmunity in *Specters of Marx* as a way to apprehend the death in life of the political subject, we can now turn to “Faith and Knowledge” where Derrida formalizes autoimmunity by explicitly defining it in terms of the medical-sciences. The two general questions that guide the following discussion revolve around how Derrida brings medical scientific logic to bear on his understanding of autoimmunity, and how this “merger” helps him explicate the relationship between religion, community, and politics of life. I suggest that Derrida carries with a crucial division of the concept of life within religious discourse (sacred life and biological life) to complicate how definitions of life become coterminous with political projects of immunity.

In “Faith and Knowledge” Derrida presents the contradictory ways that religion uses science and technology to perpetuate itself while simultaneously denouncing it in favor of its own meanings of life and living. Derrida is interested in the question of how the notion of transcendental life that religion is founded upon both relies on and rejects

the importance of the kind of biological life that science formulates. Furthermore, in current political discourses religion begins with and follows the logic of science and technology in order to create and maintain the sacred space it requires for the protection of transcendental life. The movement that renders religion and science today, “secretes its own antidote but also its own power of auto-immunity. We are here in a space where all self-protection of the unscathed, of the safe and sound, of the sacred must protect itself against its own protection [...] in short against its own immunity” (Derrida, “Faith” 79-80). Religion is autoimmune in the sense that the protection of sacred space is created by the same tele-technoscientific reason that threatens the stability of religious discourses. Derrida identifies an “elementary act of faith” underlying “the essentially economic and capitalistic rationality of the tele-technoscientific” (“Faith” 81) that masks a fear of the self within religious discourses that try to indemnify themselves against this reflected reason. Religion rallies against the act of faith that is inscribed within tele-technoscientific reason but it is this same act of faith that religion seeks out as an ally. At this moment in the essay, Derrida includes a long footnote that justifies his choice to use a concept from medical science to refer to this deconstruction of religion and science. I argue that Derrida intends for his definition of autoimmunity to be a kind of performativity of his analysis of the interconnection between the political, the religious, and the biological. On the one hand, autoimmunity relates to the biological process of the “immunitary reaction [that] protects the ‘indemnity’ of the body proper in producing antibodies against foreign antigens” (Derrida, “Faith” 80). On the other hand, autoimmunity also refers to juridical and political forms of immunity. “The immune

(*imunus*),” Derrida states, “is freed or exempted from charges, the services, the taxes, the obligations (*munus*, root of common community)” of belonging to a community (“Faith” 80). These separate origins of immunity gather under the biological implications of the term so that Derrida can constantly keep a question of life and the living within the frame of this discussion. While it is easy to see Derrida’s terminological choice strictly in terms of its logical compatibility with deconstruction, it is irresponsible to do so. If autoimmunity is simply “the name of deconstructive logic that should be measured against the standards of philosophical logic” (Hägglund 9) as Martin Hägglund argues, then why not use another “deconstructive term” to describe the action of autoimmunity? As we saw in the discussion of the specter, there is a certain logic of biological life (and thus zoological life as well) that remains to be deconstructed—a logic that other terms such as deconstruction, the double bind, and the specter do not quite grasp in its entirety. Derrida uses the phrase “the religion of the living” (“Faith” 85) to signify how religion unifies faith and living within a framework of a morally and politically insulated community. Derrida identifies this religion of the living as the autoimmune imperative of the “unscathed that has the right to absolute respect” (“Faith” 85). In other words, this principle of the unscathed, common to all religions, establishes the desirability of absolute immunity to religious discourse. As Martin Hägglund notes, Augustine established this principle in the seventh book of *Confessions*. Augustine “asserts that the immutable is better than mutable, the inviolable better the violable, and the incorruptible better than the corruptible. All religious conceptions of the highest good (whether it is called God or something else) hold out such an absolute immunity, since the good must

be saved from the corruption of evil” (Hägglund 8). The sacred is indemnified against contamination by virtue of its very transcendence; it is untouchable because it is beyond; it the source of all faith in religion because it is the principle of eternal savior after bodily death—life after death. The unscathed indemnifies life against death by ensuring a continuation of life beyond the body that contains death. All notions of the unscathed risk becoming autoimmune because the death of the body is taken out of the equation: death is “left” with the body after it dies. Autoimmunity begins to happen because the unscathed “turns” on the body in an effort to secure itself beyond death, but also beyond life as a result. The sacredness of the sacred turns itself on itself because it secures itself from death but also life—the very thing it claims to exist in service of.

The value of the “highest” and the most holy is indemnified against evil but it is also what perpetuates autoimmunity because it is impossible; living is inseparable from dying. Derrida identifies a contradictory “double postulation” for life in religious discourse where on the one hand there is an “ultimate respect of life” (“Faith” 86) communicated by the commandment “though shalt not kill (qtd. in “Faith” 86). On the other hand, there is the “no less universal sacrificial vocation” that involves a sacrifice of the living (Derrida, “Faith” 87). Derrida identifies a range of situations where a contradictory sacrifice of the living is upheld—from livestock breeding and carnivorousness, to vegetarianism. All of these practices share what he calls a “mechanics” of the double postulation that “reproduce, with the regularity of a technique, the instance of the non-living or, if you prefer, of the dead in the living” (Derrida, “Faith” 86). Religious practices that value life while sacrificing the living produce an inevitable contradiction

and this inevitability is like a mechanics because of their structure of autoimmune contradiction. Derrida is interested in the inevitability of the double postulation because it creates a situation in which there is simultaneous sanctification of life and sacrifice in the name of something greater than life:

Life has absolute value only if it is worth *more than life*. And hence only in so far as it mourns, becoming itself in the labour of infinite mourning, in the indemnification of a spectrality without limit. It is sacred, holy, and infinitely respectable only in the name of what is worth more than it and what is not restricted to the naturalness of the bio-zoological (sacrificeable)—although true sacrifice ought to sacrifice not only “natural” life, called “animal” or “biological,” but also that which is worth more than so-called natural life. (“Faith” 87)

What is a life valued as more than life? Transcendental life is a life that is beyond the biological life of the body because it escapes death—because it is limitless. Human life is valuable only in the sense that it proves the transcendence of the unscathed, and it provides this truth in death. Life is valued as more than life only when the dignity of life “[subsists] beyond the present living being” (Derrida, “Faith” 87). Biological life is excluded from the dignity that must be beyond the living being because religious discourse seeks to maintain a form of life to supplement the living by filling life with an ontological dignity routed through worship of self-sacrificial autoimmunity. The ontological dignity of transcendental life calls for an ethical paradigm for community building because dignity and morality are also in service of the community. Religion aligns immunity and community because it inscribes within community a responsibility to immunize. However, because of this common cause, religious sacrifice is invested with a “space of death that is linked to the automaton [...], to technics, the machine, prosthesis: in a word, to the dimensions of the auto-immune and self-sacrificial

supplementarity, to this death- drive that is silently at work in every community, every auto-co-immunity” (Derrida, “Faith” 87). The sacrificial space of death functions as an automaton because it *takes on* the characteristics of human (biological) life—only as a supplement to that life—but then must denounce it in order to maintain its immunity or to forfeit its obligation to the community. The concept of community is always already autoimmune because it shares the same moral charge as the concept of immunity. Auto-co-immunity describes the threat community poses to itself, that there is always an auto-deconstruction at work in all communities. Biological immunity is coterminous with the granting of political immunity because ultimately what is at stake in this autoimmune self-sacrifice is the life of the sacrificial and the non-sacrificeable whose life is without meaning or value.

I concluded my discussion of *Specters of Marx* with the apprehension that autoimmunity offers a way of maintaining an ethics that welcomes the other—as a chance of threat—by changing the focus from an impossible unity of the unique living body as self. I would draw a similar conclusion about autoimmunity in “Faith and Knowledge”. In fact it is important to note how this apprehension is extended in “Faith and Knowledge” to consider how all communities are already autoimmune. Derrida maintains that though the concept of community shares an autoimmune self-destruction with religious discourses that try to indemnify a transcendental dignity of life beyond life; this autoimmunization also maintains the life of the community. This autoimmune community is kept “open to something other and more than itself: the other, the future, death, freedom, the coming or loving of the other, the space and time of the spectralizing

messianicity beyond all messianicity” (Derrida, “Faith” 87). However, I have argued that there is another way Derrida augments his concept in “Faith and Knowledge.”

Community is constructed around an autoimmunity that sacrifices life for something more than life, and this sacrifice is based on a distinction between bio-zoological life and an “anthropo-theological life” (Derrida, “Faith” 87) that transcends the body. We are left with the task of further complicating how exactly the opposition between “life” and the “life beyond life” is established as a fundamental separation against which all others are divided.

After these two investigations of autoimmunity in *Specters of Marx* and “Faith and Knowledge,” we are left with an understanding of autoimmunity as a concept that complicates the relationship between life and the living body in political and religious discourses. Autoimmunity describes the self-destructive tendencies of politics of life where biological life is sacrificed for a transcendent form of life. Characteristically for Derrida’s pre-September 11 texts, this deconstruction is carried out within larger arguments about spectral politics and religious discourse. Moreover, autoimmunity occurs where Derrida’s philosophy is mobilized to encounter or account for the lives and deaths of bodies. In the above discussions, I have highlighted how Derrida mobilizes a concept that refers simultaneously to the political and the bio (zoo) logical by configuring the relationship between foreign antigen and the host organism as one that is not reducible to an absolute opposition. The biological vocabulary of autoimmunity recognizes the difference between the host body and the foreign body, but also that the “disease” is already internal to the immune defense itself. Autoimmunity exposes the

outside as implicitly internal to an organism and while it is an entirely automatic and spontaneous process, it demonstrates an attack and degeneration against the self. Derrida's philosophical logic is grounded in the body and its essential anatomical constitution, but it concerns itself with biology only in so far as it relates to life and death. I say this only to highlight that the ultimate horizon of Derrida's interest in autoimmunity is to pluralize and complicate the boundaries the oppositions between "biology," "zoology," "human," "animal," "political," and "natural". It is vital to examine these early texts that figure autoimmunity in order to show how Derrida's development of autoimmunity comes first from a consideration of the ethics of living (a topic that concerned Derrida up to his last breath), of what constitutes the death-in-living. In *Specters of Marx*, autoimmunity interests Derrida because it deconstructs the traditional demarcations that separate life and death by configuring a politicization of the *between* of the two concepts. Following this argument, I find in "Faith and Knowledge" Derrida's effort to go beyond this by using autoimmunity to begin to deconstruct the mechanisms that establish and maintain categories and hierarchies of life by referring to a kind of life-beyond-life, or a life that is more than life. Before turning to how Derrida intensifies his application of autoimmunity after September 11 it is important to discuss the work of Italian philosopher Roberto Esposito because his work on the relationship between community and immunity converges with Derrida's autoimmunity in many productive ways.

Esposito is much more interested in making his work an extension of Foucault's concept of biopolitics than Derrida is, and for this reason bringing his work into dialogue

with Derrida's will allow me to point to some specific ways that Derrida complicates biopolitics. Esposito argues that an ancient relationship between the origin of immunity and community extends Michel Foucault's theory of biopolitics. Esposito's theory comes remarkably close to Derrida's logic of autoimmunity because, like Derrida, Esposito engages with the concept of immunization as it appears in discourses of the political. My explication will hinge on two primary distinctions: First, whereas Derrida is wary to make a connection to Foucault's theory Esposito sees his work as a kind of appendage, or an extension of Foucault's biopolitics. Second, Esposito ultimately wants to pursue what he calls an "affirmative biopolitics" (*Bios* 102), whereby a concept of community can be theorized to recuperate the 'life' from the politics of death that seems to result from the bringing of life directly under the political. The most important difference between Derrida and Esposito is that Derrida understands that an "affirmation" of life always leaves itself open to committing the same violence it sought to eradicate *in the name of life*—unless it can apprehend the double bind of life and death. While Derrida too could be said to "affirm" life through his complication of life and death, he is much more circumspect than Esposito about an absolute affirmation. Instead, Derrida calls for a complication of the concept of life and its relation to death.

In his introduction to Esposito's *Bios*, Timothy Campbell describes the book as one that "may be profitably read as nothing short of a modern genealogy of biopolitics that begins and ends in philosophy" (vii). This statement is both intriguing and troubling, for how does a concept that describes how life begins and end in philosophy *also* begin and end in politics—bio-politics? I use the word "troubling" to describe this statement,

because it makes a hasty assumption that life *must* always be at the center of politics. To be sure, Esposito questions how life enters politics as bios and how even before the question of biopolitics can be asked, one must first ask what “do we understand by bios and how do we want to think a politics that directly addresses it” (14)? Esposito returns to Greek definitions of life so as to question what exactly we mean when we talk about the “bio” in biopolitics. The two concepts that Esposito is interested in are *bios* (“qualified life”) and *zōē* (“natural life,” or biological life) because of the divide that is said to exist between them. While bios and *zōē* will become the center of my discussion in the second chapter, it is important to briefly discuss how Esposito encounters these concepts.

The division between bios and *zōē* guides Esposito’s understanding of Foucault’s work, and more importantly the reason why, in his view, Foucault’s original formulation of biopolitics cannot fully grasp what exactly occurs as a result of bringing life itself into politics. However, it is also this divide that creates a symptomatic disconnection in Esposito’s own theory of bios and immunity. This disconnection occurs during a long description of the problematic nature of ascribing bios and *zōē* meaning within modern politics. If we are to remain within the Greek lexicon the word biopolitics would refer “if anything, to the dimension of *zōē*, which is to say life in its most simple biological capacity, more than it does to *bios*, understood as ‘qualified life’ or ‘form of life,’ or at least to the line of conjugation along which bios is exposed to *zōē*, naturalizing bios as well” (*Bios* 14). This is a difficult move for Esposito to make because it is the last time he mentions *zōē*. As a result of Foucault’s terminological exchange of bios for *zōē*, biopolitics becomes situated “in a zone of double indiscernibility, first because it is

inhabited by a term that does not belong to it and indeed risks distorting it. And then because it is fixed by a concept, precisely that of *zōē*, which is stripped of every formal connotation” (*Bios* 14). What exactly is biopolitics “fixed” into if the concept that fixes it is emptied of its formal meaning? Esposito leaves this question open and cites translation as his reason for doing so. “*Zōē* itself” Esposito notes “can only be defined problematically: what, assuming it is even conceivable, is an absolutely natural life” (*Bios* 15)? This indeed seems to be his only reason for not pursuing this matter further and it will also be our first point of comparison between Esposito and Derrida. Before discussing how Derrida’s thoughts on *zōē*, I want to look at the rest of Esposito’s examination of *zōē* and *bios* because Esposito identifies a third Greek word, *techne*. Esposito does not attempt to define the word, but it is generally understood as knowledge of craft or art. Esposito uses *techne* to disrupt the division between *bios* and *zōē* by calling attention to how “the human body appears to be increasingly challenged and also internally traversed by technology” (*Bios* 15). Does technology disrupt modern conceptions of life? Perhaps more importantly, how does government, as a kind of *techne*, already constitute a disruption? Esposito argues that

politics penetrates directly in life and life becomes other from itself. Thus if a natural life doesn’t exist that isn’t at the same time technological as well; if the relation between *bios* and *zōē* needs by now (or has always needed) to include in it a third correlated term, *techne*—then how do we hypothesize an exclusive relation between politics and life? (*Bios* 15)

If a third term is entered between *bios* and *zōē* it would mean perhaps, as Foucault suggests in *The History of Sexuality*, there is an “art of living” that could reach “beyond the truth claims of both life sciences and natural sciences” (Lemke 51). Esposito makes

no reference to Foucault’s “art of living” even though this could possibly constitute the break between bios and zōē that techne seems to represent, he strangely never returns to in *Bios*.

I would suggest that the ultimate reason why Esposito does not follow through with the problematic of techne is that Esposito himself does not want to take biopolitics outside the question of bios. Too much is at stake for Esposito in this term. Furthermore, Esposito is also primarily after an extension and redirection of Foucault’s thesis toward a biopolitics that absolutely affirms life. In *Terms of the Political* Esposito argues that in order to conceive of an “affirmative biopolitics” we need to take back the paradigm of immunity, and make it “the custodian and producer of life” (Lemm 7). This reversal of the necropolitics of biopolitics would then produce a “productive” life that affirms life, rather than a life that is legitimated by death or produced as a byproduct of death. He claims that in order to achieve this kind of affirmation of life in politics “we need to return to the term that holds together two horizons of meaning for community and immunity” (*Terms* 15). The term he argues that holds this double-horizon is *munus*, the Latin word for donation, expropriation, and alteration (*Terms* 15). Because both immunity and community share this root, Esposito sees a potential to bring the terms together into a “reciprocal” relationship, “to have community refer to difference and to have immunity refer to contamination” (qtd. in Lemm 7). Esposito’s use of immunity and community, like Derrida’s autoimmunity, appropriates a bodily metaphor of the political by elaborating along a micro-biopolitical line. However, it is also this microbiopolitics that separates the two thinkers’ elaborations.

Esposito argues that while Foucault's primary goal is to show how life is situated at the core of his thinking, "he does so vis-à-vis the juridical subjectivism and humanistic historicism of modern political philosophy" (*Bios* 29). Life is exclusively interpreted through the frame of legality and of a theorization of power relationships within society. But is this not the whole point of biopolitics: to theorize the effects of life's inclusion in the political purview? Esposito's concern is that the concept of *bios* that Foucault opposes:

to the discourse of rights and its effects on domination is also configured in terms of a historical semantics that is also symmetrically reversed with respect to the legitimating one of sovereign power. Nothing more than life—in the lines of development in which it is inscribed or in the vortexes in which it contracts—is touched, crossed and modified in its innermost being in history. (*Bios* 29)

Esposito challenges the primary power that Foucault's theory locates in the concept of *bios* because he wants to answer the question he sees left open in Foucault's biopolitics: "what is the *effect* of biopolitics" (*Bios* 31)? If nothing were beyond life, then wouldn't the production of life itself be the effect of biopolitics? Esposito might have returned to the concept of *techne* to find a possible answer to his question. To look back to my examination of autoimmunity in *Specters of Marx* and "Faith and Knowledge," I argued that what Derrida seeks with autoimmunity is a kind of *techne*, or a way to describe the *techne* of life (the "art of living" or a way "to learn to live finally). What else could Derrida seek with the notion of the "mechanics" of religion's double postulation of life that "[reproduces], with the regularity of a *technique*, the instance of the non-living or, if

you prefer, of the dead in the living” (“Faith” 86 Emphasis added)? If we think about the mechanics that produces a transcendental life valued as “more than life” (Derrida, “Faith” 87), perhaps we can begin to configure life in politics as always already involved in a mechanics or *techne*. As mentioned above, Esposito side steps the concept of *techne* because he is too invested in creating a bios that affirms itself in politics, but Derrida’s autoimmunity is precisely the inverse. On the contrary, Derrida’s autoimmunity describes the process by which a notion of bios as political life already turns on itself because it is already inscribed with non-life. Autoimmunity would then involve an ethical commitment to not define life as something that can be “affirmed” or “denied,” but rather as a more complicated and mobile concept.

II. The Suicides of Democracy: September 11 and Derrida’s Acceleration of Autoimmunity

I now turn to Derrida’s two primary post-September 11 texts, an interview with Giovanna Borradori titled “Autoimmunity: Real and Symbolic Suicides”, and *Rogues*, to see how Derrida intensifies his use of autoimmunity as a critique of September 11 and democratic politics. Whereas the interview with Borradori addresses the immediate post-September 11 politics, in *Rogues* Derrida broadens his analysis to consider the autoimmune logic of democratic politics. My goal in this section is to outline how Derrida develops his critique of democracy as autoimmune, but also to highlight the role

of September 11 in this critique. I argue that both Derrida's response to September 11 as well as his critique of life is inseparable from his critique of democracy.

I begin with "Autoimmunity: Real and Symbolic Suicides" both because the attacks on the World Trade Center form the bulk of Derrida's argument, and also because here we see the most dramatic shift in his thinking about the concept of autoimmunity. While it is arguable that Derrida's primary purpose in the interview is to complicate the idea of September 11 as an event without precedent, I am more interested in how September 11 changed Derrida's conceptions of democratic politics by putting questions of life at the center. In *Rogues* Derrida develops an autoimmune critique of democracy by inscribing it within the central tenants of political organization itself. In "Autoimmunity: Real and Symbolic Suicides" Derrida outlines his most concrete and elaborated application of autoimmunity until *Rogues*. In this interview, all aspects of autoimmunity, such as the concepts of the between of life and death from *Specters of Marx* and the relationship between transcendental and biological life in "Faith and Knowledge" are brought to bear on September 11. In what follows, I outline Derrida's three symptoms of the autoimmune suicide of September 11 and then move on to some of the less discussed questions of life. I argue that these latter questions concern Derrida most and that they prompted him to continue his investigation of autoimmunity in *Rogues*.

The first symptom of autoimmunity identifies the terrorist attacks of September 11 as a distant effect of the Cold War, a residual "Cold War in the head" (Derrida, "Autoimmunity" 94). Derrida characterizes his critique in terms of the Cold War because it locates the terror of September 11 and the resulting War on Terror within American

politics. Because the United States retains its political position even after the Cold War, it *alone* “represents the ultimate presumed force of law” (Derrida, “Autoimmunity” 95). I emphasize this loneliness or presumed solitude because American exceptionalism is the most elementary organizing principle that characterizes the post-Cold War period. This “force of law,” the “aggression of which [America] is the *object* (the *object exposed*, precisely, to violence, but also ‘in a loop,’ to its own cameras in its own interests) comes, as *from the inside*” (Derrida, “Autoimmunity” 95). Rather than conceiving of terrorism as a foreign invasion, Derrida uses autoimmunity to focus on the defense mechanism of the American political imaginary itself. Fear of Cold War politics mutated into a politics of suicidal self-protection after the fall of the Soviet Union. Whereas before the collapse America made use of a vast network of immunitary defenses, after the Cold War it was precisely these protections that America needed to protect itself against. Building on his explanation of the term autoimmunity in “Faith and Knowledge,” Derrida defines autoimmunity as “that strange behavior where a living being, in quasi-suicidal fashion, ‘itself’ works to destroy its own protections, to immunize itself against its own immunity” (“Autoimmunity” 94). Again, at stake in Derrida’s characterization is the juridico-political concept of immunity whereby a person or institution is exempt from charges and from “the ‘indemnity’ of the body proper” (“Faith” 80). Furthermore, Derrida grounds his critique of September 11 not in the body of an (unspecified) organism, but in one of its most basic micro-biological compartments in order to route the question of the nation state within questions of life and the living. Why is September 11 so important for Derrida’s political thought? There has been a great deal of speculation as to why

September 11 has had such an impact on political theory. While thinkers such as Jean Baudrillard argue that “the whole play of history and power is disrupted by the event [of September 11], but so, too, are the conditions of analysis” (4), Derrida is much more circumspect in his analysis. Derrida would perhaps not disagree with Baudrillard’s statements, for it is undeniable that something was disrupted by September 11, but statements such as this risk concealing the systemic problems *within* American politics. As I discussed above, and as Derrida states in *Rogues*, “this [politics of autoimmune suicide] has been happening for longer than is often believed,” after September 11 it began “in a new way and at a different pace” (*Rogues* xiii). Derrida points out that during the latter part of the Cold War, American foreign defense policies cultivated Islamic fundamentalism to combat Soviet advances in the Middle East and it was through these programs that groups such as al-Qaeda were able to attain the training necessary for the September 11 attacks. Furthermore, after the fall of the Soviet Union these groups became disenfranchised from and disillusioned with the American military. The point of this brief summary is to show that Derrida sees the fall of the Soviet Union as a catalyst for the autoimmune crisis that precipitated September 11. I do not mean to say that the American military had a direct role in promoting the attacks themselves as some kind of conspiracy theory. Rather, I want to highlight the fact that September 11 has a history beyond the immediate act of violence of the attacks. Similarly, the resulting terror of September 11 was not reducible to the attacks alone. There was already a culture of terror left over from the Cold War that was given new life after September 11.

The second symptom of suicidal autoimmunity identified by Derrida in the interview involves the trauma of the events, both the immediate terror of the towers collapsing, as well as a future attack “whose temporality proceeds neither from the now that is present nor from the present that is past but from an im-presentable to come” (“Autoimmunity” 99). This “to-come” produces the ultimate terror of the attacks because the threat is largely unknown and destabilized compared to traditional senses of how a politics of war understands an assault. The fear of the attacks is produced by the United States, both because of its limited understanding of the attacks within a military framework, but also because “[like] so many autoimmunitary movements [they] produce, invent, and feed the very monstrosity they claim to overcome” (Derrida, “Autoimmunity” 99). Although the residual fear of the Cold War may have facilitated the conditions for the attacks of September 11, the terror that resulted from them far exceeds it. The third symptom of suicidal autoimmunity is that the “war on terror” repeats the same cycle of violence that preceded it. The war on terror can only replicate the violence that it claims to extinguish because “the ‘bombs’ will never be smart enough to prevent the victims [...] from responding either in person or by proxy, with what will then be easy for them to present as legitimate reprisals or as counterterrorism” (Derrida, “Autoimmunity” 100). The third symptom Derrida identifies is perhaps the most important of the three even though Derrida states that the three are indistinguishable. The “vicious circle of repression” (Derrida, “Autoimmunity” 100) is the result of a politics of autoimmunity that began with the basic organizing concepts of western politics. Derrida’s critique hinges on a reconceptualization of concepts such as “war” and “terrorism” within our

current political situation because the current uses of these two concepts suggest that threat *exclusively* comes from the outside.

Is it possible that we have moved beyond the classical definition of war that is distinguishable from its others, “civil” and “partisan” war? Drawing on Carl Schmitt’s definitions of war as exclusively occurring between nation-states, the violence “that was unleashed” with September 11 “is not the result of war” (Derrida, “Autoimmunity” 102). Derrida points to Carl Schmitt because he sees the conversations surrounding September 11 submitting to Schmitt’s logic of the nation state and the enemy. Derrida argues that we now have to reconcile the idea that September 11 disrupts any distinction between “war” and “terrorism,” state and non-state. Is the violence of September 11 absolutely different from the violence of war or the violence enacted on behalf of a nation state? What is the difference between anxiety, or fear and terror? These questions are impossible to answer with absolute certainty, but this is Derrida’s point: the concept of terror cannot remain transparent. Derrida argues instead that we must look *inside* our own tradition to find other places where terror manifests. Herein lies the autoimmune logic of the War on Terror, for Derrida asks, how does a “terror that is organized, provoked, and instrumentalized differ from that *fear* that an entire tradition, from Hobbes to Schmitt and even Benjamin, holds to be the very condition of authority of law and of the sovereign exercise of power, the very condition of the political and of the state” (“Autoimmunity” 102)? The autoimmunity of terror implies an important point here because it leads directly into a discussion of how *Rogues* comes out of this initial response to September 11. The first point is that a definition of terror cannot exclude the actions of nation state

violence; the second is that terror does not only refer to physically felt or experienced pain. Derrida first notes that the modern conception of the word terror in large part comes from the Reign of Terror during the French Revolution and in fact a genealogy of the concept of terror indicates violence that was usually “carried out in the name of the state and that in fact presupposed a legal monopoly on violence” (“Autoimmunity” 103). Even by current definitions, terror is often defined in reference to a “crime against human life in violation of national or international laws [that entail] at once the distinction between civilian and military (the victims of terrorism are assumed to be civilians) and a political end (to influence or change the politics of a country by terrorizing its civilian population)” (Derrida, “Autoimmunity” 103). As Derrida notes, it is impossible to exclude state terrorism based on this definition of terror especially when we consider the fact that the majority of U.S targets are civilian ones, and that the vast majority of the war dead are also civilians. At the end of this discussion, the interviewer asks Derrida who he thinks is the “most terrorist” of all in the world today. Derrida’s response is two-fold: most so-called terrorism “presents itself as a response” and if we were to identify a “most terrorist” it would be the one who strips the other of any “means of responding before presenting himself, the first aggressor, as a victim” (“Autoimmunity” 107). Derrida indicates that the United States is the country most often accused of being a terrorist because it both refuses to admit its actions, but also refuses other countries a chance to respond. To disallow the other to respond is to ignore the possibility of being hospitable, or of reaching an agreement; it involves a sovereign decision and a presumed authority over what is right or just. Today more than ever, because of the situation in which the United States finds

itself threatened by its own autoimmune force, we can see the danger in this authority (or asserted position of authority over what is right).

I have highlighted how Derrida positions the terrorist attacks of September 11 as an internal threat because it offers the single most important logical connection between the interview and *Rogues*. Autoimmunity in this context signifies how exactly September 11 was a symptom of American neo-imperialism after the Cold War; but more than this, it also signaled a long deconstruction of traditional nation state defense apparatus. Furthermore, Derrida alludes to the kind of work autoimmunity can do for similarly deconstructing the nation-state by exposing the more fundamental autoimmune relationships between subjectivity and the militaristic whereby only the strong have a voice. I ended the above discussion with the concept of the “most terrorist” because Derrida’s answer paradigmatically responds to the questions that frame his next and most substantial exposition of autoimmunity: the presumed and sovereign authority of the United States.

Before finishing our discussion of autoimmunity with *Rogues*, it is important to probe more deeply into the implications of this presumed authority because here Derrida conducts his analysis of autoimmunity and democracy. In the preface to *Rogues* Derrida introduces his discussion with two lines from La Fontaine’s classic fable “The Wolf and the Lamb”:

The strong are always best at proving they’re right.
Witness the case we’re now going to cite. (qtd. in *Rogues* xi)

Derrida is enthralled with these two lines because they contain a potent “fabulous morality” (*Rogues xi*) at the heart of all questions concerning, law, justice, and of course sovereignty. “Does this morality teach us” Derrida asks, “that force trumps law? Or else, something quite different, that the very concept of law, that juridical reason itself, includes a priori a possible recourse to constraint or coercion and, this to a certain violence” (*Rogues xi*)? As these questions suggest, after September 11 Derrida begins to concern himself more and more with the role of reason within political discourses—not necessarily reason itself—but the question of whose reason is the loudest. According to Brown these concerns lead Derrida down the path of sovereignty in order to “wrest the unconditional from sovereignty” (Brown 115). In fact, unconditionality is exactly what lies underneath Derrida’s complication of sovereignty and democracy. Lafontaine’s fable bothers Derrida because it so acutely demonstrates this logic, that the sovereign lion can and will eat the lamb if for no other reason than *because he can*. In her article “Sovereign Hesitations,” Brown follows Derrida as he “relays the unconditional to freedom and refounds sovereignty as conditioned, divisible, and shared [while detaching] freedom from the premise of an autonomous subject” (115). She argues that Derrida refuses to take sovereignty “head on” and resists generalizing sovereignty so that he can recuperate it, by “holding out for a liberal democratic form of sovereignty” (116). Brown is hostile to what she calls Derrida’s recuperations because she fears that his formulations of political sovereignty and democracy institute neoliberal identifications with individual freedoms that end up isolating western subjectivity from the rest of the world. Brown misses the point for several reasons that all revolve around how Derrida configures the

logic of La Fontaine’s fable and his concept of autoimmunity. I do not mean to be unfair to Brown’s argument, but it serves as a jumping off point into my discussion of how *Rogues* begins to reformulate La Fontaine’s “fabulous morality” around September 11 and autoimmunity. In order to see exactly how Brown misreads Derrida, it will help to attend to the question that she poses. Why does Derrida expend so much effort on the notion of the unconditionality of sovereignty? Derrida answers this question by warning us about what is at stake in his deconstruction of democracy:

When it comes to reason and democracy, when it comes to a democratic reason, it would be necessary to distinguish ‘sovereignty’ (which is always in principle indivisible) from ‘unconditionality.’ Both of these escape absolutely, like the absolute itself, all relativism. That is their affinity. But through certain experiences that will be central to this book, and more generally, through the experience that lets itself be affected by what or who comes, by what happens or by who happens by, by the other to come, a certain unconditional renunciation of sovereignty is required a priori. *Even before the act of decision.* (*Rogues* xiv Emphasis added)

I highlight the last part of this passage because it is the significance of the “before” that Brown misses when she hastily condemns Derrida for falling too close to neoliberal identifications with freedom. Nevertheless, what does it mean to distinguish sovereignty and unconditionality *before the act of decision*? It would first mean suspending decision *between* life and death, question and answer, self and other. The notion of *before the act of decision* takes several forms in *Rogues*, but it has one constant horizon, the preconfiguration of a self that excludes difference and serves as the basis for all categorical homogenizations of life. Autoimmunity is the action by which this prefiguration takes place, but it is not until *Rogues* that Derrida systematically challenges exactly how life is both homogenized and divided based on oppositional categories of life.

The rest of our discussion hinges on what exactly to make of this “before” the act of decision. What is before? Life? Is there even a before of life? Of politics? The rest of this chapter focuses on how Derrida prefigures and expands the autoimmune function of democracy that he started in the interview discussed above. I focus on the relationship Derrida describes between democracy and sovereignty through the concept of ipseity. I argue that while autoimmunity describes the general process of how democracy turns on itself, it is ipseity that provides the basis for this turning. Ipseity allows Derrida to pose, with intensified rigor, the questions of life that have I have been occupied with in this thesis, and I argue that Derrida uses ipseity to disrupt the relationship between life, freedom, and democracy.

In “The Free Wheel” Derrida introduces the concept of ipseity that he understands as a principle of political selfhood. However, it is not necessarily self *in itself*, but rather “the power that *gives itself* its own law, its own force of law, its self-representation, the sovereign reappropriating gathering of self in the simultaneity of an assemblage or assembly, being together, or ‘living together,’ as we say” (*Rogues* 11). Ipseity is the process by which subjectivity is given its meaning and authority by the law. Derrida implies a great deal with this initial definition so it will take time to unpack it all. For the purposes of this chapter, I am interested in ipseity as the central relationship between sovereignty and democracy, the principle of self-rule at the center of democratic assembly. I argue that Derrida uses ipseity to describe how democracy conflates subjectivity with the idea of an absolute freedom of a finite being, but conditions this conflation by granting it *as if* it were a precondition of democracy. Derrida is interested in

how “being” and “selfhood” are fused together while being given explicit authority over what makes the self. In order to sidestep an explicit discussion of Heideggerian being, I focus on being in the sense of “living-being” and not being in-itself. Derrida pieces together the implications of autoimmunity for the distinctions between life and death, biological and zoological by positing two simultaneous horizons of ipseity: the self of political subjectivity, and the identification of self with the finitude of living being. I first discuss how Derrida describes ipseity in terms of a force or form of sovereign authority that is inscribed into the concept of democracy. Then I discuss how he links ipseity to the idea of the freedom of a finite being. Finally, I argue for the necessity of reading autoimmunity and ipseity together and conclude with a discussion of the idea of the rogue state and the reason of the strongest that will anticipate the second chapter.

Derrida builds his autoimmune critique of democracy around both a sovereignty that is inherent to democracy and an autoimmune logic that complicates it. Autoimmunity describes how the nation state’s traditional means of protection against its enemies turn upon itself. Central to this definition is a supposed distinction between inside and outside that September 11 unravels in autoimmune fashion. In *Rogues*, Derrida uses autoimmunity to trouble the fundamental concepts of democratic politics. While Derrida maintains that the autoimmunity of democracy has positive functions, he is wary of a politics that tries to hold the concept of the self too tightly; instead, he tries to learn from September 11 by thinking a politics that does not clutch to the self as a uniquely human bodily life. Ipseity is the term Derrida uses to describe how democracy is haunted by sovereignty in the form of a sovereign self-constitution and how it relies upon

sovereignty in order to declare itself as autonomous and “free” from external force.

Derrida is interested in how this notion of freedom involves a “turning upon the self” of a transcendental singularity, or “Oneness” that is always configured as a kind of life of the state. Derrida uses autoimmunity to deconstruct this oneness by calling for a rearticulation of life—or for the possibility of life as a concept that cannot be decided upon. In order to begin this rearticulation Derrida turns to the concept of ipseity as the founding principle of a political life that is always invested in subjectivity; it is the very force of sovereign authority, the power of democracy “to give itself its own law, its force of law, its self-representation” (*Rogues* 11). Ipseity is central to how Derrida imagines his autoimmune critique of democracy because even before “any sovereignty of the state, of the nation state, of the monarch, or in democracy, of the people, ipseity names a principle of legitimate sovereignty, the accredited or recognized supremacy of power or force, a *kratos* or a *cracy*” (*Rogues* 12). Ipseity is the principle by which every “oneself” is constituted, and every reason of the strongest is asserted. Ipseity is the primary unit of sovereignty that autoimmunity turns upon because as a “certain faculty of self-possession, ipseity carries the connection between a sovereign and a sovereign people; both are produced by a force of their own that gathers and rules them, however incompletely” (Brown 119). Because ipseity is at the center of all formations of sovereignty, Derrida argues that what he calls autoimmunity consists,

not only in harming or ruining oneself, indeed in destroying one’s own protections, and in doing so oneself, committing suicide or threatening the I [*moi*] or the self [*soi*], the *ego* or the *autos*, ipseity itself, compromising the immunity of the *autos* itself: it consists not only in compromising oneself [*s’auto-entamer*] but in compromising the self, the *autos*—and thus ipseity. (45)

This concept of ipseity articulates the functions of autoimmunity because in many ways it prefigures the political itself. More specifically though, ipseity both foresees democracy and describes its fundamental relationship to sovereignty. Furthermore, because Derrida defines democracy as a “force (*kratos*) [...] in the form of a sovereign authority [...] and thus the power and the ipseity of the people” (*Rogues* 13), this autoimmunity of ipseity allows us to understand how democracy involves a kind of circular subjectivity. The circular logic of democracy involves a return upon the self whereby a power of the people is turned against the people. Derrida points out that this built-in circularity is also how democracy justifies its own force with a kind of transcendental life of the state that exists beyond individual life.

Derrida relates Alexis de Tocqueville’s description of American people as “the cause and end of all things; everything rises out of it and is absorbed back into it” (qtd. in *Rogues* 14), to Aristotle’s concept of the Prime Mover in order to discuss Tocqueville’s justification. Derrida defines the Prime Mover as something that is “[neither] moving itself nor being itself moved, the actuality of this pure energy sets everything in motion, a motion of return to self” (qtd. in *Rogues* 15). The Prime Mover is a return to the self because it is eternally constituted by itself alone as nature itself, the very nature of life. As Derrida points out though, Aristotle also describes it as “a life (*dia-goge*: in his commentary on this passage, Alexander of Aphrodisias uses *zōē* for life and *zen* for living), a kind of life, a way of leading life comparable to the best of what we might enjoy for a brief time in our life” (*Rogues* 15). Derrida is interested in the Prime Mover

because it links the concept of ipseity to the kind of “pure actuality” that Aristotle ascribes to it. Ipseity is the force of democratic sovereignty or the sovereignty of the people, but also the origins of its ontotheological justifications for existence. We should pay close attention to the two possibilities that Derrida gives us for translating the life of the Prime Mover: *diagoge* or *zōē*. While he doesn’t justify this distinction between the two kinds of life, I argue that he gives us these two kinds of life in order to remind us that there is no single life; there are many lives, and many ways of looking at life. I will come back to the concept of the Prime Mover, but in order to see how exactly Derrida positions this undecidability of life we should turn to how he configures the concept of freedom within democracy.

The second horizon for ipseity is its relationship to the concepts of freedom and life in democracy. In the second chapter of *Rogues* “License and Freedom: The Roué” Derrida describes the historical relationship between democracy and freedom. Here again ipseity is at the center of this relationship. Derrida begins by describing how within the history of democracy it “has always been *hard* to distinguish, with regard to free will, between the good of democratic freedom or liberty and the evil of democratic license” (*Rogues* 21). Derrida is interested in early descriptions of democracy that characterize it as dangerously liberating because it touches upon an important characteristic of autoimmunity: democracy, by definition, leaves itself open to the possibility of democratically electing an office that will take democracy away. Derrida gives the example of the Algerian election of 1992 where elections were “interfered” with in order to prevent a Muslim dictatorship. Derrida argues that this move to cancel the election was

a suicide of democracy “for its own good, so as to take care of it, so as to immunize it against a much worse and very likely assault” (*Rogues* 33). While Algeria is very close to Derrida because he experienced firsthand the violence of decolonization, this kind of suicide is central to all democratic politics. Derrida states that in democracy any transfer of power to the people “*would not have been able to avoid the destruction of democracy itself*” (*Rogues* 33 emphasis added) because democracy is essentially suicidal. I highlight Derrida’s conditional phrase because it speaks to Aristotle’s Prime Mover discussed above. The inability to avoid democratic suicide posits it as a quasi-imperative or even “natural” tendency. Derrida argues that this unavoidable suicide of democracy is why he introduces the Prime Mover into his discussion of ipseity and sovereign democracy: “if there is a to-come for [democracy], it is only on the condition of thinking life otherwise, life and therefore the force of life. That is why I insisted earlier on the fact that pure actuality is determined by Aristotle as a life” (*Rogues* 33). What exactly is the relationship between the pure actuality of life and autoimmunity? Derrida is interested in this pure actuality because it is what autoimmunity describes; pure actuality is the force that starts before politics, but also what keeps politics moving. Autoimmunity describes the pure actuality of all political organization as a process of life—not necessarily a determination of life but of the concept of life itself. Before discussing how Derrida is interested in a complication of life in democratic politics by opening-up to ancient determinations of life (*bios*, *zōē*, *diagoge*, and others—not to mention *physis*, *techne*, *nomos*, and *thesis*), it is necessary to discuss how Derrida links the concept of ipseity to freedom.

Derrida argues that historically democracy has been configured as freedom, and that before any power of the people there is the concept of freedom. Derrida defines freedom as “essentially the power to do as one pleases, to decide, to choose, to determine *one-self*, to have self-determination, to be master, and first of all master of oneself” (*Rogues* 22-23). Ipseity is a precursor or a precondition for freedom because sovereignty fundamentally means to have control of oneself. As Derrida argues, this logic of ipseity and freedom within democracy involves a circularity and a return of force upon the self within democracy. In other words, as Brown notes, “self-possession requires a certain self-subordination; [therefore] democracy produces itself through certain antidemocratic supplements” (Brown 120). If we think of freedom as requiring a certain power, we can begin to postulate a similar relationship between freedom, power, and life. As discussed above, in relation to the concept of the Prime Mover, the political is founded not only on a sovereignty of self, but also a transcendental “actuality” of the concept of life itself. Aristotle equates freedom and life in a passage from *Politics* where he states that “one mark of freedom which all democrats set down as a principle of the constitution is for a man to live as he likes [*he de to zen hos bouletai*] [and from it] has come the claim not to be governed in turns; and this is the way in which the second principle contributes to freedom [are] founded upon equality” (qtd. in *Rogues* 24). Before describing his interpretation of Aristotle’s claim, Derrida reminds us once more that the definition of life is tricky because Aristotle does not actually state how he understands the difference between the two words. The opposition between bios and zōē indicates a long line of political thought that separates human life and so-called natural life. While this will be

the topic of a larger discussion in the second chapter, it is also important here because it reveals how Derrida conceives of the relation between life and freedom as one that should not be reduced to the political. Derrida is wary of these distinctions because when a concept such as freedom is inscribed into the very concept of life, this inscription carries a relation of force along with it.

I opened this discussion of *Rogues* with the concept of the reason of the strongest out of a desire to locate it within a discussion of how power and force are justified. I conclude by looking at how this ipseic force of freedom that seems to constitute the life of democracy is precisely what precipitates autoimmunity. In the section called “Sending” that concludes the first essay in *Rogues*, Derrida summarizes his deconstruction of democracy. It is in this section that Derrida alludes most clearly to how this deconstruction is primarily invested in uncovering the concept of life within the political. Derrida identifies how autoimmunity is meant to deconstruct the self “before the separation of *physis* from its others, such as *tekhne*, *nomos*, and *thesis*” (*Rogues* 109). But what does he mean by this division? What is divided? I argued above that for Derrida ipseity is the link between sovereignty and democracy because it is the principle of self-domination that is central to all formations of the political. Next, I linked this concept to how freedom in democracy is equated with subjectivity. The autoimmune relationship between ipseity and democracy exposes the concept of freedom as constituting life within democracy. This equation of life with freedom infuses an artificial nature or natural state within democracy. Ipseity, too, is constituted as “natural” because it relates to control over the self, but this so-called natural control is always mobilized for political purposes

to support a certain relation of power. To return to the quote initiated this conclusion; the separation of “*physis* from its others” (Derrida, *Rogues* 109) opens Derrida to a more robust articulation of the relationship between life, nature, and politics. As I move forward, I will push these ideas of naturalness into a more detailed discussion of what Aristotle calls the “political animal”. In the next chapter, I follow Derrida as he uses the analogy of the beast and the sovereign to pluralize this figure of the political animal by examining how September 11 became an occasion for Derrida to question the fundamental role of the division between “nature” and what is proper to human life.

Chapter Two: Between the Political Animal and The “Proper to Man”

The response to September 11 that Derrida develops in *The Beast and The Sovereign* shifts his focus away from a critique of democracy in America toward the relation of political exception and the oppositional limits between human life and all other forms of life. While this may seem like a stretch, it is not my intention to argue that Derrida saw September 11 as an event that in itself drastically changed the ancient distinctions between forms of life. However, I suggest that September 11 accelerated Derrida’s concern for shifting discourses of life within politics because of its impact on global power dynamics. Building on my discussion of autoimmunity and democracy from the first chapter, I pursue the idea that Derrida works his way toward a more generalized critique of biopolitics as a field that dramatizes and homogenizes concepts of life in politics.

While Derrida’s most sustained critiques of September 11 occur in the texts I discussed above, I argue that *The Beast and The Sovereign* constitutes another kind of response. In this chapter I pursue the notion that in some of his final seminars Derrida sought to explicate and perhaps consolidate his thoughts on how the history of “living being (both biological and zoological)” (*Beast* xiii) is spliced with the history of political sovereignty and the political in general. I suggest that Derrida bent his consolidation of his thought of life in politics around a response to September 11. Derrida investigates the “splice” he sees between sovereignty and the living being in order to complicate how

almost all theories of life and politics—“from Aristotle to contemporary [discussions] (Foucault and Agamben)”—reproduce “the interpretation of man as ‘political animal’” (*Beast* xiii). The figure of man as political animal contains a fundamental contradistinction between two forms of life; human life is characterized by a supplement, an augmentation that authorizes special categorical privileges. What exactly does this authorization entail? Where does it take place? The purpose of the political animal is to primarily divide life unquestionably between life that is proper to humans and life that is not proper to humans. Nevertheless, it is not so simple because human life is still part of animal life. Perhaps the question should be: what is political life and how does it bring a *quality* to life that distinguishes humans from other living beings? To answer this question Derrida asks us to follow him along the dual-path of the beast and the sovereign, the “overdetermined analogy” (*Beast* xiii) that guides his complication of political life and the life of the living being in general.

This chapter is divided into two sections. Section one examines how the seminars are a response to September 11. In *The Beast and The Sovereign* this response, similarly to *Rogues* and the Borradori interview, follows an autoimmune deconstruction of the concept of the rogue state and the general logic of nation state sovereignty. However, Derrida shifts his attention to the political dissymmetry of the analogy of the beast and the sovereign: “the sovereign like a God, like a beast” (*Beast* 57). This dissymmetry serves as the platform for his critique both of September 11, as well as life in politics. I suggest that by comparing the relationship between the beast and the rogue Derrida inscribes the question of life within the formation of sovereign power. I look at how the

methods of sovereign power have been historically assumed to be “proper to man” and positioned in between two figures of God, a figure of absolute sovereignty above the law, and the beast or the animal, a figure below the law, with no recourse to sovereign power or right. The relation between the beast and the sovereign thus rests on the operation of sovereign power as a relation of force. Section two digs deeper into the implications of this sovereign power for nonhuman life. I suggest that Derrida’s complication of sovereign power and its philosophical construction with and against God and the animal calls what is “proper to man” into question. However, I argue that the intervention that Derrida works toward is yet another politicization, a repoliticization against the nation-state, against “what is proper to man,” against sovereignty as the reason of the strongest.

I. “The Reason of the Strongest” and Non-Human Life

To begin, I will define exactly how Derrida uses the concept of the analogy as a reason and a “fable” that makes-known, as a political strategy. It is with this political strategy that Derrida analyzes September 11, for he sees in the aftermath of the events how this “fabulous morality” (*Rogues xi*) was put to use. Derrida begins the first session of *The Beast and the Sovereign* seminars by pondering two phrases that converge within the dual logic that characterize his analysis in the rest of the seminars. The first phrase, Derrida reminds us, comes from La Fontaine’s classic fairy tale “The Wolf and the Lamb,” and as he puts it, quoting directly from that fable, “we’re shortly going to show it” (*Beast*

2). The second is a common French proverbial expression, *à pas de loup*. Derrida starts us on the path of complicating the relationship between the beast and the sovereign by bringing into view the intersecting logic that at once asserts a truth and brings into view a way of using the figure of the animal to invest human actions with characteristics attributed to an animal. These investments are never neutral or without moral implications. To return to the phrase at hand, to move *à pas de loup* means to move “without making a noise, to arrive without warning, to proceed discreetly, silently, invisibly, almost inaudibly and imperceptively, as though to surprise a prey” (Derrida, *Beast 2*). Derrida is interested in *à pas de loup* because it refers to the wolf, an animal that is most often used in relation to the sovereign within political discourse. But why the wolf? The answer may seem obvious given the ease with which wolves become enemies to humanity in so many popular stories, but as Derrida explains “[if] I chose the expression that names the wolf’s ‘step’ in the *à pas de loup*, it was no doubt because the wolf itself is named there *in absentia* as it were; the wolf is named where you don’t even see or hear it coming; it is still absent, save for its name” (*Beast 5*). The wolf is absent;¹ it is apprehended by the phrase both *literarily* and *literally* because on the one hand we are never referring to an actual wolf, but rather a sense of wolf-attributed-silence. On the other hand, the wolf within the story in which the phrase appears is not *yet* present. “There is only a spoken word, a fable, a fable-wolf, a fabulous animal, or even a fantasy

¹ The French word *pas* means “not,” but *à pas* can also mean, “to step.” Derrida plays on the meanings of these two words to make his point about how the concept of presence haunts this phrase.

[...]; there is only another ‘wolf’ that figures something else –something or somebody else, the other that the fabulous figure of the wolf, like a metonymic substitute or supplement, would come both to announce and conceal, to manifest and mask” (Derrida, *Beast* 5-6). The phrase *à pas de loup* contains a fable-wolf, one that is always silent and whose silence carries a fear associated with the figure of the wolf. However—and this will guide my analysis in the following section—the association of the wolf with a threatening, ghostly stalking always refers to something other than a wolf. Who or what is this other that the figure of the wolf, or any figure of bestiality, refers to? Derrida gives us several important “others,” but the most prominent one that informs much of how he thinks about the analogy of the beast is the one that refers us back to the first phrase that opens his seminar: “we’re shortly going to show it.” As I mentioned in chapter one, this phrase comes from La Fontaine’s fable “The Wolf and The Lamb,” and is one half of the couplet that reads:

The reason of the strongest is always the best;
As we shall shortly show.² (qtd. in *Beast* 7)

As we saw in the discussion of *Rogues*, Derrida sees in this fable a certain logic, or perhaps even an equation, between sovereignty, force, and justice. Derrida cites Blaise Pascal’s notion that “it is just that what is just be followed; it is necessary that what is strongest be followed” (qtd. in *Beast* 8), in order to point out that in this fable La Fontaine uses the figure of the wolf to communicate this logic that the strongest is right precisely because he/she³ is the strongest. In other words, what is right is determined by

² These are the same two lines I quoted above from *Rogues*, but a different translation.

³ As Derrida often notes, the sovereign is almost always a man but we also “mustn’t forget the she-wolf” (*Beast* 9).

the one who has enough force to make it so. But what does this say about reason itself? Before moving on, this question must be addressed because it tells us a great deal about how Derrida uses the idea of analogy to complicate the animalization of the origins of the political. Speaking of Jean-Jacques Rousseau’s animalized account of the reason of the strongest in a discussion about slavery, Derrida argues that Rousseau’s thesis is “that ‘*the reason of the strongest*’ is *in fact* the best, that it has prevailed and prevails in fact (the stronger has reason of the weaker, the wolf and the lamb), but that if *in fact* the reason of the stronger wins out, *by right* the reason of the strongest is not the best, [...] and everything will turn around the semantic pivot of the word reason” (*Beast* 13). The significance of the word “reason” is ambiguous; it can refer to either that of the strongest who asserts his reason *because* he is the strongest, or it can refer to a metaphysical, ontotheological reason that “ought to prevail by right and according to justice” (Derrida, *Beast* 14). What is at stake in the concept of the reason of the strongest is the position of reason within discourses of force, power, and sovereignty because it is this reason that determines who or what is right. Moreover, there is the question of who benefits from this reason and what it legitimates, indemnifies, and conceals. Derrida approaches these concerns with the concept of the analogy because where ever there is an analogy there is always a reasoning, “a calculus that moves back up toward a relation of production, or resemblance, or comparability in which identity and difference coexist” (*Beast* 14). The analogy serves as a way for Derrida to question how exactly reason is put to work to simultaneously justify a reason of the strongest inherent to the figurative relation of the beast and the sovereign. It is the goal of the rest of this section to suggest that Derrida’s

problematizing of this reason, or analogy of the beast in the sovereign serves two conceptual purposes. First, Derrida’s deconstruction of the analogy of the beast and the sovereign inscribes the question of life within the formation of sovereign power as the right to create exception. Second, this inscription calls for a more robust understanding of sovereignty that does not reduce it to configurations “said to be zoological, biological, the animal, the bestial” (Derrida, *Beast* 14). The overarching frame of this discussion will be that this dual deconstruction occurs as a response to September 11. Before I look at how the analogy of the beast and the sovereign produces a reason of the strongest that creates and conceals sovereign exception, it is important to briefly discuss how Derrida brings together the figure of the beast and the figure of the rogue from *Rogues* so that we can make some important distinctions between the figures of god, sovereign, man, and beast.

If we look back to the previous chapter La Fontaine’s phrase led us through Derrida’s discussion of the autoimmune politics of democracy in *Rogues*. I analyzed the logic of the reason of the strongest in relation to the collapse of the Cold War politics of a “balance” of powers. Without wanting to rehearse the arguments pursued in that chapter, I argued that September 11 had an integral influence on Derrida’s thoughts about democratic politics. I want to briefly discuss two places in *Rogues* where Derrida explicitly links both the concept rogue state and the reason of the strongest to animality. By comparing these two moments in *Rogues* to Derrida’s careful deconstruction of the logic of the reason of the strongest in *The Beast and the Sovereign*, I shall argue that the seminars offer the same critique as *Rogues*.

In the section called “The Last of the Rogue States” Derrida briefly discusses the history of the word ‘rogue’ in English and how this word is distinguished from the French word *voyou* that translates roughly into English as a ‘rogue.’ Derrida understands the concept of the rogue in several ways in *Rogues*, but the common thread between them is that the rogue refers to an unwillingness to abide by the rules. One primary reason the word interests him more than *voyou* is that it has a history of being extended to animal life. Derrida recalls that,

any wild animal can be called rogue but especially those, such as *rogue elephants*, that behave like ravaging outlaws, violating the customs and conventions, the customary practices, of *their own* community. A horse can be called rogue when it stops acting as it is supposed to, as it is expected to, for example as a race horse or a trained hunting horse. A distinguishing sign is thus affixed to it, a badge or hood, to mark its status as rogue. This last point marks the point rather well; indeed it brands it, for the qualification *rogue* calls for a marking or branding classification that sets something apart. A mark of infamy discriminates by means of a first banishing or exclusion that leads to a bringing before the law. (*Rogues* 93-94)

Derrida is interested in this inclusion of the animal in the category of rogue because it allows him to draw connections between how the figure of the animal is used to display qualities of humans, to mark and set them apart. Similarly, the rogue state and the rogue animal nonetheless share the same logic of being excluded from the law in order to bring them under the law. However, what does this mean for the animal itself? How can the animal be brought before the law? While Derrida does not say this explicitly in *Rogues*, one can imagine that the term functions the same in each case; this term justifies violence against an animal or person. This justification is similar to what Derrida says about the functioning of the analogy between the beast and the sovereign “that brings man so close

to the animal, inscribing them both in a relation of proportion, and now brings man and animal close in order to oppose them: heterogeneity, disproportion between the authentic homopoliticus and the apparently political animal, the sovereign and the strongest animal” (*Beast* 14). This analogy always asserts the reason of the strongest, or some justification for violence, however, to take this argument further, it also produces a relationship of semblance, or identification with the other because it creates a proximity that results in this opposition. Derrida is interested in this proximity because it is within this space that the beast and the rogue are brought under the law. The opposition is created in order to establish a legible distinction of self and other that is fabricated as irreconcilable. While there is more to say about how this works in the analogy between the beast and the sovereign, I first want to discuss how exactly Derrida links the rogue to this discussion because this informs his critique of September 11.

As I mentioned above, the beast and the rogue share a “being-outside-the-law” (Derrida, *Beast* 17), and it is on this basis that Derrida brings the rogue into his discussion of the wolf in Rousseau’s *Social Contract*. Rousseau opposes those political theorists who “reduce citizen to beast, and the originary community of men to an animal community” (Derrida, *Beast* 11) because he wants to think outside of a state-as-nature configuration that this animal community implies. To the contrary, Rousseau argues that “if there are slaves by nature, this is because there have been slaves against nature. Force made the first slaves” (qtd. in *Beast* 13). In other words, according to Rousseau, humans are only made into slaves and animals by an analogy that rationalizes their subordination. While I mentioned this above, it is worth repeating here: Derrida reads this argument as

an insertion of ethics into the question of the reason of the strongest; the reason of the strongest is best but it ought not to be. Derrida has learned this lesson from Rousseau. “We should never be content to say,” Derrida urges, that “the social, the political, and in them the value or exercise of sovereignty are merely disguised manifestations of animal force, or conflicts of pure force, the truth of which is given to us by zoology, that is to say at bottom bestiality or barbarity or inhuman cruelty” (*Beast* 14). Derrida learns from this lesson that we should distrust analogies and the oppositions they use to construct a reason or a justification that usually does violence to someone or something. In the case of the rogue and the beast, both are said to be outside the law and this outside is conditioned with a being brought back inside to face the sovereign and the law. In fact, as Derrida says, there is a “reciprocal haunting” (*Beast* 17) between all three figures that inscribes one into the other. It is at this point, and on this level, that Derrida discusses September 11.

September 11 allows Derrida to demonstrate more concretely the exemption from the law and reciprocal relationship between the one who is exempted and the sovereign who supposedly exempts. However, September 11 also opens Derrida up to a critique of the beast and the sovereign that has in view a deconstruction of a certain formation of life and the political. Thinking back to our brief mention of Rousseau and the lesson Derrida learns about the problematic reliance on analogies between the political and the animal, I argue that Derrida brings September 11 into view to show only the most recent enactment of the kind of logic that mobilizes the political around a fundamental division of life. In other words, Derrida bends his discussion of the beast and the sovereign around

September 11 because he is worried about the ramifications this event will continue to have on configurations of life and the political. In the rest of this section, I briefly discuss how Derrida fits September 11 into his deconstruction of the beast and the sovereign through the figure of the rogue state and the logic of the reason of the strongest. Next, I turn to the implications Derrida draws for the concept of “proper to man” and Aristotle’s political animal.

As I mentioned in the discussion of Derrida’s interview with Giovanna Borradori, he points out that the United States is often accused of committing terrorism and of being a rogue state despite its many accusations against other nation-states. For Derrida, this situation of the accused-accuser is a similar situation to the one between the rogue-beast-sovereign because it is often the United States that has authority over who *officially* becomes the rogue and thus is brought under the force of international law. With this in mind, the major difference between the United States and those they accuse as being rogue is that technical, military, and media apparatuses allow the U.S. define itself as a just state and not a rogue state—they act not as an international terrorist, but as a state that seeks justice through retaliation. For this reason Derrida argues that the U.S. is “most rogue of all” (*Beast* 19) and that its use of the concept of rogue state is the “most hypocritical rhetorical stratagem, the most pernicious or perverse cynical armed trick of its permanent resort to the greater force, the most inhuman brutality” (*Beast* 19). This hypocritical “trick” is what Derrida refers to as the “putting to work of a fable” (*Beast* 35). The fable is a trope that Derrida uses to signify the creation of moralized meaning that is then put to work as a reason of the strongest. This putting to work of reason involves a

“strategy to give meaning and credit to a fable, an affabulation—and therefore a story indissociable from a moral, the putting of living beings animals or humans, on stage, a supposedly instructive, informative, pedagogical, edifying, story [...] to *make known*, to share knowledge, to bring to knowledge” (*Beast* 35). The fabular dimension of politics involves a circulation of knowledge that serves to align popular interests with that of the state by creating a narrative of how power works to serve the interests of the state or sovereignty. In the aftermath of the September 11 attacks this affabulation was enacted by what Derrida calls the “technical reproducibility of the archive [...] that conditions its very putting-to-work, its efficacy, and its very meaning” (*Beast* 36). During and after the collapse of the towers, the images of the events were highly mediated and reproduced in a certain way to achieve both the maximum dramatic effect, but also to condition how the world perceived the attacks as an isolated act of violence without reason and without provocation. The United States’ government used the images of the towers to archive not only the towers themselves, but also a certain narrative of how and why they fell. Furthermore, and perhaps more importantly, these circulations of images have “to do with knowing, knowing how to cause fear, knowing how to terrorize by making known” (*Beast* 39). The images of the towers are circulated as a kind of knowledge or proof of attack while simultaneously denying any response that accounts for any responsibility America might have for this event. With this in mind, we can see how the fabular putting to work of the images of September 11, along with the characterization of the rogue state, bring September 11 in line with Rousseau’s fear of creating an analogy between the political and the animal. In each case there is a careful concealing of power through a

narrative that both justifies and moralizes a violence or domination of one over the other, and while I will talk more explicitly about non-human life in the rest of this paper, this concealing remains the same. I will now turn to how Derrida applies this fabular logic of the analogy to the historic opposition of human life as political and non-human life as apolitical. This discussion allows me to make claims about how Derrida's project in the seminars is to deconstruct a rationality of the political that creates divisions of life in order to position itself above life.

II. The Political Animal and Derrida's "Re-politicization" of Life

After his discussion of September 11 Derrida turns to Aristotle's figuration of man as "political animal" that opened this chapter. Building on his argument about the analogy and the putting to work of a fable, Derrida argues that the analogy deconstructs a conception of the political that is based fundamentally on the opposition between political life and natural life. Derrida argues that "the animal realm is so often opposed to the human realm as the realm of the political" (*Beast* 25). The human is in essence a political being and that this definition of humans as political beings is "the essence of the political and in particular of the state and sovereignty has been represented in the formless form of animal monstrosity" (Derrida, *Beast* 25). What is a political being? As we saw at the end of the first chapter, Derrida is attuned to the ways that the political creates a logic or a reason that positions the life of the political as a life that is above or beyond biological life. I argued that the horizon of his concept of autoimmunity is to deconstruct this logic

by calling for a more complicated understanding of life that does not apprehend the living as a form of the political. To go beyond this means to see how exactly the life of the political is said to be an appendage, or a prosthetic that extends the life of the political being. Derrida, speaking primarily of Thomas Hobbes' *Leviathan*, argues that this prosthetic creates a life that is neither human nor animal but remains nonetheless central to both because it is modeled after the human body. Derrida argues that although the *Leviathan* views the state as a “gigantic prosthesis designed to amplify, by objectifying it outside natural man, to amplify the power of the living, the living man it protects” (*Beast* 28), it also mimes the human form relentlessly. This mimetic state exposes the logic that we are working with here between the analogy of the beast and the sovereign because the leviathan at once privileges and denounces the human body, while producing a third “artificial animal” or monster out of the state. I argue that Derrida concerns himself with Hobbes' prosthetic state so that he can posit what he calls the “proper to man” (*Beast* 42) as the action of these configurations of the state as beyond nature. Furthermore, it is this “proper to man” that excludes the animal from being a political animal precisely because of these characteristics that are said to be natural. Before moving on to discuss exactly how this “proper to man” works, it is important to examine how Derrida reads Hobbes' justification for the exclusion of animal life from the realm of the political as a model for the relationship between the beast and the sovereign. Derrida recalls that in the chapter of *De Cive* entitled “Of the Rights of Masters over Slaves” Hobbes categorically justifies the rights humans have over animal life based on what he calls “the right of nature” and not “divine positive right” (qtd. in *Beast* 29). However, built into this description is also a

justification for violence against human life: “[right] over non-rational animals is acquired in the same way as over the persons of men, that is, by natural strength and powers” (qtd. in *Beast* 29). This is troubling for two primary reasons. First, how can the state produce a life beyond nature if nature is the very concept that justifies its actions? Second, why is violence against animals even justified except as a way to legitimate human-to-human violence? The answer to both of these questions, I propose is that Hobbes is operating under the same—reason-of-the-strongest—reasoning that began this discussion; it is always a matter of justifying sovereign force. While Derrida does little in the way of a close reading of this passage, he concludes that this contradiction illuminates his thesis regarding the analogy between the beast and the sovereign: “the beast is the sovereign, man is beast for man” (*Beast* 30). What Derrida means by this is that the beast—as nature or an idealized force of nature—stands in for sovereign authority in order to legitimate hostility toward both humans and animals. However, man is a beast for man because the animal is used as a way to signify an original law of nature. In other words, the relationship between humans and animals (or humans and “other” humans) is regulated by a fundamental reason of the strongest that legitimates sovereignty. Derrida emphasizes that this conclusion is essential to how Hobbes constructs a “proper to man” that is supposed to legitimate the natural right of men over beasts but instead exposes Hobbes’ admission that “this humanity, this proper to man here signifies that sovereignty, laws, law, and therefore the state are nothing natural” (42). Hobbes posits that this “proper to man” is both an extension or a result of the state, and also acts as a precondition of the state itself.

While there are several examples of traits said to be “proper to man” in *The Beast and The Sovereign*, the one that is most pertinent and encapsulates best how the “question of the proper to man is indeed placed at the center of a debate about the force of law, between force and law” (Derrida, *Beast* 83) is fear and terror. As I mentioned above, Derrida argues that September 11 and the War on Terror are products of the “fabular dimension” of politics (*Beast* 35) that signify how Derrida configures political rhetoric as a kind of story that is “indissociable from a moral” (*Beast* 35). Similarly, Derrida understands that the “making known” (*Beast* 38) of the images of September 11 “in all cases has to do with knowing how to cause fear, knowing how to terrorize by making known” (*Beast* 39). Because it is this fear that maintains his theory of the state as a prosthetic to human life Derrida relates it to what Hobbes, in *Leviathan*, calls the “mainspring of politics” (*Beast* 39). Derrida argues that the leviathan is a technology for distributing fear and it is this fear that constitutes sovereign power by delegating the “natural” right to self-protection of the sovereign. Hobbes saw the kind of social contract of sovereignty as a trading of bodily subjectivity or ipseity for protection. In other words, one gives up his or her “personal freedom” (defined by Derrida in *Rogues* as a right to do as one pleases) for a different kind of freedom, a freedom from the threat of outside force. With this in mind, there is a kind of autoimmune logic in this fear whereby fear “is equally opposed to the state as a challenge as it is exerted by the state as the essential manifestation of its sovereignty” (Derrida, *Beast* 41). While in the previous chapter this autoimmune logic led us to the relationship between sovereignty and democracy, here Derrida uses it to examine how the concept of proper to man is politicized as

simultaneously the condition of what could be called “human sovereignty” but also the condition of sovereign political rule. Derrida comes to this by reading Hobbes’ constitution of this fear as a property of “natural” human being whereby humans are led into a sovereign agreement *because of this fear*. Furthermore, Derrida argues that Hobbes’ fear is primarily a fear for the body, “for one’s own proper body, i.e. for life. Life lives in fear. Life is essentially fearful, fear is the passion of life” (*Beast* 41-42). Hobbes considers fear as a fundamental characteristic of human life, but only as it relates to the political and because of this, Hobbes argues that fear and human life are synonymous. This notion is central to Derrida’s arguments about what is at stake in the deconstruction of the analogy between the beast and the sovereign because what it advocates is that life is fundamentally defined by the political.

In this chapter, I have parsed how the analogy of the beast and the sovereign establishes the attributes that are proper to man, and this has brought me to Hobbes’ configuration of human life that is synonymous with fear. This examination extends my ideas about autoimmunity and ipseity from chapter one by pulling them into a discussion of how life is divided in politics only to be brought back in the form of a categorical opposition between humans and animals. Through Derrida’s discussion of Hobbes, I have shown that Derrida pursues a deconstruction of the way in which analogies simultaneously exclude animal life and bring it back in the form of an attribution of what is proper to man. The analogy of the beast and the sovereign describes the violence with which animal life and human life are separated, excluding nonhuman life from a relationship with the political, and denying subjectivity to nonhuman life. This exclusion

opposes natural life and political life, even as it pretends that political life originates from a natural order. This hierarchical order of political life above natural life is used as a justification to deny political responsibility for nonhuman life by naturalizing the distinction between human and nonhuman life, as well as solidifying a line between life and politics. This naturalization of the denial of responsibility for nonhumans returns within the law as a justification for human-to-human violence precisely because it is perceived through the lens a justification to kill nonhuman animals.

Near the end of the third session, Derrida calls for a reformulation of the political that does not rely on oppositions that are easily organized into a logic of the reason of the strongest: “What I am looking for would be, then a slow and differentiated deconstruction of this logic and dominant, classic concept of nation-state sovereignty [...] without ending up with a de-politicization, but another politicization, a re-politicization” (*Beast* 75). I have followed his line of thought from autoimmunity and ipseity to the analogy of the beast and the sovereign in order to show how Derrida’s concerns about life involve deeply-rooted political structures that establish hierarchical definitions of life. Underneath these definitions of life is the reason of the strongest or a relationship of power and force. At the same time, this relationship of force creates man as a political animal, and establishes a form of life that is greater than natural life.. I argue that Derrida seeks a politics of life that can apprehend and be hospitable to human and nonhuman life. In order to achieve this, he sets out to break the political configurations of life and the oppositions that have been set up against nonhuman life. I have analyzed some of the

ways in which Derrida breaks down the division between life and politics by deconstructing the places where politics creates life as a category of its own. As I move into the conclusion of this paper, I would like to push these ideas a little further into a consideration of what Derrida hopes to achieve with this deconstruction of life and politics.

Conclusion: On the Threshold of Life

In session twelve of *The Beast in the Sovereign* Derrida levels a critique of Giorgio Agamben's theory of the Homo Sacer. Derrida's critique of Agamben allows him to postulate that what is at stake in the analogy between the beast and the sovereign is a return to Aristotle's concept of human life as inherently political. While Aristotle's concept of the "political animal" has occupied Derrida from his introductory session, it is not until session twelve that he explicitly complicates it. Derrida disagrees with Agamben for two fundamental reasons. On the one hand, Agamben believes there is an absolute distinction between bios and zōē, biology and zoology. On the other hand, Agamben finds this distinction in Foucault, but claims to be amending his original thesis by arguing for, rather than an entrance of zōē into the polis, a "zone of irreducible indistinction" (Agamben 9) between bios and zōē. Derrida frames his discussion of Agamben (and by extension Foucault) by pairing the concept of a "threshold" of life with Heidegger's phrase "for the stubborn, life is merely life" (qtd. in *Beast* 305). Derrida employs the word "threshold" to signify an ontological origin, an absolute bottom of a line of thought.⁴ However, the word threshold also implies a beginning and as Derrida states, "we no longer know, between the beast and the sovereign, where to begin tackling this question" (*Beast* 312) of life. Derrida introduces the twelfth session of *The Beast and the Sovereign* with Heidegger's phrase because he wants to complicate the notion of a

⁴ Derrida derives his understanding of the word "threshold" from its French equivalent, 'seuil'. 'Seuil' etymologically derives from the Latin word "solum," meaning bottom.

threshold in life, a threshold that insists there are certain kinds of life and that they are indivisibly separate. However, Derrida also begins with Heidegger's phrase because it is Heidegger that he finds missing in both Agamben and Foucault's theories of the bio-political. Heidegger's symptomatic absence from both Foucault and Agamben signals avoidance on behalf of the two theorists to encounter Heidegger's location of Aristotle's statement "man is by nature a political living being" (qtd. in *Beast* 315) within the question of the "unity of *physis* and *logos*" (Derrida, *Beast* 318), nature and reason. Derrida finds in Heidegger a more robust complication of life precisely because he locates Aristotle's phrase "political animal" between nature and reason; because he too wants to unpack the relationship between reason and the threshold of life that Aristotle communicates. Between reason and life, Derrida points out, "it really is a question of a sort of war and conflict of forces in which reason wins by force, and along with reason the rationalism [...] inscribed in the concept of animal rationale" (*Beast* 318) or the political animal. What is at stake between reason and life, in other words, is another reason of the strongest, a logic of force at the center of the life. I argue that it is this reason that Derrida charges Agamben with when he calls for a "bare life" that relies on an opposition between *bios* and *zōē*, biology and zoology. Furthermore, Derrida's location of the reason of the strongest at the center of life is how he understands the repoliticization of life that I discussed at the end of the previous section.

Derrida begins his critique of Agamben by locating the definition of man as political animal at the commencement of Aristotle's *Politics* where he defines the purpose of the state and the constitution. The location of Aristotle's statement is

important for Derrida because he also outline a kind of purpose for the state, or at least working against an idea of the state that solidifies its position by defining life as a fundamental separation. As Derrida points out, Agamben rests his entire argument on such a distinction, and it is precisely this distinction that Derrida finds so problematic. Agamben unfolds his argument in relation to both how Aristotle defines human life as political and also in relation to how Foucault interprets this initial claim. “In Foucault’s statement,” Agamben argues, “according to which man was, for Aristotle, a ‘living animal with the additional capacity for political existence’ it is therefore precisely that meaning of this ‘additional capacity’ that must be understood as problematic” (qtd. in *Beast* 315). Agamben calls for a theory of the political that would be, rather than biopolitical, zoopolitical because in modernity the two kinds of life Aristotle defines “enter a zone of irreducible indistinction” (qtd. in *Beast* 316). Agamben then argues that Foucault’s thesis that “modern man is an animal whose politics calls his existence as a living being into question” (qtd. in *Beast* 320) has to be corrected, or completed to reflect Agamben’s indistinction. Derrida has two problems with Agamben’s arguments: nowhere in Aristotle’s text is an absolute distinction between bare life and qualified life defined, and furthermore this distinction is not specific to modernity. Derrida’s second remark is also leveled against Foucault who also calls for a “threshold of modernity” (qtd. in *Beast* 317) that is marked by biopolitics. At this point Derrida wonders why neither of these of authors reference Heidegger who, in *Introduction to Metaphysics*, similarly speaks of an event that instigated a discourse of human life. Derrida translates Heidegger as arguing that it is “only after the event [...] after the conscious, knowing, knowledgeable

appearance [...] of man as historical man, only after this historical eventness, and thus tardily, did one define [...] man by a concept” (*Beast* 317). The event that Heidegger refers to is Aristotle’s definition of man as a living being “endowed with reason” (*Beast* 317). Heidegger’s replacement of “political” with “reason” is important for Derrida because of the connection he draws between the two concepts with the idea of “the reason of the strongest is always best”. By locating Aristotle’s statement in reason, Derrida follows Heidegger in configuring life in terms of logos rather than simply in a distinction between bios and zōē. Derrida cites the five questions regarding man as political animal that Heidegger asks, however I focus on two: first, “How does the originary unity of Being and thinking unfold as the unity of physis and logos?” (qtd. in *Beast* 318). Second, “How does this logos, as reason and understanding, come to reign [...] over Being at the beginning of Greek philosophy?” (*Beast* 318). Heidegger’s questions allude to a kind of struggle between reason and being, but not in the sense of “the *logos* itself, but the *logos* [...] one might say corrupted into the form of reason and understanding, the *logos as* reason and understanding” (Derrida, *Beast* 318). The distinction between “logos itself” and “logos as” is crucial to understanding what is at stake in Derrida’s critique of the beast and the sovereign as a relation of force (and hence of the reason of the strongest). Heidegger makes two distinctions that are important for Derrida and that both Agamben and Foucault fail to recognize: the explicit significance of the concept of logos for questions of life, and furthermore that when we think about life it is already in the form of a “logos as,” a discourse of life that has been impossibly political since Aristotle’s time.

Derrida calls for a reading of Aristotle that does not make a concrete distinction of *bios* and *zōē*, but rather looks more closely at what Aristotle actually says. Derrida suggests that perhaps Aristotle already had considered what Agamben and Foucault attribute to modernity and this is why they ‘like everyone else, have to quote [Aristotle’s concept of the political animal] and get embroiled in reading this enigmatic passage” (*Beast* 327). While this may seem like splitting hairs on Derrida’s part, he pulls apart why Foucault and Agamben cite Aristotle only to oppose him because it allows Derrida to propose a re-reading of Aristotle that pays closer attention to his thinking as *already biopolitical*. At the end of the session, Derrida summarizes his arguments against Agamben’s use of Foucault and Aristotle by arguing that:

Aristotle might very well have said, and in my opinion certainly did say, that “the attribute of the living being as such” (and thus of bare life, as Agamben would say), the attribute of the bare life of the *living* being called man is political, and that is his specific difference. The specific difference or the attribute of man’s living, in his life as a living being, in his bare life, if you will, is to be political. (*Beast* 329-330)

Derrida’s call to reread Aristotle is not a simple inversion of Agamben’s bare life and an inscription of the political animal into Agamben’s theory of biopolitics. Rather Derrida reads Aristotle against Agamben to show how life is constituted by the political and is therefore already “bare life” in the sense that life is already political. If we consider Derrida’s discussion of how Heidegger locates Aristotle’s “political animal” within the context of *logos* and reason, we can see that Derrida calls for a consideration of life as *logos*. Derrida’s reading of Aristotle against Agamben opens us to the understanding that when we talk about man as political animal we are defining a version of humanity that

takes control of logos in order to “reign over being” (qtd. in *Beast* 318). Derrida finds in Agamben’s bare life both an audacious claim of discovery and also a problematic separation of political life and life itself that can only enact more violence by qualifying and solidifying *zōē* as the life that can be properly destroyed without regard. Instead, Derrida is more interested in remaining on the threshold that keeps life from being distinguished because it is this distinguishing that leads to the justification of violence.

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