SURVIVING THE PRESENT: A STUDY OF THE ROLE THAT HUMAN/ANIMAL DIFFERENCE PLAYS IN JACQUES DERRIDA'S WRITINGS

by

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Abstract

This dissertation answers three questions relating to Jacques Derrida's writings: why is Derrida concerned with human/animal difference? How should his deconstruction of this distinction be understood in the context of his broader philosophical project? Finally, do the answers to these questions complicate the belief that Derrida's thought promotes a post-human ethics? Whereas Derrida's sensitivity to the suffering of non-human creatures partially explains his interest in "the animal," there are complex reasons for why he frequently returns to interrogate this theme–reasons that can only be understood by first clarifying core features of his philosophy. I maintain that what obsesses Derrida in virtually all of his writings is how a longstanding, "metaphysical" view of human consciousness proves deconstructable. Following Derrida, I term this view "living presence"–the belief that experience happens presently to beings who are present to themselves. In undermining this view, Derrida reimagines experience as what I term "survival," where the very things traditionally thought to be foreign to human subjective life are required for experience to carry on happening.

Importantly, the fact that philosophers repeatedly describe human consciousness in terms of presence is not simply an error. It is rather an effort to preserve the living present against the threat that everything opposed to presence plays in its very possibility. This explains why human/animal difference is so strenuously affirmed throughout the history of Western thought on Derrida's view. Animals are not simply inferior kinds of beings compared to humans; there is rather thought to be an *essential* difference between the two. Whereas humans encounter themselves and their world presently, animal are utterly instinctual, reactional, and non-present to themselves. However, by deconstructing the human/animal distinction, Derrida reveals that those features traditionally associated with animals are necessary for *any* life, human or otherwise, to exist. For this reason, "the animal" is a "pharmakon": it both sustains and upsets a long-held understanding of what we uniquely are.

In my final analysis, I examine whether my reading of Derrida's thought is compatible with a non-human ethics. I do so in two steps: first, I examine a prominent reading of Derrida's thought that contends that it is. For a large number of thinkers in "animal studies," Derrida's thought is aligned with the philosophy Emmanuel Levinas in important respects: whereas Derrida rejects Levinas' anthropocentrism, he retains the core of Levinas' ethics. However, I argue that the conditions that Derrida believes make life possible undermine this reading of his work. In the end, I argue that if deconstruction is an ethics, it is so only because it promotes "life" understood in the sense developed in this dissertation. Yet we must be mindful of what deconstruction does not provide in the way of an ethics: on the one hand, any standard of ethical belief is deconstructible. On the other hand, deconstruction does not necessarily promote a more inclusive and compassionate future. Whereas it can do so, it might also inaugurate a future that is less inclusive and more savage. This is, I argue, precisely what cannot be known.

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Abbreviations

A – *Aporias*

AD – *Adieu to Emmanuel Levinas*

AF – *Archive Fever*

AL – *Acts of Literature*

AR – *Acts of Religion*

AT – *The Animal That Therefore I Am*

BSi – *The Beast and the Sovereign, Vol. I*

BSii – *The Beast and the Sovereign, Vol. II*

D – *Dissemination*

DA – "Differance"

DB – *Derridabase*

DPi – *The Death Penalty, Vol. I*

DPii – *The Death Penalty, Vol. II*

DV – *Deconstruction and the Visual Arts: Art, Media, Architecture*

EO – *The Ear of the Other: Otobiography, Transference, Translation*

EUi – *Eyes of the University*: *Right to Philosophy 2*

EUii – *Eyes of the University*: *Right to Philosophy 2*

FL – *Force of Law*

FT – *For What Tomorrow…*

HS – *How to Avoid Speaking: Denials*

L – *Limited Inc.*

LF – *Learning to Live Finally*

MO – *Monolingualism of the Other: or, The Prosthesis of Origin*

MP – *Margins of Philosophy*

N – *Negotiations*

OG – *Of Grammatology*

OH – *Of Hospitality*

ON – *On the Name*

OT – *On Touching – Jean-Luc Nancy*

P – *Parages*

Pi – *Psyche: Inventions of the Other, Vol. I*

Pii – *Psyche: Inventions of the Other, Vol. II*

PO – *Positions*

PS – *Points…: Interviews, 1974-1994*

R – *Rogues: Two Essays on Reason*

RP – *Resistances to Psychoanalysis*

S – *Signsponge*

SC – *Shibboleth: For Paul Celan*

SP – *Speech and Phenomena*

WA – *Without Alibi*

WD – *Writing and Difference*

WM – *The Work of Mourning*

Introduction

> From the first breath, this archive of survivance is at work. [T]his is the case not only for books, or for writing, or for the archive in the current sense, but for everything from which the tissue of living experience is woven, through and through. A weave of survival, like death in life and life in death, a weave that does not come along to clothe a more originary existence, a life or a body or a soul that would be supposed to exist naked under this clothing
>
> - Jacques Derrida, *The Beast and the Sovereign, Volume II*

> always the question of liberty and the machine
>
> - Jacques Derrida, *The Beast and the Sovereign, Volume I*

This dissertation was originally conceived as a Derridian critique of normative approaches to non-human ethics. A considerable amount of time was spent developing this project, even while its most important premises seemed uncontroversial: for example, if there is nothing that essentially distinguishes human from animal life, then there is little reason to privilege "human" life as the singular or even principal focus of any ethical framework. Additionally, I believed that the deconstruction of human/animal difference offers a different thinking of ethics itself, one that is radically inclusive and that effaces many of the foundational assumptions at work in much of the animal ethics literature (particularly in works stemming from the "analytic tradition"). Yet this reading of Derrida's work was frustrated when I began exploring why he often returns to deconstruct human/animal difference. Whereas non-human life and human/animal difference are primary themes in his later work, "the animal" features prominently even in Derrida's earliest published writings. In trying to answer this question, it became apparent that "the animal" is one of a number of themes that upholds a metaphysical imagining of "life" understood as "living presence"–the belief that such beings exist that are present to themselves and to their world. Deconstructing this notion gives rise to an understanding of life that is radically finite–what I call "survival." It is in terms of survival that all of "life," human or otherwise, carries forward through

time. Yet having developed this account, the question became whether this deconstructed understanding of "life" subverts the very assumptions that led me to take on this project in the first place. For if deconstruction upsets longstanding metaphysical prejudices about what we are, it is also possible that it is not an "ethics," at least not in the way that I assumed when first developing this project. As I argue in the final chapters of this work, this is in large part the case even while I was the last to want to admit it. In what remains of this introduction, I will explain why I take this position having reassessed Derrida's philosophy.

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"The animal" has attracted a considerable amount of recent scholarly attention, particularly among post-modern thinkers in "animal studies," a cross-disciplinary, intersectional field that explores the philosophical, political, literary, social, and cultural aspects of the relationship between human and non-human life. Whereas the overwhelming majority of Western philosophers since Plato have affirmed human/animal difference, animal studies is largely an effort to reimagine what, if anything, "the animal" means; to interrogate longstanding claims about what essentially distinguishes non-human and human beings; and to rethink human/non-human relations. In this spirit, several scholars have developed approaches to non-human ethics that are each considerably different from normative approaches propounded by philosophers in the Anglo-American tradition, according to which there are minimal conditions for who or what is a being worthy of ethical concern. Thinkers such as Cary Wolfe, Kelly Oliver, and Donna Haraway argue that such an approach is inappropriate for thinking about non-human life, and have sought a radical departure from normative approaches for thinking about non-human beings. Specifically, they have tried to formulate an ethics that upsets various philosophical and epistemic claims on the basis of which sharp distinctions between human and non-human animals continue to be drawn.

They furthermore challenge not only the criteria on the basis of which we determine whether a creature has some or equal ethical "worth," but more radically the proposition that ethical "criteria" (defined as standards or principles for evaluating whether a creature is a subject of moral concern) are appropriate for thinking about ethics. Such criteria, they claim, risk effacing a primary experience of ethics understood as a pre-theoretical encounter with and responsiveness to non-human beings.

This project of reimagining human/animal difference, and of reconceptualizing ethics in a way that better accommodates non-human life, has to a great extent been influenced by the writings of Jacques Derrida. As Seung-Hoon Jeong contends, Derrida's work "virtually ignited recent animal studies in the humanities" (Jeung 142). Whereas the greatest amount of attention has been paid to his later writings on human/animal difference, Derrida has throughout his career interrogated the tortuous, contradictory ways that the animal has been to used sustain a metaphysical understanding of "the human." In addition to *The Animal That Therefore I Am* and his last seminars, Derrida focuses on the animal in his treatments of Husserl ("Exemplary Stories of the 'Flesh'"), Aristotle ("The Principle of Reason," *On Touching–Jean-Luc Nancy*, "White Mythology"), Heidegger ("Heidegger's Hand (*Geschlecht* II)," *Of Spirit*, "The Ends of Man," *Aporias)*, Lacan ("And Say the Animal Responded?," but also "Resistances," "For the Love of Lacan," "To Do Justice to Freud,"), Rousseau (*Of Grammatology*), among many others. On a certain reading of his works, Derrida challenges the claim that sharp distinctions exist between human and non-human living beings, and so majorly contributes to the project of developing a post-human future. To offer some sense of the importance that contemporary thinkers accord Derrida's writings on human/animal difference, Cary Wolfe, one of Derrida's most committed adherents in animal studies, argues that "Derrida's work on the animal, it seems to me, provides

the most promising framework ... for bridging the ethical and epistemological dimensions of issues that occupy me in this book" (*Rites* 11), later writing: "no contemporary theorist has carried out a more searching, if episodic, investigation of the question of the animal" (*Rites* 55). Further, Akira Mizuta Lippit contends that Derrida's animal writings are "crucial to the discussion of animal being ... Beyond his own thoughts on animal being and the metaphysical disruption it causes, Derrida has introduced the philosophemes that make an investigation of the animal as such possible." (Mizuta 14-15). Anne E. Berger and Marta Segarra, meanwhile, contend that "Derrida's thought … has far reaching implications … for thinking anew the difference(s) between human(s) and animal(s), differences which the Western philosophical tradition has mainly articulated and summarized in terms of the generic opposition between the speaking and the non-speaking living being" (Berger 6).

Whereas Derrida's writings on animality have proven inspirational for the project of reimagining human/animal difference, it is nevertheless unclear *why* he frequently returns to deconstruct this distinction from within the many works where it is affirmed. What is beyond dispute is that Derrida believes that "the animal" has been used to qualify humans as exceptional kinds of beings; as he writes, the broad, enigmatic term "animal" "institutes what is proper to man, the relation to itself of a humanity that is above all careful to guard, and jealous of, what is proper to it" (AT 14). It is furthermore uncontroversial that Derrida believes that whereas differences clearly exist between, say, macaws, sperm whales, and human beings, the view that *essential* differences distinguish humans as unique, exceptional creatures cannot be maintained in light of deconstruction. Yet why are these claim important for Derrida? To appreciate the significance of human/animal difference in Derrida's work, should it be understood in terms of a wider, more complex philosophical project? And assuming that it is possible to convincingly contextualize

human/animal difference within the scope of Derrida's philosophy, in what way might the conclusions that we arrive at impact the possibility of developing a non-human vision of ethics that is consistent with Derrida's thought?

These are the questions that this dissertation aims to answer. While it seems indisputable that Derrida is, in a broad sense, in favor of developing more nuanced and caring relationships with non-human creatures, this cannot by itself account for the importance of the theme of human/animal difference in his work; rather, it has to be understood in terms of his overall project (assuming one exists). Yet accomplishing this in a way that does justice to Derrida's writings is no easy feat. Minimally, it requires interpreting a wide range of Derrida's writings, and determining the core claims of what I hope to show is a coherent, compelling, though complex philosophy. It furthermore requires interpreting Derrida's animal writings in a way that is consistent with that philosophy. This project is made more difficult for the following reason: with the exception of certain interviews, Derrida generally resists describing his philosophy in simple propositional terms. This is so for reasons stemming from how deconstruction works: deconstruction is not a theory that can be adequately described outside of its being performed; rather, Derrida understands deconstruction as the text undermining *itself*. This makes efforts to describe a "core" of Derrida's thought not only problematic, but perhaps unfaithful. Nevertheless, this is what I have attempted to do, and in a way that I hope avoids sacrificing the considerable nuance of Derrida's body of work.

I maintain that Derrida's central obsession in virtually all of his writings is to reimagine how "life," and in particular human subjective life, should be understood. Since *La Voix et le Phénomène,* Derrida undermines the view that conscious experience happens along the lines of "living presence"–the belief that reality gives itself presently to beings who are present to

themselves. For Derrida, the claim that any such living being could exist is false given a necessary condition that allows any creature to continue to be: differential repetition. As I argue, experience *just is* the repetition of iterable marks through time. By interrogating the consequences of this insight, Derrida undermines the proposition that some free, spontaneous, or sovereign agency underlies the goings-on of experience. Derrida argues that experience only happens on account of what philosophers have generally held to be extraneous to the purity of the inner life of human subjects: non-presence and non-conscious mechanicity. Indeed, on his reading of the history of philosophy, the view that we, or any being, is ever *present* to itself is maintained by denying or avoiding the role that everything traditionally opposed to subjective life plays in its very possibility. For this reason, Derrida reimagines life as what I have termed "survival." In claiming that creatures do not live, but survive, Derrida conveys a vision of experience that is radically finite, where the claim that experience *happens* to a unified "subject-of-a-life" is undermined by the very conditions that make it possible.

It is in terms of this reimagining "life" that we can understand the importance of the human/animal distinction in Derrida's work. Human/animal difference does not simply uphold the relative superiority of human beings, as though animals are lesser beings compared to humans (with limited capacities for reason, language, self-reflection, and so forth). It rather expresses an *essential* difference, on the basis of which human consciousness is thought to be unique among the living beings that inhabit the earth. Yet the confidence with which human/animal difference is affirmed betrays an enigma about human consciousness that is, for Derrida, irresolvable. As Derrida writes in "How to Avoid Speaking," "the animal" has always posed an "immense problem" for the "problematic of consciousness, that thing that, more and more, one avoids discussing as if one knew what it is and as if its riddles were solved" (HS 87). For Derrida, the

features that traditionally define animals in contrast to human beings–in particular, the view that animals are instinctual and utterly reactional–are required for *any* living being to exist. For this reason, the animal is a *pharmakon*: it both sustains and undermines a vision of human subjective life as living presence. Minimally, this suggests that human "consciousness," understood on the level of presence, is a flawed model for thinking about human subjective life.

Yet do the conclusions that Derrida arrives at in his deconstruction of human/animal difference have ethical consequences with respect to how non-human life should be regarded and treated? On a certain reading, this conclusion seems indisputable: the vision of "life" as survival that I develop in this dissertation undermines the claim that essential differences exist between "human" and "non-human" life. An argument can be made that if we are being consistent, human beings should not be the singular focus of ethics, for the simple reason that deconstruction to a great extent undermines human exceptionalism. Indeed, read in a certain way, the undermining of exceptionalism has been central to Derrida's project since his earliest writings: "my whole history, the whole genealogy of my questions, in truth everything I am, follow, think, write, trace, erase even, seems to me to be born from … exceptionalism and incited by [the] sentiment of election" (AT 62). If human beings deserve ethical respect because they are thought to possess certain unique qualities, but if those qualities, to the extent that they exist, are not uniquely human, then who could deny that we should treat animals with increased sensitivity and compassion?

I think that we should be careful in assessing whether and to what extent a non-human ethics can be derived from Derrida's philosophy. If this is possible, it must be so in a way that is consistent with the account of survival that I develop in this dissertation. Importantly, whereas Derrida's reimagining of "life" might lead us to view non-humans in more sensitive, complex, and compassionate ways, it is nevertheless unclear whether any particular ethical vision, claim, belief,

or inclination that we might develop having read Derrida's work is not itself deconstructible. After all, there is no necessary reason to think that deconstruction compels or even inclines us to regard any other in any particular way, nor that it necessarily promotes the emergence of any particular future. To be sure, it *can* help to promote a specific future, including one that is more decent to non-human life. However, I argue that deconstruction is simultaneously a threat to any ethical belief that it might help to generate.

The chapter outline of this dissertation goes as follows: in chapter 1, I explain and draw out the consequences of Derrida's contention that experience always takes place as the repetition of iterable marks. To do so, I initially focus on an opposition that Derrida often returns to, that between "speech" and "writing." This distinction captures a tension between the claim that marks are repeatable and that they appear in the present: if experience is the experience of marks, it is nevertheless commonly assumed that there is a vital difference between a written and a spoken (or "lived") sign. To be sure, Derrida does not claim that there is *nothing* that distinguishes a written from a spoken sign. He rather questions that value on account of which an essential difference is thought to distinguish the two: presence, according to which "I" *live* the signs that "I" put to use. As I will show, deconstruction reveals that if "consciousness" is the experience of iterable marks, then those features traditionally associated with "writing"–distance, absence, and unconscious passivity–are necessary for it to occur.

The consequences that Derrida arrives at through his deconstruction of writing and speech have considerable consequences for what "the self" for whom repetition happens is. For Derrida, a sign can only appear as "consciousness" on the condition that it is severed from any animating intention and any particular context. Indeed, he maintains that the separation between a mark and the "intentional state" that supposedly animates is required for the future reception of that mark;

just as one has access to a written mark because it bears no essential link to any particular individual, this is similarly the case with marks inscribed in memory. There is therefore a distance required wherever repetition takes place. Furthermore, deconstruction undermines the self-sameness of any discrete moment of temporal experience. While each passing moment happens on account of repetition–such that "I am," at any given time, the "happening" differential repetition–no event of experience takes place in a temporal present. This explains why Derrida frames lived experience in terms of *differance*–the emerging of space in (or as) time and of time in (or as) space. On the one hand, signification only happens owing to the movement that time introduces in the way that a mark is experienced. In this sense, a mark never "occurs," but is produced in time without however emerging in a present. On the other hand, while signification happens in time, time only happens as signification; no moment of temporal life takes place except through a system of marks or traces.

In light of Derrida's deconstruction of living presence, in chapter 2, I reframe how experience carries forward as non-present, quasi-mechanical events of differential repetition, which undermines core assumptions about human subjectivity. Experience is radically finite: to the extent that "I" exist, I do so as the unrelenting, non-present repetition of marks that are ceaselessly being arrested from me without ever having truly appeared. Following Derrida's work on Blanchot, I term this thinking of life "survival." I draw from a wide range of Derrida's texts, and focus in particular on three themes to flesh out a broadly Derridian vision of survival: "the archive," the *yes, yes* of "double-affirmation," and "life/death." In discussing these themes, I argue that one never lives, but survives: one's continued existence is undeniably, *though not irreducibly*, passive, mechanical and non-present. To the extent that one is not irreducibly these things, this is

not on account of some free, spontaneous agency that underlies experience. It is rather owing to the workings of differance itself.

Whereas "survival" challenges metaphysical notions of "the self," it is nevertheless true that "we" commonly believe that a unified self exists. This belief is, Derrida argues, a basic assumption that runs through the history of philosophy. Yet if differance allows each moment of temporal experience to happen, then it is *a fortiori* required for any self-assertion of "the self" to take place. This is the case whether the "I" or "self" is affirmed in works of philosophy, or in seemingly simple moments of self-reflection. This raises the question of what goes on when we assert ourselves as present subjects. By reinterpreting the affirmation of the "I" in light of survival, Derrida suggests that even the most commonplace, apparently simple expression of "the self" is what I describe as an appropriative performance that immediately effaces itself. Paying special attention to the "the signature" in Derrida's work, I argue that if "I am" only as the non-present happening of iterable marks, and if every new experience requires a necessary severance in psychic continuity (i.e., spacing) for a mark to be claimed "as mine" (for example, a memory relating to "myself"), then the conditions that allow anything to be proclaimed as my own requires that it not be. This is so for the simple reason that "survival" implies that no such self is possible *in principle*. As such, "the self," should we continue to use this term, is never self-identical but is always, to use Derrida's language, "to come": experience only happens in a way that is incomplete, non-present, radically finite, and never one with itself.

In chapter 3, I describe how Derrida's deconstruction of human/animal difference connects to my reading of his project developed in chapters 1 and 2. "The human" confirms a metaphysical imagining of conscious life as living presence, which is sustained by externalizing those features that are nevertheless required for *any* life, human or otherwise, to exist. Among the most prominent

ways that "the animal" confirms "the human" is through the apparent difference between reaction/response; whereas animals are thought to merely react to their environment, humans authentically respond to their world. I show why this distinction proves deconstructible, which is due to the role that repetition plays in any living being's continued existence. Human/animal difference should therefore be understood in terms of Derrida's project of deconstructing the living present, where "the animal" buttresses a conceptuality that casts human beings as essentially free, decisional, sovereign–in other words, *present*–subjects.

As importantly, I account for what motivates philosophers to uphold human/animal difference on Derrida's view. The affirmation of human/animal difference is not simply misguided or a mere error on the part of philosophers. Rather, it is sustained by the same passion to affirm presence developed in chapter 2. What motivates human/animal difference is, I argue, a drive to externalize animal life. However, this drive is simultaneously one of flight and dissimulation against the threat that non-human life poses to living presence. On the one hand, and using Derrida's terminology, "the animal" is unrelentingly "sacrificed" to sustain "the human." By this, I do not simply mean that animals have been reduced to a secondary status relative to human beings. Rather, "the animal" is *made* to represent everything without which any expression of life could not take place–instinct, non-conscious automaticity, non-presence, and so on. Yet on the other hand, human/animal difference never operates as a simple or static distinction in philosophical texts; rather, it is asserted in ways that are contradictory, unstable and strained. Understood in this way, whereas the metaphysical passion to secure "the human" involves the persistent marginalization of non-human life, it is never finally secured and must be unrelentingly *re*asserted in ways that are bound to prove insufficient. With this dynamic in mind, we can better

understand the claim that "the animal," like writing, is a *pharmakon*: it simultaneously supports "the human" while perennially threatening to undermine it.

In what remains of this dissertation, I explore whether my account of Derrida's work can be used to promote a non-human vision of ethics. I do so in two stages: in chapter 4, I examine claims that Derrida's thought can be so used, particularly among scholars in animal studies influenced by his thought. While Derrida figures prominently among continental thinkers of human/animal difference, he is generally read in ways that are broadly Levinasian: the dominant tendency has been to eschew Levinas' anthropocentrism in light of Derrida's deconstruction of human/animal difference, while retaining the core of his ethical vision. This misunderstands the considerable challenges that deconstruction poses to Levinas's ethics. Derrida's work, and in particular his writings on Levinas himself, undermines both the "singular" status of human and non-human creatures, as well as the notion of ethical responsibility as this notion is developed by Levinas. This is so for two reasons that I develop in considerable detail in chapter 4: first, if "life," human or otherwise, only carries on as differential repetition, this subverts the view that we are "singular" creatures in Levinas' sense. Second, survival undermines the view that any creature can access any other on the order of transcendence. My reading of Derrida suggests that we can encounter any human or animal other through the same conditions that allow us to encounter anything whatsoever. Hence, whereas Derrida undermines human exceptionalism, he simultaneously challenges the dominant way that his thought has been interpreted for promoting non-human ethics.

Having discussed why a Levinasian reading of Derrida's work is misled, in chapter 5, I explore to what extent deconstruction can be considered "ethical" in a way that is consistent with the account of survival developed in this dissertation. I argue that deconstruction can only be

regarded as "ethical" in a very specific sense, one that in no way inclines us to any particular future *vis-à-vis* non-human life. Claims to the contrary misunderstand deconstruction, and in particular Derrida's suggestion that deconstruction is "for life" or is "liable to the other, opened to and by the other, to the work of the other" (Pi 46). Deconstruction, I argue, is "ethical" only in the sense that it disrupts "the same" understood as any relatively stable conceptual framework. This is, for Derrida, the minimal condition for any "sign of life" to happen. Yet importantly, deconstruction does not promote the arrival of any particular future, and for essential reasons. Life only carries on as a consequence of difference and alterity–in other words, through the arrival of "the other" (what Derrida sometimes calls the *arrivant*). However, "the other" in Derrida's specific sense is not something known prior to its arrival. This point is essential for Derrida: were "the other" known prior to its arrival, then it would not serve the essential function that it has for allowing life to carry on. If the future arrived in a fully predictable way, then it would not arrive as a differential "event." Yet as a consequence, whereas deconstruction promotes the "coming of the other" and so the continuation of life, this "other" is always a potential threat inasmuch as we simply don't know what it will be. Yet for Derrida, it is only on account of this threat that life carries on into the future.

Chapter 1 – From Living Presence to Survival

Before discussing "the animal" as it figures in Derrida's philosophy, it is necessary to describe the deconstruction of living presence–the presumption that subjects are present to themselves and to their world. This gives way to an understanding of "life" that undermines prominent philosophical assumptions about temporal conscious experience. Showing why this is the case is the task of the first two chapters of this dissertation. Paying special attention to the theme of "writing" in Derrida's work, in this chapter, I show how experience involves the repetition of iterable marks through time. By drawing out the consequences of this claim, I argue that lived experience happens on account of differance–i.e., as non-present, differential repetition. This will prove crucial for understanding Derrida's interest in non-human creatures: whereas human subjective life has commonly been conceived in terms of presence, those very qualities that traditionally define animal life–in particular unthinking automaticity and the absence of a fully present subjective life–are necessary for any creature to exist.

§ 1.1 – Presence and Repetition

Derrida often stresses that experience only takes place as the experience of marks. This is not a novel point: human consciousness is always the consciousness *of* something. Yet importantly, Derrida stresses that every such experience must be repeatable–must bear the possibility of being recalled. This is the case not only for "linguistic" signs, but for every event of experience (a sneeze, the ringing of a siren, the feeling of the sun on one's face). As Derrida states in conversation with Ornette Coleman, even if any such experience never happens to be recalled in the future, it nevertheless bears the *possibility* of being recalled: "the unique event that is produced only one time is nevertheless repeated in its very structure" (Coleman and Derrida, 322). Indeed, inasmuch

as the most fleeting experience is temporally extended, it is remembered in its happening. When, for example, I have a sip of coffee, I am recalling its being drunk while drinking it.

Yet there is a tension between the propositions that marks are repeatable and that they take place in the present. This tension expresses itself in the longstanding opposition between speech and writing. If experience only takes place as the experience of a "sign," there is nevertheless thought to be a marked difference between a written and a "living" sign: whereas the latter is intimately present before consciousness, the former does not signify anything by itself. Written marks have, at best, an instrumental function for preserving ideal meaning: writing communicates the present intentional state of living beings–communicates "by different means, by more powerful technical mediations, over a far greater distance, but still within a medium that remains fundamentally continuous and self-identical" (LI 3). Central to the speech/writing distinction is therefore a vision of a fully self-identical speaker for whom signs appear as they are being expressed. Vocal speech emanates from and reflects the speaker's intentional life. Written words, meanwhile, do not have this unbroken connection to the speaker; they are no longer *animated*, and are for that reason external and alien "to the living, … to the right-here of the inside" (PP 104). Why is this apparent difference important for Derrida?

The reason why Derrida frequently returns to the distinction between speech and writing is due to the role that the mark plays in experience, and how philosophers have been compelled to negotiate this fact against an understanding of consciousness as living presence.[1] Derrida argues that if "consciousness" is minimally the experience of repeatable marks, then those features traditionally associated with "writing"–in particular, death, distance, absence, and unconscious passivity–are necessary for it to occur. In deconstructing the difference between speech and writing, Derrida reveals what might be called the essentially *textual* nature of "consciousness";

any moment of conscious awareness, including any moment of intimate self-reflection, happens through the same conditions that allow us to encounter a conventional text. This frustrates the view that a self is ever present to itself. Indeed, the role that reading/writing plays in the possibility of experience reframes conscious life as the movement of differance.

"Describing" differance is no simple task (for Derrida, it is not strictly possible). In what follows, I focus on two indissociable "aspects" of how experience happens differantially. In the following subsection, I explore what Derrida variously terms "iterability" and "repeatability" in connection to the mark. Following this, I show how repetition happens temporally, in a way that exposes the irreducible role that non-presence plays in experience. To explain why I take this position, I will briefly supplement my more abstract treatments of iterability and temporality by exploring Derrida's treatment of Husserl and Plato, paying special attention to two of his most remarkable though difficult works, the early *Speech and Phenomenon* and "Plato's Pharmacy."

§ 1.1.1 – Iterability

Among the most productive of Derrida's insights stems from the claim that any mark (including any linguistic sign) has to be readable "despite the absolute absence disappearance of any receiver, determined in general" (L 7). This apparently simple point challenges the belief that language communicates a "distant presence"; language, indeed *any* mark, does not transmit "intentional meaning." This is so because a sign must be iterable for it to be a sign at all. Among the most uncomplicated ways that Derrida makes this point is in "Signature, Event, Context," where he sets forth two arguments. First, he asks us to consider a coded message. Even a message written in a language decipherable by two people alone would share the structurally necessary feature common to all languages: its content is readable in principle, if not in fact. The insight that flows from this claim goes as follows: "To be what it is, all writing must […] be capable of

functioning in the radical absence of every empirically determined receiver in general" (LI 8). Second, consider the status of a text after its author's death: so long as that text exists, it continues to be readable: "A writing that is not structurally readable–iterable–beyond the death of the addressee would not be writing" (LI 7). These examples demonstrate a relatively simple point: signs must be interpretable in the absence of any *specific* individual or group. At the moment a word is inscribed, it has become divorced from the "intentional life" of the author who wrote it; once written, the possible deaths of the author or the potential addressee does nothing to affect the possibility that it might be read and interpreted. Were this not the case–were it impossible for a text to be repeated after the author or addressee's death–it would not be composed of iterable, interpretable signs, and so would not be a text at all. It follows, therefore, that no single person is required for a text's continued readability, nor does the author or anyone else have any exclusive connection to it. Even though additional commentary by an author might help to clarify the contents of their work, this would in no way change the readability of that text, but would only guide the reader to develop a particular interpretation.

While these arguments might seem self-evident, they are foundational for Derrida: if a written mark must be detached from any living intention in order to be read, this undermines the view that *any* sign (whether written or spoken) is ever received as an "absent present" (as intentional content, the lived experience of the author, and so on). To the contrary, the "lived experience" of another person can only be received on the basis of marks thought of as mediums that can function perfectly well in other contexts. If a mark only ever appears by being severed from the intentional state of specific individuals, then communication can no longer be thought of as the expression and reception of people's "states-of-mind." In "Title to be Specified," Derrida makes this point by remarking that if the same sentence occurs in multiple places in a text, then

there is nothing that essentially distinguishes the two occurrences. And yet, the same sentence is nevertheless meaningful despite being situated in different places. As such, neither iteration can be said to "belong" to, in the sense of operating exclusively within, either place. If this same principle applies for every sign, then every mark is meaningful *not* because it expresses the intentional life of an author: if a sentence signified something that were truly specific and singular, it would fail to function in the potentially infinite different contexts in which it might occur. A sign's meaning is therefore only determined based on the context in which it is inscribed–i.e. only in relation to other marks or sentences which themselves do not "belong" to the contexts in which they are written.

While we will further complicate this picture, iterability at the very least suggests that the occurrence of a written mark must be negotiated in relation to other iterable marks whose meanings are themselves only determined in relation to others. Accordingly, a text is never a self-enclosed unity. We must therefore renegotiate just *what a text is*: as Derrida writes in "Living On," a text can no longer be thought of as "a finished corpus of writing, some content enclosed in a book or its margins, but a differential network" (P 111). Being composed of repeatable signs, no text exists as a unity over which *anyone*, including the work's author, can claim interpretive authority. These insights lead Derrida to describe how we encounter signs in connection to "spacing": a sign can always be separated from the context in which it was first inscribed, as well as from the initial moment of inscription. Spacing, Derrida argues, constitutes and structures "the emergence of the mark": the radical removal of the sign from any specific spatial or temporal moment allows it to be read in the indefinite multiplicity of contexts in which it can be encountered. This is a condition for us to apprehend anything generally: one only encounters a word, idea, or concept on the condition that it can potentially be repeated in the future. The question becomes: if one *is* only in

relation to iterable marks, and if marks only emerge by being divorced from any animating intention, how do these claims affect our understanding not only of texts, but of *what we are*? To begin answering this question, I will briefly interpret Derrida's treatment of the speech/writing distinction in Plato and Husserl.

§ 1.2 – Presence and Repetition in Plato and Husserl

If writing operates only as the repetition of discrete marks without any essential link to an author's intentional life, and if one only exists on account of the marks that constitute experience, it is nevertheless *perhaps* the case that a distinction exists between written marks and marks as they are experienced by a living, conscious creature. This difference seems undeniable: the words in a shut book do not signify anything to anyone, and are in this sense "dead"; whereas they were once animated by a conscious, self-present being who wrote them, having been written down, they are no longer lived by anyone in a present. It is precisely this distinction between the written and the spoken (or "lived") sign that interests Derrida in "Plato's Pharmacy" and *Speech and Phenomena*. While both Husserl and Plato wish to maintain the living presence of conscious life, the role that repetition plays in the way that marks operate as experience upends the integrity of this claim.

Beginning with "Plato's Pharmacy," Derrida investigates Socrates' suggestion in *The Phaedrus* that writing is contrary to "life" in the sense that it is distanced from the origin that first animated it. This, in turn, presumes a vision of the soul as a unified and originary force–one that "moves itself" (*Phaedrus* 245c-245d), is fundamentally immaterial, and governs physical bodies (*Phaedrus* 246c). Plato conceives the distinction between speech and writing with this model of the soul in mind: whereas spoken signs originate from and exists in intimate proximity with the speaker, written signs do not. The way that we engage with written material is therefore

fundamentally different from how we negotiate spoken/lived signs: the latter exist before a subject who is "present, standing near it, behind it, within it, sustaining it" (D 77), whereas written signs are lifeless. For this reason, writing is a poor substitute for speech: relying on writing "atroph[ies] people's memories" (*Phaedrus* 275a). Beyond this, reading is always a minimally technical affair: as when we memorize something by rote without appreciating the substance of what has been memorized, we do not authentically *live* the words we read. Why is this important?

By interrogating the distinction between written and "lived" or spoken sign, Derrida does *not* claim that nothing distinguishes a conventional text from a speaking being. Rather, he challenges the view that marks are generated by and occur to self-present, autonomous beings. He does so by showing how the experience of a mark (and for Derrida, there is no experience except the experience of iterable marks) takes place *as* reading/writing–i.e. as the experience of marks that are detached from any living source. This is owing to the role that repetition plays for a mark to emerge; because memory is a repository where signs are "stored" to be recalled, they are never perpetually present as consciousness. Accordingly, we can only recall them through the same distance that allows us to encounter any written word. This suggests that much of what Plato negatively associates with writing is at play in the way that any sign is experienced. If what distinguishes writing is the fact that it "repeat[s] itself by itself, mechanically, without a living soul to sustain or attend it in its repetition" (D 111), but if memory is not self-identical with the presence of conscious life, then "technicity" is involved in the possibility of a sign's being repeated. This is a consequence of the distance that separates memory and "conscious" awareness. Because the signs deposited in the former have lost their vital connection to the living present, then a sign's being recollected involves the same technical, formal aspects at play when we read a conventional text. For this reason, writing proves essential for us to exist even while it undermines the purity of

the living present in terms of which conscious life is often framed. It follows that the spacing that separates the reader from the text is similarly at play in the self's relationship to memory in a sign's being repeated.

Similar points as these are made in *Speech and Phenomena*, where Derrida challenges Husserl's claim in *Logical Investigations* that a particular class of signs–"expressive" signs–can be rigorously distinguished from "indicative" signs. What differentiates the two is "meaning" or *Bedeutung*: an expression is meaningful when it is "presently" expressed by a self-present subject who "*means* or *wants to say* something" (SP 18). As Husserl writes early in "Investigation I," an expression is "phenomenally one with the experiences made manifest in them in the consciousness of the man who manifests them" (*Logical Investigations* 188). By contrast, an indicative sign refers the subject to something beyond itself (for example, the smell of coffee beans might indicate that a coffee shop is close by). A sign that indicates is thus not experienced as a pure, ideal meaning. What distinguishes these two kinds of signs is thus the relationship that they have to the speaker who intuits them: an expression is present before a consciousness who "wills" or "intends" it.

What interests Derrida, and what he believes cannot be maintained, is the vision of consciousness that determines the distinction that Husserl makes between expression and indication in the first place. The claim that these two types of signs are different is premised on Husserl's understanding of the purity of ideal conscious life: an expression qualifies as an expression if it is the kind of thing that can be experienced fully and presently without referentiality and detour. It therefore cannot refer or "point to" some other object or state of affairs. Yet as Derrida argues, the indicative function of the sign is *precisely* what allows any expression to manifest itself and be communicated: to be expressed, it has to be "embodied" (for example, in a word), and so severed from the intentional state of the speaker. Thus, an expression cannot be

received except through the mediating power of the sign. In order to avoid the contamination of indication and expression, Husserl must demonstrate that every expression is *purely* expressive–is absolutely non-indicative, meaningful without in any way referring. To do so, he must maintain that underlying the indicative, non-self-present way that expressions operate "in reality" is a *fully* self-present transcendental space of pure expressivity.

Derrida upsets this assertion, stressing that if ideal consciousness were truly self-enclosed and unified in a living present, then there would be no space in which anything could actually be expressed. Inasmuch as ideal objects do not simultaneously express themselves at any single moment of psychic life, the possibility of any one of them emerging before consciousness in the present is through their being recalled–i.e., through repetition. If repetition is required for ideal objects to be recollected before consciousness, Husserl must maintain that they are never affected in being recalled. In order to do this, ideal objects can in no way be reaccessed in an indicative fashion: indication implies a distance that separates consciousness and meaning in the form of the "physical" sign; while ideal consciousness takes place through repetition, by forbidding indication, the purity and permanence of ideal content remains uncompromised. For Derrida, this solution reflects Husserl's commitment to presence; if every sign is represented indicatively, then we cannot deny that consciousness takes place in a way that is passive and automatic (i.e., in a way that is not determined by a sovereign, self-aware agency). Ideal objects must therefore be recalled unaffectedly, as though they had never left–must, in other words, be re-presented or re-presenced. As Husserl writes: "when we live in the understanding of a word, it expresses something and the same thing" (*Logical Investigations* 190).

The phenomenon of repetition leads Derrida to posit the "law" of iterability: to reappear, any representation must retain some formal identity, for which reason it can be recalled and

recalled indefinitely. At the same time, a representation never appears identically across different iterations. If one's encounter with a type of object were identical each time it appeared, then there would be absolutely nothing to distinguish the two occurrences. One would then not be able to encounter a mark in the indefinite number of contexts in which it might occur. As Derrida argues in "Title to be Specified," if the meaning of a mark were truly self-identical, then it would in no way be affected by the different contexts in which it might be cited; it would be an entirely self-sufficient unit of meaning, and so would fail to signify in terms of the specificity of any particular context. Yet this cannot be so, as the mark would thereby be meaningless; it would fail to signify *in terms* of anything else, and so would not signify in any particular iteration. Iterability, then, is necessary for any sign to signify. As was also the case with Derrida's Plato, iterability introduces writing and textuality into the self-relation of the self to itself. We will now consider how iterability, spacing, and writing affect the self understood along the lines of living presence.

§ 1.2.3 – Consequences of Iterability: Calculability and Incalculability

Our discussion of "Plato's Pharmacy" and *Speech and Phenomena* imply certain conclusions that are essential for understanding how the living present is deconstructible on Derrida's view. On the one hand, the distance that separates the speaker from the sign reveals that experience occurs through a tension between calculability or technicity on the one hand, and incalculability or freedom on the other. Having reviewed Derrida's reading of Plato and Husserl, we have seen that any discrete mark, including those lodged in "memory," are only ever experienced in a way that is divorced from any living intention. There therefore cannot be a temporally extended, self-present intentional agency that governs how marks will arrive in experience. Because the iterable structure that makes language use possible requires that utterances be cut off "from all absolute responsibility, from consciousness as the ultimate authority" (LI 8),

the way that we engage language does not transcend non-conscious, unthinking technicity. As Derrida writes in *The Animal That Therefore I Am*: "a logic of repetition … will always inscribe a destiny of iterability, hence some automaticity of the reaction in every response, however originary, free, deciding and a-reactional it might seem" (AT 127).

However, and on the other hand, the fact that humans are defined by automaticity in the way that signs are repeated does not lead Derrida to reduce them to a mechanical ontology. This is so because at each moment where a mark is uttered or inscribed–indeed, in the temporal process of its being uttered or inscribed–that mark requires a reception that is other from the one that originally animated it. This is a consequence of the "law" of iterability described towards the end of the last section; while one never transcends mechanicity, no event of experience would happen were it wholly predictable and programmed. As such, even while calculability is undeniably involved in experience, it does not fully capture how experience happens. If, as Derrida suggests, we do not and cannot repeat, in all its purity, the "experience" or "intention" of *any* signatory (including "oneself"), then reading understood as the simple, unproblematic, unaffected–in other words, calculable–repetition of the signatory's intention is also incorrect. Because every utterance contains within it the possibility of repetition, the alleged connection that it bears to the "intentional state" of its author is severed the moment it occurs. As such, there must simultaneously be a non-determinate contamination of precisely what should resist contamination–calculability and that which exceeds calculability. Accordingly, every discrete moment where we encounter and negotiate signs–and it is only in such moments that experience takes place–is always singular, spontaneous, and unanticipated while at the same calculable and repeatable.

Derrida fleshes out the complexities of the distinction between calculability and incalculability when discussing a number of themes, for example "invention" or the "arrivant" in

the production of the "event."[2] Yet the crucial claim at this point in our discussion is that whereas experience only takes place by being bound to a system of iterable marks, no moment of experience is the identical repetition of any other. Iterability operates in such a way that the unprecedented, if not the "new" (this is the entire enigma) arrives through repetition: "the unprecedented is never possible without repetition, there is never something absolutely unprecedented, totally original or new; or rather, the new can only be new, radically new, to the extent that something new is produced, that is, where there is memory and repetition. The new cannot be invented with-out memory or repetition" (N 238).

§ 1.2.4 – Consequences of Iterability: The Self as Other

Derrida's complication of the distinction between repetition and what putatively exceeds repetition poses further difficulties for the self understood in terms of living presence. Minimally, iterability possibilizes "language." At the moment of inscription, the separation between a mark and the "intentional state" that supposedly animates it makes any future reception of that mark possible. Yet this necessary distance between the author and the written mark applies in principle to the author herself: an author has no *essentially* privileged access to his or her own work or memory after it has been inscribed. Inasmuch as she can only access her work on the condition that it is composed of iterable marks, the author is constricted by the same limitations that allow us to read any text. As Derrida writes in *Limited Inc a b c…*: "The sender and the receiver, even if they were the self-same subject, each relate to a mark they experience as made to do without them, from the instant of its production or of its reception on; and they experience this not as the mark's negative limit but rather as the positive condition of its possibility" (LI 49).

Yet importantly, the constraints that prevent us from being able to re-presence ourselves make self-relation possible. If memory did not operate in terms of spacing–if there was no distance

between the living present and "memory"–then there would be no chance of memories being recalled. As he writes in "Plato's Pharmacy": "Memory is finite by nature. … A limitless memory would … be not memory but infinite self-presence. Memory always therefore already needs signs in order to recall the non-present, with which it is necessarily in relation" (D 109). For this reason, Derrida associates the living present with pure death: if consciousness truly involved the unaffected re-presencing of memory, then there would be nothing to differentiate it from the unaffected, lifeless activity of a machine (as we will explore in the following section where we discuss differance, difference is the very condition for lived experience carrying forward, though its role will complicate everything traditionally associated with the "living" and the "living" subject). Importantly, spacing does not only allows us to access "linguistic" signs, conventionally understood. Emphatically, the spacing of iterability is what allows *any* experience, "linguistic" or otherwise, to take place: every living moment only comes into being on the condition that it is, to some extent, the repetition of the past. To deny this would be to deny the constitutive role that context plays in the very possibility of the emergence of every "new" experience.

If iterability and spacing make every moment of experiential life possible, we must reassess the self-identity of the "self" in relation to the marks that constitute its existence. If the self only relates to itself through marks (if, to use the language of *Speech and Phenomena*, one "speaks" to oneself in the inner sphere of psychic life) then self-relation becomes structurally indistinguishable from how we relate to any other. In order for "me" to understand what "I" have said to "myself," there must be a distance between speaker and interpreter, where "I" relate to "myself" only by interpreting iterable marks. If the possibility of any moment of self-relation depends on the reception of signs (if, for example, I can only think "I'm tired," "how old is she?," "when will this movie end?," by *in some sense* asking myself in the form of repeatable marks) this introduces a

necessary non-self-identity into the "internal monologue" that is required for any thought to happen. This means that each moment of subjective life involves engaging signs in a way where there is no privileged access to the content of what is being expressed. Yet because the possibility of any self-relation is due to "the primordially repetitive structure of signs in general" (SP 51), there is nothing that essentially distinguishes a sign as it is received from another, and a sign as it appears or is communicated "in consciousness." Whether I am listening to another person speak (or indeed, when I am reading a text), or representing signs in isolated solitude, I am always repeating iterable marks. As Derrida writes, inasmuch as every sign is necessarily constituted by an "originally repetitive structure," "there is no sure criterion by which to distinguish an outward language from an inward language or, in the hypothesis of an inward language, an effective language from a fictitious language" (SP 56). By this, Derrida means that language requires that one negotiate a linguistic structure that transcends the self, and where the possibility of experiencing it requires a productive, inaugural "interpretation" of the sign. If every moment of experience involves engaging with an iterable mark, then the very happening of experience is *necessarily* a relationship with that which one is not as a condition for one's being generally.

For this reason, Derrida claims that no mark or system of marks belongs to any self, even while it is only through the mark that one continues to be. As he writes in *Learning to Live Finally*, "language" "does not belong to me, even though it's the only one I 'have' at my disposal" (LF 34). By this, Derrida does not simply mean that one never "masters" a language (for example because languages are ceaselessly undergoing change). Beyond this, this claim expresses a paradox stemming from the fact that one has access to herself only through marks that do not themselves belong to them–indeed, that do not "belong" anywhere or to anyone, that are beyond "belonging": "language is not something that belongs. Not naturally and in its essence" (LF 38). And yet, "I

am" at any point in time only in connection to such marks. It would seem, then, that "I am" only because I do *not* belong to that which nevertheless constitutes my experience. With every passing moment, new experiences emerge, but because every experience is the experience of a mark, it can only be experienced through spacing–i.e., in a way that is severed from presence or any animating intention.

In what sense, then, can we ever think of the self as an enduring self at any point in time? If signs are in some sense other from us, but if the self *is not* except as signification, and if, furthermore, a sign only appears through spacing, then we cannot rigorously claim that an enduring "self" underlies the happening of signification. As I explore more extensively in Chapter 3, it is for these reasons that Derrida defines any moment of self-reflection as *autobiography*–a retrieval of the self which, because any "moment" of one's "past" self can only be accessed through repetition, can only be received through distance, spacing, and "death." As Derrida writes in *The Animal That Therefore I Am*, when one speaks of oneself, it is as if "I, me, my self were speaking of another, were quoting another, or as if I were speaking of an 'I' in general, naked and raw" (AT 57). Before examining how this claim informs Derrida's reconceptualization of "life" as survival, we must explore how he further complicates the living present by examining differance in connection to temporality.

§ 1.3 – Differance, Temporality, and the Living Present

Whereas one can only access themselves through iterability–at any particular moment in time, "I am" the "happening" of marks that do not belong to anyone in particular–it is nevertheless perhaps the case that with each passing moment, conscious life is temporally unified. Yet this would misunderstand Derrida's project: Derrida not only challenges the claim that one cannot retrieve one's "prior self." He further argues that any discrete moment of experience must *itself* be

divided and non-present to itself: "there must be a certain play, differance, non-identity. Not of indetermination, but of differance or of nonidentity with oneself in the very process of determination" (LI 149). Briefly stated (though we will have to elaborate why this is the case), every moment of "presence," whether this is understood as the "presence" of a linguistic sign, but more generally the "presence" of any temporal moment, only happens by differing from and deferring itself–i.e., on account of differance. In this section, we will see how Derrida's challenge to the presence of the living present is thoroughgoing by considering "signification" (or the happening of the mark) in relation to temporality.

In several texts, Derrida challenges temporal self-identity by emphasizing the role that differance plays in "lived" experience. Differance, Derrida writes, is "the movement according to which language, or any code, any system of referral in general is constituted 'historically' as a weave of differences" (DA 12), which leads him to define it as "the disappearance of any originary presence" (D 168). Yet why does Derrida accord differance this originary status? In many of his most widely read writings, such as "Differance" and *Of Grammatology*, Derrida makes heavy use of Saussure to describe this term. As is well known, for Saussure, a linguistic sign is meaningful only insofar as it is differentially defined from within the "linguistic system" in which it exists. In this sense, a sign is not a plenitude, but "is" only in being opposed to other signs. Saussure writes: "in language there are only differences without positive terms. Whether we take the signified or the signifier, language has neither ideas nor sounds that existed before the linguistic system, but only conceptual and phonic differences that have issued from the system" (Saussure 120). We should understand Derrida's claim that the sign "is" only as "deferred presence" in the following sense: because it can only meaningfully appear to consciousness differentially, there is no moment where a sign appears in a fully transparent, unequivocal–in other words, present–way. As Derrida

writes, "the circulation of signs defers the moment in which we can encounter the thing itself, make it ours, consume or expend it, touch it, see it, intuit its presence" (DA 9). Thus, a signified concept is simply not an ideal meaning–is "never present in and of itself, in a sufficient presence that would refer only to itself" (DA 11). As Derrida explains in *Of Grammatology*, it is only because of the otherness that marks the sign that it receives its signifying power, and "no structure of the entity escapes it" (OG 47).

Derrida interprets Saussure's insight that difference allows signs to appear to be a general limitation that makes any manifestation of presence possible. Just as a sign only appears by being received *differently*, so too it only ever appears differentially *in itself*, already contaminated by what it is not. Yet Derrida's focus on Saussure's linguistics to highlight the originary role played by differance in the emergence of the sign can obfuscate Derrida's principal concern in these and all of his writings: how the deconstruction of the living present gives way to survival. While many of his writings develop differance by treating Saussure's linguistics, the attention that Derrida accords semiological difference (particularly in certain early works) is the case only because it was within this field that differance had a reasonably well-developed history. In *Of Grammatology*, Derrida claims that his main reason for engaging so heavily with Saussure is that the latter thinker inaugurates a rethinking of "logocentric metaphysics" itself. Saussure, Derrida writes,

> give[s] us the assured means of broaching the de-construction of the greatest totality–the concept of the episteme and logocentric metaphysics–within which are produced, without ever posing the radical question of writing, all the Western methods of analysis, explication, reading, or interpretation" (OG 46).

Yet if "originary *différance*" (DA 10) is the possibility of "signification" itself, the view that it simply possibilizes "language" (narrowly defined) misunderstands Derrida's project. More exactly, it underestimates the full implications of Derrida's deconstruction of living presence by failing to understand the role that temporality plays in connection to the possibility of signification.

In what follows, I will show how the insinuation of the other in "presence" is originary for the happening of any "now"–any apparently temporally unified happening of experience. To use Derrida's terminology, differance is the emergence of space in (or as) time and of time in (or as) space, prohibiting the mark from ever emerging in a temporal present. It is on account of the involvement of the *trace* in the presence of the present moment which leads Derrida to describe differance as the original possibility of "signification" happening in time, just as it is the possibility of every opposition in terms of which "human" experience, understood from within the metaphysics of presence, conceives the world.

Before describing differance in connection to temporality, it is helpful to first account for Derrida's argument that absence is the possibility of movement, difference, and play in experience: "the origin of presence and ideality is concealed in the very presence and ideality it makes possible" (SP 55). In "Plato's Pharmacy," Derrida communicates this point in connection to the *pharmakon*: the *pharmakon* is not anything *in itself*, but is that very lack on the basis of which experience moves forward. As Derrida writes, "the 'essence' of the *pharmakon* lies in the way in which, having no stable essence, no 'proper' characteristics, it is not, in any sense … of the word, a *substance*. The *pharmakon* has no ideal identity; … It is rather the prior medium in which differentiation in general is produced" (D 126). We have already reviewed arguments that rest on this claim: a sign "is" not except in its being related to other signs. Such being the case, it does not presence itself before "consciousness" as a fully formed plenitude, but only by differing from itself (i.e., by being in relation to other signs). Presence, therefore, cannot be the value that explains why a sign is significant; its emergence is due precisely to its being incomplete *in itself*, and so in need of supplementation. It is on account of such absence that a sign *gives* itself to be read: a sign that could be fully presenced, *in itself* and without any relation beyond itself, could not be thought. For

these reasons, Derrida writes that one can only translate the untranslatable: absence "opens up the space for a *re-marking*, which, at the same time and in the same double way, defies translation" (AL 257). Repeating this point in "Living On," Derrida writes: "unreadability does not arrest reading, does not leave it paralyzed … rather, it starts reading and writing and translation moving again. The unreadable is not the opposite of the readable but rather the ridge that also gives it the chance or force to start up again" (P 140). Yet by writing about absence as a condition for the possibility of signification, Derrida is concerned with how the mark signifies *in* or *as experience* on the basis of this lack. For as he explains in "Force and Signification," "[o]nly pure absence–not the absence of this or that, but the absence of everything in which all presence is announced–can inspire, in other words, can work, and then make one work" (WD 8).

The lack that Derrida deems essential for the passage of psychic life further undermines the vision of experience understood as temporal self-presence. This lack is central to how Derrida understands differance. To show this why this is so, I will briefly return to what I consider Derrida's best treatment of temporality, *Speech and Phenomena*. The reason for this is that, like Saussure's insights about differential nature of signification, Husserlian phenomenology already exposes the necessity of difference in the way that signs appear in time.

§ 1.3.1 – Husserl, Temporality, and *Differance*

The logic of presence determines temporality in terms of "the identity of experience instantaneously present to itself. Self-presence must be produced in the undivided unity of a temporal present so as to have nothing to reveal to itself by the agency of signs" (SP 60). This vision of temporal unity reflects an understanding of "consciousness" as living presence. As Derrida asks in "Differance": "But what is consciousness? What does 'consciousness' mean? Most often ... consciousness offers itself to thought only as self-presence, as the perception of self in

presence. And what holds for consciousness holds here for so-called subjective existence in general" (DA 16). Yet as we have already seen, signs minimally refer or "point" the subject to something else: by intending the intentional content of experience, the subject is set in relation to the objects she intends. For this reason, expressive signs are "contaminated by the very thing it seemed to exclude: *Zeigen* [a complex word that can mean signify, point, demonstrate], the relation to the object as indicative showing" (SP 72). Yet we must bear in mind three important points which, for Derrida, are undeniable. First, the "pointing-out" of indication does not take place in an instant, but *takes time* to be performed. This is not a controversial point: it takes time for objects to be revealed before or intended by consciousness. If, for example, I say to myself "I'm cold," "I need to put on my winter tires," or simply "stop" when I see a stop sign, there is a necessary lapse over the course of which such phenomena are expressed. Second, we do not have access to the meaning of a sign in any pure, unmediated sense. This is certainly the case when we read conventional texts. In order to understand the content of a written work, I must construe repeatable marks. Yet this is also the case with ideal objects (which are, after all, essentially repeatable marks). In order to intuit ideal content, I must pass, so to speak, through the "physical" sign. The moment that a person puts ideal content "into words" (whether in conventional conversation or in the inner sphere of conscious life) that "content" can only be *re*accessed by interpreting the signs that were used to express it. To connect this second point to the first, because one *must* negotiate with signs in this way, there is a necessary duration, however slight, between the utterance of a sign and the reception of that same sign by myself. This is the case whether or not I actually, physically utter the sign: whenever I in any sense intend a sign, I can only reinterpret that same sign by passing through the "physical," empirical aspect of the sign. Third, it is important to recall that the "self" does not exist without content, but *is* only insofar as it is in a relationship with

iterable signs. There is therefore a necessary connection between personal existence and the "word": "to be" is, Derrida argues, an entirely empty concept *in itself*, and must be expressed in connection to something. The way that the sign operates in (or as) consciousness therefore complicates the proposition that there is a unit of consciousness within which signification happens. The "self" is not beyond the appearing of objects, and there is nothing that exists outside of their being manifested.

These three points–that the "I" does not exist except in relation to signs, that one must "pass through" and repeat signs in order to derive "ideal" meaning (i.e., spacing), and that repetition takes time–would seem to complicate the proposition that there is a unit of consciousness for whom signification happens. The "self" is not beyond the appearing of objects, and there is no "I" that exists outside of their being manifested through repetition. In order to maintain the presence of temporal life, a mark therefore *must* be expressed in an enduring temporal present. However, the way that objects become expressed temporally undermines this possibility. A sign is, in a sense, lost having been expressed; it is not perpetually retained in the full presence of conscious life, but must be repeated. On Derrida's reading, it is precisely in order to avoid these challenges that temporal repetition pose for the living present that Husserl closely identifies conscious life in connection to the voice (*voix*). As Derrida writes, because consciousness "designates nothing, no thing, no state or ontic determination, since it is encountered nowhere outside the word, its irreducibility is that of the … the unity of thought and voice in *logos*" (SP 74).

Because Husserl wishes to maintain the self-presence of ideal consciousness, but because the operation of the sign in consciousness happens temporally and so demands repetition, repetition must happen in such a way that what is being expressed remains in intimate proximity

to consciousness. This is *precisely* what the voice accomplishes, allowing repetition to happen as pure self-relation. To use Derrida's language, temporal repetition happens as *autoaffection*: vocal signs are heard

> by the subject who proffers them in the absolute proximity of their present. The subject does not have to pass forth beyond himself to be immediately affected by his expressive activity. My words are 'alive' because they seem not to leave me: not to fall outside me, outside my breath, at a visible distance; not to cease to belong to me (SP 76).

Autoaffection, then, preserves the self-presence of the self to itself *despite* that the self is essentially constituted through the law of repetition and everything that this implies. In speech, one auto-affects oneself immediately and is instantaneously present to the content being spoken. Despite that "I" can only access "myself" through iterable signs that have no essential connection to anyone in particular, the apparent immediacy with which a sign is uttered and received in speech maintains consciousness as living presence; the voice is, *at once*, a medium, but one that preserves self-presence.

Thus, the significance of speech or the voice in connection to the living present consists in the fact that one hears oneself speaking in a temporal instant. The happening of the expression in speech is intuited by the self in such a way that the sense of the expression is replicated instantaneously, as though it never left; a voice allows the perfect self-presentation of what is being emitted. Yet is it in fact possible that the self can preserve itself in this way through speech? Consider other modes of self-relation–for example, when one sees oneself in a mirror, notices a cut on one's hand, or thinks about getting a haircut. In each case, not only must I relate to a medium external to myself in order to form a self-image of myself, but every such case takes time to perform. As we will see, the temporal lapse that takes place between the self that hears and "the self" that speaks is an absence that produces "the self" (though in a way that compels us to revise this term in thoroughgoing ways).

We can now define differance in relation to temporality. Derrida writes that differance is the temporalization of space and the spatialization of time. On the one hand, signification can only take place through (or as) time: signification only happens in experience owing to the "movement" that time introduces in the way that a sign becomes intuited. A sense is never received as an atomic unity, but is produced in time: "temporality does not unfold a sense that would itself be nontemporal; even before being expressed, sense is through and through temporal" (SP 83). Yet because sense is unfolded temporally, it never becomes simply or purely present, but is always in "movement." In *Speech and Phenomena*, Derrida develops this point by expanding on Husserl's insights about retention and protension in the happening of any present moment. Every "now" is always already punctuated by the past in retention, such that the moment that a represented object comes "into view" as an already retained object, one that can be accessed only *as* past. Thus, for example, in order to catch a baseball flying in midair, I must be aware of the trajectory it takes and the location where it was thrown–must, in other words, retain the past in the present. This retention of the past is minimally required for any moment of experience, without which the present would be rudderless. Yet for this reason, the happening of the present moment involves what Derrida calls a "folding back" in the past that interrupts the self-sameness of the present moment. Yet being past, the past does not take place or appear *as such*. In a sense, it is retained without appearing. Understood in this sense, the happening of any now involves the ceaseless differentiation between retention and protention, and it is only on account of this ceaseless oscillation that never culminates in a present that experience happens. As Derrida writes in "Différance":

> [E]ach element appearing on the scene of presence, is related to something other than itself, thereby keeping within itself the mark of the past element, and already letting itself be vitiated by the mark of its relation to the future element, this trace being related no less to what is called the future than to what is called the past, and constituting what is called the present by means of this very relation to what it is not: what it absolutely is not, not even a past or a future as a modified present (DA 13).

Sense is therefore never received as an enduring ideal plenitude: it unfolds through time, and as such never properly arrives in a static "now." Indeed, as Derrida contends, the non-identity of time operates in such a way we cannot capture its "taking place."

On the other hand, whereas signification only happens through time, every moment of temporal experience happens as signification. However, because one can only access a mark that is essentially "outside" of the self's pure interiority (again, through spacing), the movement of time itself only takes place as the ceaseless renegotiation of signs that do not endure and that must be ceaselessly repeated. This is why, in Derrida's words, "[s]pace is 'in' time; it is time's pure leaving-itself; it is the outside-itself as the self-relation of time. The externality of space, externality as space, does not overtake time; rather, it opens as pure 'outside' 'within' the movement of temporalization" (SP 86).

Space and time therefore *imply* each other; indeed, they cannot be rigorously thought apart from one another. Time cannot take place except as the spatial movement of the trace, and space cannot take place except as temporalization. And yet, the constituting possibility for both space (as time) and for time (as space) is non-presence. As Derrida writes, differance is "the operation of differing which at one and the same time both fissures and retards presence, submitting it simultaneously to primordial division and delay" (SP 88). This is, Derrida writes, the very possibility of experiential life moving forward. No moment is ever properly unified, but is always other from itself in such a way that it has no stable, full–in other words, "present"–identity: "As soon as we admit spacing both as 'interval' or difference and as openness upon the outside, there can no longer be any absolute inside" (SP 86). Derrida would have us understand "the trace" in this sense, where the "present" moment *is* only insofar as it relates to what is outside of it. If the trace is the possibility of the appearing of any now, it is so in the sense that any now is inherently

incomplete, contaminated by a primordial nonpresence or nonself-identity that allows any apparently "present" moment to emerge. And as I have stressed, this is the case not only because signification only takes place through spacing, but on account of the temporality in terms of which signification happens.

§ 1.3.2 – *Differance* and Lived Experience

As Derrida suggests in countless texts, differance is the possibility of lived experience, a conclusion which, for him, is implied even within those texts that most vigorously defend the logic of presence. Deconstruction reveals that no moment of experience ever emerges *as such* as a plenitude, but also undermines the view that there is a locus of consciousness that is ultimately singular, sovereign, and free. This is the case first of all because of the challenge that differance poses for the possibility of originariness itself: "there is nowhere to begin to trace the sheaf or the graphics of différance. For what is put into question is precisely the quest for a rightful beginning, an absolute point of departure, a principal responsibility" (DA 6). Differance, then, is not an "origin" in a simple temporal sense, nor does it operate in a way that is ever simple or unified. It is rather "the non-full, non-simple, structured and differentiating origin of differences. Thus, the name 'origin' no longer suits it" (DA 11). Because differance produces the possibility of any singular moment of signification, it follows that no difference emerges through a prior sovereign agent or principle: "differences have been produced, are produced effects, but they are effects which do not find their cause in a subject or a substance, in a thing in general, a being that is somewhere present, thereby eluding the play of différance" (DA 11).

Yet while differance is necessary for temporal experience to happen, the fact remains that this thinking of presence and absence together in the differential production of experience can only be stated within the language of presence. This accounts for why the insights that deconstruction

generates are sometimes difficult to express. This is particularly the case regarding the temporal aspect of differance. For example, in the second volume of *The Beast and the Sovereign*, Derrida captures similar insights as those developed in *Speech and Phenomenon*, writing that any experience by a "self" is an experience of the past. Hence, the appearance of temporal experience similarly prevents its full and complete emergence. Yet Derrida also highlights the difficulty of capturing this thinking of presence-as-nonpresence by using the language of speed and acceleration, saying that the present passes with a hyperbolic speed. Derrida does not claim that the present occurs with such speed that it passes us by too quickly to be properly identified; as has already been suggested in our discussion of Husserl, it is rather that the present is *already* past at the moment of its supposed arrival. At that "instant" (though the adequacy of the idea of the "instant" is what is in question here), the experience is already past. Derrida argues: "as soon as I say *here*, and especially if I write it, *here* is no longer *here*, *around here*, but already *there*, around there, elsewhere, on the *other side*; and *I is another*, another I, me and wholly other I" (HC 15). This immeasurable speed at which time passes captures the idea that the differentiation through which any instant of experience "occurs" is beyond the possibility of identification: it will always already have been outstripped the moment one has spotted it. In this sense, the speed of differance is "a speed winning out over speed, going quicker than time and even than speed, taking time by speed, so fast that what I live in the present, or even what I expect from the future, is already past, already memory and melancholy, or nostalgia" (BSii, 51). Hence, and in spite of the dominant tendency to express consciousness in terms of presence, the present moment is always already outstripped. This is so because the idea of presence itself relies on a problematic model for thinking "experience" generally, even while we cannot presently–and perhaps ever–think beyond it.

Conclusion

Despite difficulties in expressing differance–difficulties which, for Derrida, are in many ways unavoidable–in the following chapter, I will attempt to develop an alternative account of how lived experience emerges through differance. This vision of experience not only undermines the living present, but accounts for how that which is ostensibly foreign to the living present is in fact *essential* for life to carry on. As we will see, the living present gives way to survival, a vision of life that cannot rigorously be distinguished from animal life, but where those very features that traditionally define animals in contrast to human beings prove essential for the possibility of lived experience generally.

Chapter 2 – Survival and the One who Speaks

As I showed in the previous chapter, Derrida's challenge to living presence is thoroughgoing. To be sure, his point is not that nothing corresponding to a "self" exists; it is rather that what we mean by this term must be reconsidered in far-reaching ways. If experiential life happens as the movement of differance, then an alternative account must be developed to describe it. In this chapter, I develop such an account, which, following Derrida, I call "survival." It is difficult to overestimate the importance of this theme in Derrida's work. As he explains in *Learning to Live Finally*, each of his writings, in one way or another, connect to a thinking of "life" and "death" at once: "All the concepts that have helped me in my work, and notably that of the trace or of the spectral, were related to this 'surviving' as a structural and rigorously originary dimension" (LF 26). "Survival" (what Derrida variously describes as "life/death" and "survivance") is a rethinking of experiential life in light of differance, according to which there is a necessary discontinuity that makes every new iteration of a mark possible. If experience is unavoidably textual, and one continues to exist only as the citation of iterable marks, the description of differance that I provide in the previous chapter reveals that no sign emerges in a temporal present, and that every sign must be negotiated anew in a way that is severed from any animating intention. For this reason, a mark is never fully appropriated, slipping away without ever having arrived. The relationship that "we" have with marks in light of differance therefore highlights the finitude–what Derrida elsewhere calls an (in)finite finitude–of experiential life: whereas one *is* only through the citation of iterable marks, those marks are ceaselessly being arrested from us without ever having belonged to us.

In what follows, I offer a reasonably comprehensive account of the logic of survival as it is developed in a number of Derrida's texts. This is difficult, as Derrida nowhere provides a final

and complete reformulation of experiential life in light of differance, choosing instead to expose how traditional accounts of "the self" undermine themselves. Nevertheless, I will sketch the beginnings of a vision of experiential life in light of Derrida's deconstruction of the living present, and will do so with reference to three themes that Derrida frequently treats: "the archive," "double-affirmation," and "death." Derrida's treatment of these themes gives rise to an image of experience as a quasi-technical happening that is nevertheless not reducible to technicity, where the "present self" is recast as an "effect" of an always prior differential movement.

This understanding of life as survival displaces philosophical assumptions about subjective life in such a way that few distinctions between human and non-human life can be rigorously maintained. Survival, the differential, quasi-mechanical movement of differance, is the possibility of life, both human and non-human. This, in turn, compels us to reinterpret human/animal difference, and as importantly to assess *why* this distinction has been asserted in the ways that it has throughout the history of philosophy. Yet importantly, these reasons can only be properly assessed once we have first examined how the overwhelmingly dominant understanding of human subjectivity–according to which the self is free, sovereign, and at one with itself–emerges through differance. To the extent that we believe ourselves to be sovereign subjects (to the extent, for example, that "I" believe "I" am responsible for and have unique interpretive authority over the contents of this dissertation), but given that survival undermines this understanding of human subjectivity, then we have to reassess just what goes on when we assert, in an apparently simple and pre-reflective way, ourselves as subjects. Derrida recasts this in terms of a performance that immediately betrays itself, a point that he captures in certain of his writings on the "signature." At the moment when one signs one's name to a work (for example, to a painting or a piece of writing) one has at that moment paradoxically severed one's connection to it. This is, for Derrida, the

dynamic that structures any self-relation: whenever we assert or reassert something *as one's own* (as when, for example, I say "I wrote this," "I went to the beach," or "I am not a Christian"), the condition for our doing so requires an essential distance from what is being reasserted–i.e., requires spacing. We must, to use Derrida's language, countersign the signature, though in a way that betrays the self-identity of the person who signs. Understood in this way, the performance of the "I" is, for Derrida, compulsive, tragic, and "mad": it maintains itself only by ceaselessly reasserting itself, and only takes place through an always prior differential movement. As I will argue in chapter 3, it is *precisely* in terms of this dynamic that we are meant to understand the human/animal distinction. In order to maintain human conscious life as living presence, we must externalize that which is nevertheless essential for experience to continue. "The animal," like "writing," has been instrumental in maintaining human life as living presence, though in ways that always (and for Derrida, necessarily) undermine the very distinction that it imposes.

§ 2.1 – Surviving the Present

§ 2.1.1 – "Machineless Machination": the Archive

A helpful way to begin discussing survival is by interpreting Derrida's writings on "the archive." His most focused treatment of this theme is found in *Archive Fever*, though it features prominently in a number of other works.[3] His discussion of the archive reveals two points that are crucial for understanding survival: that experience is mechanical, and that it is passive. Derrida argues for the mechanical aspect of experience by assessing just what an archive is and how it functions, from there arguing that experience takes place in a similar way. An archive cannot function without mechanical repetition, and so cannot be rigorously distinguished from the operation of a machine. However, an archive is not a static repository of documents; it is

ceaselessly changing, with every new addition introducing differentiation within the archive itself. To explain these insights in connection to survival, the first point restates Derrida's challenge to the presumption that experience happens in a way that is "spontaneous, alive and internal" (AF 11). For Derrida, no instant of "conscious" life can be rigorously distinguished from a technical "substructure" on which it is based. While few would challenge that some degree of automaticity is required for experience to happen (for example, in order for memories or words to be recalled), one of the conceptual difficulties that Derrida is trying to overcome through "the archive" is the view that consciousness emerges from but is itself distinguishable from a technical substructure. The technical aspect of experience is not, for Derrida, external to experience–is not, for example, a resource that conscious minds draw from. Rather, technicity inheres in the very *happening* of experience: if every new experience involves repetition, but if marks are only ever recalled on account of spacing (i.e., in a way that is severed from any animating intention), then there cannot be a self-present, autonomous consciousness for whom and on account of which marks appear. Rather, each moment will be an inaugural moment of repetition. As such, there is a minimal mechanical element that determines how experience carries forward: inasmuch as experience takes place *as* repetition, technicity cannot be seen as external to experience even while it might give rise to it. As Derrida writes in *Ulysses Gramophone*, technology "is not an external element of the context; it affects the inside meaning in the most elementary sense, even so far as the statement or the inscription of practically the shortest word" (AL 271).

Yet in a way that recalls our discussion of calculability/incalculability, whereas technicity is involved right at the moment of the archival event, it is not so in a way that is irreducibly mechanical. There is rather a strange (or, to use Derrida's terminology, "impossible") co-involvement of programmatic calculability and what might be called "free spontaneity" in the way

that experience happens: repetition cannot be the seamless, identical repetition of the same. Differance, we have seen, "operates" in such a way that any memory, word, or "concept" is only ever recalled and given for thought on the condition that it is originarily fissured and never presently apprehended. This is the law governing the emergence of the mark, which can only be accessed in a way that divides and transforms it, even while it never truly arrives in the present. Derrida makes this point when he writes that any iteration of a mark never takes place presently, and can only be repeated in a way that is imperfect, non-present, and never simply replicative. As Derrida states, even when thinking about the uniqueness of a past event, that event was "not even a past present … one can dream of it after the fact, only insofar as its iterability, that is to say, its immanent divisibility, the possibility of its fission, haunted it from the origin. The faithful memory of such a singularity can only be given over to the specter" (AF 100).

The notion of the differantial archive not only captures the technicity in terms of which human life carries forward. It similarly challenges, without wholly abolishing, the distinction between "activity" and "passivity" in the way that experience happens. Just as Derrida wants to develop a thinking of freedom and automaticity at once, so too does he wish to develop a thinking of activity and passivity that allows for the arrival of any event of experience. While Derrida acknowledges that mechanicity possibilizes "human" experience, passivity in this case is

> not *simple* passivity, even if some passivity is required here: it is on the contrary the condition for an event to advene and for something to happen. What I would make happen instead of letting happen–well, that wouldn't happen. What I make happen does not happen, obviously, and one must draw the consequences of [this] apparently paradoxical necessity (BSi 234).

This point reflects Derrida's claim that to the extent that experience does not happen as a fully predictable process, this is not owing to an active, sovereign agency. Indeed, as this passage suggests, a being with the sovereign power "to decide" would be incapable of bringing about any

"event" in Derrida's specific sense. The etymology of this term is significant: "event" derives from the Latin *evenire,* which is a combination of *ex-* ("out") and the important Derridean term *venire* ("to come"). As is also the case when he discusses the "invention of the other," an "event" only arrives in an unanticipated way. As Derrida writes in "Typewriter Ribbon": "An event does not come about unless its irruption interrupts the course of the possible and, as the impossible itself, surprises any foreseeability" (WA 73). Yet for this very reason, no event arrives owing to the subjective will of a conscious subject: to anticipate or produce something minimally requires prior calculation. For this reason, Derrida does not identify "subjectivity" as the most basic requirement for the happening of experience, but alterity and difference–what Derrida calls "the other." If Derrida is correct that an "event" only arrives as a result of the unanticipated and inaugural "other," then a fully calculated decision would itself be indistinguishable from a calculable process.

Derrida complicates these points in the first volume of *The Beast and the Sovereign*, where he writes that the contamination between freedom and automaticity is such that every decision, *in a sense*, carries with it an element of active, "sovereign" force, but a force that can only take place *as passivity*. Derrida justifies this claim as follows: a true decision would be beyond the possibility of calculation and beyond any horizon anticipated by the subject. This is so because any true, sovereign decision would exceed calculability and conditionality, coming as it does from a free, sovereign source. Yet if this were the case, then a decision could never be made by any subject, as there would be no calculation or deliberation involved in making it. Indeed, such a decision would be the *opposite* of a decision–would be passive, carried out in the total absence of thought. It follows, then, that the concept of the sovereign decider–s/he who is beyond the law and who freely decides for herself without condition or calculable constraint–would be absolutely beyond the possibility of decision–would be, in other words, identical to a certain conception of the machine

(or the animal). In an important passage, Derrida explains this as follows: "[B]ecause every decision worthy of the name must be this exceptional scandal of a passive decision or decision of the other, the difference between the deciding decision and the undecided decision itself becomes undecidable, and then the supposed decision … looks … just like an indecision. an unwilling, a nonliberty, a nonintentlon, an unconsciousness and an irrationality (BSi, 33).

It follows, therefore, that whatever the traditional notion of "the self" turns out to be in light of deconstruction, it cannot be understood as an active, sovereign force with full decisional power. If there is a necessary element of mechanicity and passivity involved in the way that experience happens, this commits us to reinterpret what a passive, unthinking machine is. In "Faith and Knowledge," in a way that recalls Derrida's reading of Freud in "Freud and the Scene of Writing," Derrida characterizes the passage of experience along the lines of a "mystical machine," one that operates mechanically but that is at the same time always producing newness that becomes integrated into the same:

> "'Mechanical' would have to be understood here in a meaning that is rather 'mystical.' Mystical or secret because contradictory and distracting, both inaccessible, disconcerting and familiar, *unheimlich*, uncanny to the very extent that this machinality, this ineluctable automatization produces and re-produces what *at the same time detaches from and reattaches to* the family (*heimisch*, homely), to the familiar, to the domestic, to the proper, ... to the place of dwelling (AR 78).

As this passage makes clear, the technical reproduction of the trace is always encountered in a way that upsets the self-sameness and identity of the creature or archive itself. Derrida's reference to *umheimlich* in this passage suggests that the condition of being "at home" with oneself is that one not be at home with oneself. One is, at the moment where the future is received, necessarily non-self-identical.

To sum up, if differance makes experience possible, it does so in a way that undermines traditional accounts of selfhood. Far from involving a sovereign, self-present subject, experience

carries forward in a way that is undeniably mechanical and passive. What is more, while Derrida denies that experience is *irreducibly* mechanical and passive, this is not because it is determined by an active, dictating consciousness. It is rather owing to the movement of differance itself, which, for Derrida, transcends the distinctions calculability/incalculability and passivity/activity themselves. Yet given Derrida's problematization of these distinctions in the way that experience happens, it remains to be seen how temporality functions in experience as survival.

§ 2.1.2 – Temporality, Double-Affirmation and the Promise

For Derrida, temporal repetition happens through "double-affirmation" (what he variously describes as the "*yes, yes*" and the "*Come*"), where time is produced on the basis of a "promise" awaiting its own fulfillment. Stated briefly, if the future only arrives through the always inaugural recitation of iterable marks, double-affirmation accounts for how every such moment happens non-presently through differance. Double-affirmation therefore explains what might be termed "temporal continuity," though in a way that complicates the proposition that the movement of time in experience is continuous or unified. Indeed, as I will show, it is against this vision of "temporal continuity" that double-affirmation was developed: if, with every passing moment, marks are affirmed–they appear or take place as experience–their being affirmed happens through an alternative conception of time as differance, where no mark ever emerges in a present but is ceaselessly awaiting its own inaugural repetition. For this reason, Derrida explains double-affirmation as a promissory yes: as he argues, a "yes" always implies its own temporal repetition. In a similar way, a promise is never simply uttered presently; so long as it is being kept, one must ceaselessly reaffirm it. By emphasizing the temporality involved when we say "yes" or make promises, Derrida clarifies how temporal repetition happens.

Before expanding on these initially somewhat abstract claims, it is important to clarify that double-affirmation is the movement of differance. As such, temporal repetition happens prior to any conscious will, and for essential reasons. For example, in order for "me" (understood as a deciding subject) to affirm, deny, or make any judgment concerning anything that appears as experience, "I" must already have ascented to it (i.e. must already have said "yes" to it). In many ways, this point seems uncontroversial: if, for example, I clamp my hands to my ears after hearing the loud sound of an ambulance siren, I am reacting to an event that I cannot not have responded to insofar as I noticed it. I might have responded to the siren in a number of different ways–I could have groaned, erratically driven into a tree, or simply continued on my way relatively unbothered. Nevertheless, every such reaction would be a response to an event that I cannot deny having happened. To use Derrida's terminology, I have said "yes" to the event, and this is a condition for my being able to respond to it in the first place. This same point applies when we are addressed by others: whether one is eagerly attentive to what someone is saying, or is trying to avoid engaging them, one is nevertheless obligated to respond insofar as she hears them. Yet for Derrida, this always prior "yes" is a general feature of how experience functions temporally. While in the former examples I am responding to events that are "beyond one's control," Derrida argues that the future arrives in a way that precedes any judgment that might be made about it; differance produces an "already ... past event, which has never been *present*" (P 155), where one can only "lay claim" to it retrospectively. In *Signsponge*, Derrida characterizes this obligation to the always prior yes as something that I cannot help but submit to, as an "intransigent, insatiable demand to me, without an exchange and without a transaction, without a possible contract" (S 14).

What, then, is double-affirmation? As always, Derrida is mindful of the etymology of his principal terms. "Affirmation" derives from the Latin *ad-* ("to") and *firmare* ("strengthen," "make

firm"), and so does not suggest an "active" agent on account of whom an affirmation is made (indeed, as he makes clear in "A Number of Yes," double-affirmation is devised *precisely* to challenge the proposition that experience surges forward on account of "the unconditional will of a subjectivity," a view "whose hegemony marks all modernity, at least from Descartes to Hegel and Nietzsche" (Pii 127)). For Derrida, differance happens as "affirmation" in the sense that it allows for differentiation, which is the minimal condition for experience to happen. This partially explains why Derrida frames affirmation as a "yes": because difference (and not presence) is originary, one "is," at any given moment, only on account of the disruption of "the same" through the introduction of alterity. One's continued existence therefore requires that "the other" is permitted passage–is said yes to. Because the "continuation" of temporal experience requires that the other is allowed to arrive, Derrida describes any present moment as a "response" to the other. As he writes in "Passions," the very question of "I" cannot ever be posed without an address to the other, including the other from oneself; "the question of the 'I,' of 'I am' or 'I think,' would have to be displaced toward the prerequisite question of the other: the other, the other me that I am (following) or that is following me" (ON 95). As we shall examine more closely in a subsequent chapter, for Derrida, "the other" is not a singular, let alone "living" other, but is *precisely* what is beyond every horizon of expectation.

Emphatically, then, this originary "yes" is pre-subjective. As was the case in our discussion of the archive, what distinguishes experience from a "mechanical process" is the fact that it is ceaselessly being interrupted by "the other." Indeed, the other's arrival *cannot* be the result of a free, sovereign agent who would force it into existence: doing so minimally presupposes that one has already identified "the other," in which case it would not be "other" at all. For this reason, Derrida sometimes calls the differential passage of time the "invention of the other," which is

possible on account of a fundamental openness that he identifies with the *yes* of affirmation. "Invention" derives from the Latin *in-* ("in," "on") and *venire* ("to come," "approach"), and so like "affirmation" does not of itself imply a subjective will. Indeed, by deconstructing "invention" understood as "active creation," Derrida reveals how "the other" cannot be *made* to come into being; it is beyond identification, and only arrives as a result of a fundamental openness prior to any agency. As he puts it, "the other" "[The other] can be invented only by the other and from the coming of the other that says 'come' and to which a response with another 'come' appears to be the only invention that is desirable and worthy of interest" (Pi 45). In this sense, the "invention" of "the other" happens through this fundamental openness, where prior to the possibility of *any* experiential event is its being affirmed, though always as a "citation" of iterable marks.

If Derrida is correct that every moment of conscious life requires a pre-subjective responsiveness to the other, how does affirmation happen temporally? Relatedly, why does Derrida describe the *yes* not simply as affirmation, but as *double*-affirmation? As we saw in our discussion of Husserl, differance operates in a way where every moment of experience simultaneously involves a rupture of presence. Yet at the same time, every such moment minimally involves a *yes*–a "*here*, present, listening, on the other end of the line, ready to respond" (AL 270). In other words, experience *happens*, and as we have just observed, it happens on account of a responsiveness (a *yes*) to the other beyond any horizon. Yet how can this possibly take place if it does not "occur" presently?

To explain this, Derrida explores the strange temporality involved in the simple uttering of a "yes." As he observes, when one says "yes" to someone, one makes a promise. If, for example, I say "hello" in response to someone who has called, I am making a commitment that I will remain present to that person. Derrida thus claims that uttering "yes" is immediately reaffirmed. As he

writes in *Ulysses Gramophone*: "In order for the *yes* of affirmation, assent, consent, alliance, of engagement, signature, or gift to have the value it has, it must carry the repetition within itself. It must *a priori* and immediately confirm its promise and promise its confirmation" (AL 276). Importantly, as a promise, the *yes* is not actually fulfilled in its being uttered. This is implied in the etymology of the word: as is the case in English, the French *promettre* derives from the Latin *prop* ("forward") and *mittere* ("send"). It is the temporality suggested by the etymology of this term that interests Derrida: by assuming a promise, and insofar as I continue to keep it, there is no moment where it is actually fulfilled. As a promise, the simple saying of a "yes" involves its own unceasing repetition. Indeed, the commitment that one makes when she says "yes" is multiple in its being uttered: it takes time to say "y-e-s," and in order for the promise that I am making to endure over the brief time that it takes to say this word, it must be repeated.

Hence, a "yes" is never simply uttered in a present, but is, so to speak, awaiting its own fulfillment. This explains why Derrida frequently returns to the theme of the promise in connection to temporality: a promise is never experienced *as such*–it never gathers into a singular moment, but structurally implies its own repetition even as it is being affirmed. A promise is always a commitment to a future, for which reason it cannot be isolated or identified with any present moment. If the yes could be isolated as a discrete, temporally self-identical moment, it would no longer be a promise, which always and *immediately* implies further repetition. For this reason, "the promise prohibits the (metaphysical) gathering of Being in presence" (N 246).

Why, then, does Derrida interpret temporal experience in terms of double-affirmation? First, it allows him to reframe the forward passage of experience in a way that is never self-identical. The yes, Derrida writes, is always *re*affirmed in its very occurring. In this connection, Derrida states: "There is a time and a spacing of the 'yes' as 'yes-yes': it takes time to say 'yes.'

A single 'yes' is, therefore, immediately double, it immediately announces a 'yes' to come and already recalls that the 'yes' implies another 'yes.' So, the 'yes' is immediately dou-ble, immediately 'yes-yes.'" (N 247). Because the yes is never temporally self-identical, but is always and immediately repeated, the repetition of iterable marks happens in such a way that time moves forward without finally arriving in a present–where the present is ceaselessly being overrun by further repetition. As Derrida states, the *yes* is "essential exigency" (Pii 126)": being defined by a promissory structure, it is never simply stated, but restlessly repeats itself without delay. Hence, time happens as this incessant string of repetitive *yeses* that is beyond any willing or control: any discrete moment where one says *yes* will already carry within it a *promise* ("pro-mettre") to be reaffirmed, and this "present" *yes* will have occurred because it had already been *promised*. As Derrida suggests, the *yes* is always repeated "in haste," "in advance ... of a response that is already asking" (AL 299). If, as Derrida argues, the *yes* always takes place as an oath or *promise*, it is *in its very utterance* ceaselessly pleading to be repeated, always already a pledge to be renewed. The *yes*, then, structurally carries with it the plea for another *yes*: the first *yes* always carries with it the anticipation of a further *yes*. In Derrida's words, the *yes* "asks only for another *yes*, the *yes* of an other, which … is implied in the first *yes*. The latter situates itself, advances itself, marks itself in the call for its confirmation, in the *yes, yes*. It begins with the *yes, yes,* with the second *yes*, with the other *yes*" (AL 299). This movement of the *yes* that says *yes* in anticipation of another *yes* just is the advent of the self, it "opens up the position of the *I*" (AL 300).

Second, double-affirmation accounts for how the forward passage of time is inextricably linked to memory–i.e., is inaugural, even while it only takes place on the basis of an already established context or archive. While every new experience is always and necessarily "new" (i.e., involves "the other," is not the identical replication of the same), it is never beyond a contextual

framework of repeatable marks. No experience happens except by being re-called (or re-marked) through memory. As Derrida also writes in *Nietzsche and the Machine*:

> [T]he unprecedented is never possible without repetition, there is never something absolutely unprecedented, totally original or new; or rather, the new can only be new, radically new, to the extent that something new is produced, that is, where there is memory and repetition. The new cannot be invented without memory or repetition (N 229).

How, then, does double-affirmation operate in such a way that "the other" is granted passage? While the *yes* is always inaugural, every new experience only happens through a prior *yes* having been said. To use the author's present activity as an example, when someone presses a key on a keyboard (say, the letter "i") in order to produce a word (say, "radical"), that singular event could only have happened owing to its temporal connection to past events (when I wrote "r," "a," and "d"). What is more, the memory of the "i" key being pressed is necessary in order for me to complete typing the word "radical." And yet, this memory is not "retained" in the sense that it remains unaffectedly before me as I type the remaining words. Rather, it is retained as a *promise*: I continue typing only because this event has been committed to memory and is immediately recalled, though in a way that is never the simple replication of this initial event. The yes, then, is best thought of as the recitation of the past that is nevertheless *open to the future*: while experience is necessarily citational, it nevertheless moves forward inaugurally through contamination. In this way, a future actually arrives.

Because the repetition of any mark requires spacing (i.e., a severance from any animating intention), the yes-as-promise is never made or kept by an enduring self-identical subject. It is, as Derrida writes, always a response to the "other" whose arrival is always disruptive. This is the very condition for a mark being repeated: a mark can only be recalled through a necessary distance that allows *any* sign to be encountered. This, in turn, means that there is "remoteness, distance, *differance*" separating every moment of experiential life. This is the minimal possibility of any

self-relation to begin with: spacing "institutes, forbids, *and* interferes with the so-called monologue" (AL 271–272). If, with each happening of the yes, something "new" (i.e., "the other") arrives, then one's "identity" is always and ceaselessly changing with each passing moment, never to be recovered. Every new experience is "from the start [a] separation" (Pii 121). We should therefore not regard "double-affirmation" as the continuity of life. As Derrida writes in "Living On," it is more accurate to think of it as "a paradoxical phase in the work of mourning" (P 112). As a promise, the yes does not take place in a present, but immediately, in its very happening, repeats itself, pleading or promising to be repeated. Far from producing a continuity, then, the yes is always and necessarily inaugural and so produces *discontinuity*.

Connecting these insights to the conclusions made in section 1 of this chapter, if double-affirmation makes temporal repetition possible, it also casts the passage of experience as being inescapably mechanical. As Derrida also stresses in *Archive Fever*, mechanicity "is not an external element of the context; it affects the inside of meaning in the most elementary sense" (AL 269). To be sure, if the restless, non-present repetition involved in double-affirmation is foundational for how experience carries forward, then experience is "mechanical" not only in the sense that there are technical sub-structures that give rise to it (for example, the operation of the brain); rather, time carries forward mechanically even while it is not reducible to a particular conception of the machine understood as *pure* automaticity. In *Ulysses Gramophone,* Derrida captures this point through the metaphor of telephonic technology: repetition takes place as "the perpetual buzzing of a telephonic obsession … a telegramophonic obsession" (AL 269) prior to any sovereign or free will. Derrida elaborates on this point when he discusses *gramophony*, "writing" that inscribes repetition and mechanicity in even "the liveliest voice." For Derrida, time passes forward only because the yes is always *re*marked: it arrives having been marked by a promise, and is at that

moment promised to memory in order to (potentially) be recalled. Framed in this way, it is difficult to understand how any happening of experience can be rigorously distinguished from the operation of a machine *but* for the role that "the other" plays in repetition. If the yes is a "*sign* of life," it is so in the sense that inscription and repetition inhere in the very production of life (which, in turn, places into question *what we mean* by the "self" underlying experience). As Derrida writes, "at the origin there is technics" (N 248). The differantial, quasi-mechanical structure of the promissory yes figures foundationally in the reproduction of life. It is important to stress the word "reproduction": the repetition of the yes does not obviously "preserve" subjectivity, nor does it suggest that the temporal movement of experience happens as a continuity. Rather the yes as promise *re*produces life: "The machine reproduces the living, it doubles it with its automaton" (AL 276).

In sum, Derrida's thinking about the yes of double-affirmation accounts for how the temporality of experience happens in a way that undermines the living present. The distance through which any sign is produced, as well as the mechanicity that governs its movement, means that experience is neither dominated by, nor does it necessarily occur to, a subject thought of as a continuous, free agent. If every moment of experience involves an always prior, quasi-mechanical, differantial yes, then the self cannot exist as a self-identical plenitude. Furthermore, because no moment ever emerges in a temporal present, the proposition that such a self ever actually emerges to begin with, even for a fleeting moment, is itself undermined: "the first breath is suspended in the breath of the other, it is already and always a second breath" (AL 305). If there is no sovereign force that authorizes how or when the yes is affirmed, and if a "self" never emerges in a temporal present, then it would seem that the very conditions that make experiential life possible at the same

time forbids such an entity from ever emerging. In the following section, we will further discuss this consequence by expanding on the role of "death" in the production of "life."

§ 2.1.3 – Death and Survival

Our discussion of the archive revealed that experience is undeniably mechanical and passive owing to the role that differance plays in the reproduction of life. Furthermore, the *yes* of double-affirmation reveals that temporal experience does not happen to a self-identical subject, but involves the unceasing, restless, and always inaugural reproduction (i.e. citation) of memory. This leads us to discuss an essential theme in Derrida's work: "death"–more precisely, how the conditions that give rise to experience complicate the distinction between "life" and "death." For as we have seen, the temporality in terms of which life carries forward (i.e., time-as-*promise*) is such that any discrete instant of experience is severed from any past moment. This suggests that difference and interruption are required for "life" to carry on, and in a way that highlights the constitutive role that "death" plays in the production of "life." It is precisely because of the alliance of "death" and "life" in how experience happens that, following Derrida, I have chosen to use the term "survival" or *survivance*. As always, the etymology of this term is important: *survivance* derives from the Latin *super-* (an enigmatic term with multiple meanings: "addition," "over," "beyond") and *vivere* (which itself derives from the Proto-Indo-European "to live"). This suggests that living on takes place through supplementation and by being outstripped.

To understand survivance, we must recall that experience *is* the experience of iterable marks, but that no mark "belongs" to any particular context: whereas my continued existence rests on their being continually repeated through time, marks survive any single moment of expression. In this way, a mark has the chance of being repeated indefinitely. As Derrida writes: "no one inflection enjoys any absolute privilege; no meaning can be fixed or decided upon. No border is

guaranteed, inside or out" (L 105). As the last sentence in this passage suggests, the border that would protect how a term *should* be properly used is effaced the moment the sign comes into existence. Furthermore, the non-present temporality of double-affirmation suggests that a mark is repeated in its very occurring, which minimally means that it is unceasingly being reinscribed in "new," inaugural ways. Yet this gives rise to a curious proposition: if "I am" only in relation to iterable marks that are ceaselessly being repeated, and if repetition is always inaugural, what is the subject "for whom" life carries on? To answer this question, we must assess Derrida's claim that one only speaks in the language of "the other":

> There is commitment only in the language of the other, which I speak, of necessity, irresponsibly and fictively, in expropriation, but the language of the other is more contractual, contracts more, is closer to the conventional, fictive origin, to the extent that I invent it and thus adopt, appropriate it, mythically, in the present act of each spoken word. The language of the other lets the spoken word have the word, and commits us to keep our word. In this sense, there is 'language of the other' whenever there is a speech event (P 168).

As this passage suggests, it is only because "language" is never finally appropriated–is always "invented" anew–that one *is*: "a language can never be appropriated; it is mine only as the language of the other, and vice versa" (P 173). Yet this places into question the status of the "self" for whom experience happens, and leads Derrida to describe any "present" moment of experience as the fictive, non-present and ephemeral happening of differance itself.

This understanding of experience not only undercuts the possibility that the self can relate to itself in an unmediated way. It recasts "the self" (should we remain committed to this term) as fundamentally futural though never fully constituted in the present: "one is" the always productive happening of differential marks through time. For this reason, Derrida describes the "self" *as* a promise that is never finally fulfilled: "I am the promise, I am the one to promise, I am the one

who is promising ... This means that the one who is promising is *already* the promise or is *almost* already the promise, that the promise is imminent (N 225).

This imagining of conscious life recasts any discrete moment of experience as the dynamic play of a differential network. If the possibility of "self-relation" requires that on the basis I relate to myself (i.e., iterable marks) can only be accessed inaugurally (i.e., through spacing), then it seems that "self-relation" is an unfitting model for understanding experience, as no moment of life will reflect a priorly existing subjectivity. Indeed, the possibility of self-relation contradictorily requires the "death" of any enduring "self." In a series of difficult essays collected in *Parages* (in which Derrida first introduces the term *survivance*), Derrida develops these insights by examining the role of the *récit* in experience. This term carries with it several meanings. On the one hand, and quite conventionally, *récit* means "a story, a narrative*"* (P 111). Yet in addition to this definition, *récit* also means recapitulation–a recital or a recitation. This element of repetition is implied in the etymology of this word: *récit* is a synthesis of the Latin *re-* ("again") and *citō* ("call forth"). By examining textuality in terms of the *récit*, Derrida is, as always, highlighting the role that repetition plays in every textual event. Every narrative is composed of iterable marks that must be renegotiated each time they are read: "each '*récit*' (and each occurrence of the word '*récit*,' each '*récit*' in the *récit*' *is part* of the other, makes the other a part (of itself), each '*récit*' is at once larger and smaller than itself, includes itself without including (or comprehending) itself, identifies itself with itself even as it remains utterly different from its homonym" (P 126). Yet importantly, Derrida is not *simply* concerned with "textual analysis." He is interested rather with how the *récit* structures the possibility of the self's self-relation to itself through time. Whereas the repetition of memory is necessary in order for us to make narrative sense of our lives (indeed, for "sense" to be

made generally), Derrida shows that every moment of repetition requires a severance in the continuity of intentional or experiential "life."

Derrida's principal interest in these texts is therefore to account for how differential repetition happens only through interruption and deferral, in such a way that "death" becomes constitutive for "life" to carry on, though in a way that reveals neither term to be adequate for describing how experience happens differentially. For Derrida, this phenomenon can just as aptly be described as a "triumph of death" as it can a "triumph of life": "living on goes beyond both living and dying, supplementing each with a sudden surge and a certain surcease, deciding life and death at once" (P 134). As he writes later in this same text, in light of how differance functions, experiential life is "neither life nor death, but rather LIVING ON, the very progression that belongs, without belonging, to the progression of life and death. Living on is not the opposite of living, just as it is not identical with living" (P 156). This is so because "living on" does not involve the unbroken temporal enduring of subjective life. Rather, survival is radically finite: at every moment where a mark is recalled, the condition of its being recalled is that it be severed from any prior interpretive moment, which in turn means that death is unavoidable in the way that life carries forward. Yet for Derrida, this interruption is paradoxically necessary for life to continue. As we saw in the previous chapter, the absolute fulfilment of presence would be *absolute* death, for which reason "life," understood on the order of presence, must be arrested for one to "survive" or "live on." As he writes in *Speech and Phenomena*: "*A voice without differance, a voice without writing, is at once absolutely alive and absolutely dead*" (SP 102). In this important sense, "life" requires the "other": inasmuch as the self is not a self-identical plenitude, it is so only due to a relationship to the other. This relationship is possible owing to a constituting lack or absence *within the self* that must be supplemented. Such is the case because a fully constituted presence would be

incapable of any relationship, even with itself. As Derrida writes in *Of Grammatology*, one does not exist "without the presence *of the other* but also, and consequently, without absence, dissimulation, detour, difference, writing" (OG 139). What is more, no temporal moment can be absolute or fully present, but exists differentially through the promissory structure described in the previous section. For this reason, Derrida describes the interruptive role of repetition as a "death sentence" that suspends death: as soon as a mark emerges, it can only be reengaged through the death of the "animating voice" or "intentional life" that gave rise to it. As double-affirmation suggests, this repetitive structure happens unceasingly at a "speed beyond speed," where there is no discrete moment where repetition is finally fulfilled.

Survival, then, is only possible owing to a delay to both life and death at once; survival happens as differance, where the deferral of any moment of presence is how *absolute* death is avoided: "'Living, living on' differs and defers, like *differance*" (P 157). Yet this happens only through the oscillating play between "life" and "death"–where "death" interrupts "life" and "life" interrupts "death." Derrida clarifies this apparently paradoxical dynamic by discussing what he terms a "deferred decision." By this, Derrida is not referring to a decision made by a "conscious will," but rather to the necessity of an always deferred interruption that allows life to carry on. The etymology of "decision" is important in this context, deriving as it does from the Latin *de* ("off") and *caedere* ("to cut"). A decision, then, carries with it both the sense of a "final decision on a matter" (as in a judgment), but Derrida also interprets it to mean a death sentence, a cut or break. As is often the case, Derrida suggests that both senses in truth amount to the same thing: death and the decision are absolute, final, and without remains. Nevertheless, de-cisions must happen for experience to carry forward at all–every new event of experience requires interruption. The notion of a deferred decision therefore announces a paradox which, for Derrida, is nevertheless essential:

experience involves de-cisions that are always suspended, as well as the interruption of suspension through the de-cision. To avoid any confusion, this dynamic is differance itself: the happening of the mark is always temporally deferred (the decision is suspended), while time is ceaselessly punctured by signification (the suspension is interrupted or de-cided). As Derrida writes, differance "both fissures and retards presence, submitting it simultaneously to primordial division and delay" (SP 88). In this connection, Derrida describes presence as "*ajoure* and *ajourne*": the day (*jour*–in other words, presence) is both pierced or penetrated ("ajoure" derives from *ajouer*, an opening or piercing that lets daylight in), and deferred or postponed (as is the case with the English "adjourn," "ajourne" in French refers to a postponement, as in the deferral to a future day). Experience, then, happens as the differing and deferring of presence, which is prevented from emerging, fully formed, in itself: "the day is never one with itself," it both differs from itself (is always already penetrated) and is always deferred. For this reason, Derrida states that the "madness of the day, of this moment, is momentary. The abyss … carries it away" (P 115).

For these reasons, neither "life" nor "death" are adequate for describing how experience carries on: the conditions that make "living" possible compel us to rethink the relationship it bears to its supposed opposite. As he writes in the second *The Beast and the Sovereign* seminar: "Survivance is … a sense of survival that is neither life nor death pure and simple, a sense that is not thinkable on the basis of the opposition between life and death. (BSii 130). One does not live, but *sur*-vives.

§ 2.2 – Reimagining the "I": Signature, Survivance, and Sovereignty

As we will see in the next chapter, Derrida's reimagining of "life" as survival suggests that we cannot maintain any essential distinction between humans and non-human creatures. Yet before expanding on this claim, one final topic must be explored. If survival undermines traditional

accounts of self-hood, it is nevertheless the case that "we" conventionally "believe" that such a self exists. This has been the overwhelmingly dominant assumption for how human life has been understood throughout the history of philosophy. Human beings are often thought to be unique in this respect: whereas animals or plants do not possess any such self, humans do. Yet if the account of survival developed above is correct, then the presumption that an extended presence underlies the passage of experience conflicts with the differential play which, for Derrida, is necessary for the happening of human life. Yet it remains to be seen how the apparent unity of lived experience produces the impression of a unified "self" that persists through time and across experience. As we will see, Derrida's answer to this question reveals the important role that the "animal" plays in buttressing a sovereign conception of human selfhood. If iterability is a necessary condition for the happening of temporal life generally, it is *a fortiori* required for the metaphysical understanding of selfhood to be asserted. Yet by reinterpreting the self-affirmation of the self in light of survival, Derrida concludes that every positing of an "I" is a structurally complex and aporetic event despite the apparent simplicity of its performance: even the most commonplace saying of the "I" is an appropriative performance that betrays itself the moment it is made. Why is this so?

Derrida describes the drive to self-assert the "I" in several of his writings dealing with "the signature." The core problem that Derrida negotiates when writing about this theme is how the "I" functions in light of differance. Derrida contends that if every moment of experience *just is* the inaugural repetition of marks through time, then not only does this contradict the proposition that there is a self-identical subject "for whom" experience happens, but it recasts the performance of the "I" as a "mad" and jealous drive to secure self-presence, though in a way that must be ceaselessly repeated and re-affirmed.

Ordinarily understood, a signature is a personal mark that secures a direct association between the signer and what has been signed: "a written signature implies the actual or empirical nonpresence of the signer. But, it will be claimed, the signature also marks and retains his having-been present in a past *now* or present, which will remain a future now or present" (LI 20). When we respect signatures (for example, ones that are made on financial or legal documents), we do so because there is a presumed connection between signer and document, which is thought to hold indefinitely through time whether or not the signer is present (for example, when I deposit a signed cheque, I assume that it will be cleared even if I am not around to guarantee its authenticity). By recalling how a signature ordinarily functions, Derrida does not challenge it as an institutional convention. He rather shows how any proclamation of the "self" takes place *as* a signature: "the self"–or rather the vision of a *proper* self–just is this movement of affirmation where one ceaselessly reaffirms oneself, but where the conditions that make this movement of affirmation possible undercuts the integrity of what is being affirmed. To use Derrida's language, "one" "is" only as a signature that is ceaselessly being countersigned, what Derrida calls the "performative of a promise and a memory conditioning every commitment" (AL 279).

If, as I have argued, every experience is an experience of the trace, to claim that experience "belongs" to "me" is neither an immediate nor simple gesture. On the one hand, any such performance can happen only after a prior differantial movement: because one can only proclaim the self or *I* by "laying claim" to iterable marks (recall that one only "is" as the happening of differential repetition, and so any "I" that is proclaimed is therefore minimally said in relation to iterable marks) and because any such moment emanates from a yes (i.e., through double-affirmation) that precedes any "I am," the view that any experience is produced or reflects "the self" is a necessarily retroactive gesture–assumes "the irreversible commitment of the person

confirming … the token of a mark left behind" (AL 295). Indeed, as Derrida writes in *Signsponge*, inasmuch as the yes of double-affirmation precedes every conscious decision, it is "an infinitely, insatiably imperious injunction to which I ought to subject myself, even when this involves trying to acquit myself afterwards, at the end of the duel, having offered it, with my life and desire, something akin to my signature" (S 12–14). Said briefly, the yes precedes the signature, and "there is no signature without *yes*" (AL 295), which recasts the saying of the "I" as a drive to secure self-presence.

Furthermore, because every mark (even one "signed" by oneself, whether this be a document, an academic or literary work, or a memory) can only be accessed through spacing, the moment where any "I am" takes place can only be recalled and reaffirmed through a necessary distance that possibilizes every general experience. This dynamic is at play in the way that every conventional, civil signature functions: the moment that a document is signed does not thereby automatically ensure that my signature will be respected as mine. Rather, a signature can only be recognized as mine through a necessary distance that is required for it to be identified *as anything* in the first place. As Derrida writes in "Signature, Event, Context": "In order to function, that is, to be readable, a signature must have a repeatable, iterable, imitable form; it must be able to be detached from the present and singular intention of its production" (LI 20). For a document to be respected as genuinely mine, then, it has to be reclaimed the moment that it is encountered. In order for this to take place, it must be repeated, and as a repeatable mark, its apparent singular status as the sign or seal of "myself" is thereby undermined.

In this sense, a signature can be verified as "mine" *precisely* because it is not what it is conventionally thought to be: for it to be identified and identified as genuine, it must be *re*claimed (or *counter*signed) under the same conditions that make the reception of any mark possible. Yet if

this is the case, then the condition for a mark being identified as "properly" mine requires that it not be mine: if every mark can only be received differently, then the referent of the signature must be different for it to be countersigned at all. For this reason, Derrida argues that the self, so long as it "lives-on," is never self-identical but is always *to-come*. This is Derrida's vision of life as survival developed in the previous section. Such being the case, the signature can only refer to an other whenever it is encountered to be countersigned. Derrida makes this point when he claims that any signature is both made possible and undermined by the "paradox of the *yes.*" The conditions that make the moment of the countersignature possible simultaneously ruins the possibility that any signature will be "properly" one's own: "just when the work of such a signature gets going … [even] the most competent and reliable production and reproduction machine … simultaneously ruins the model" (AL 282). In this sense, the moment of the countersignature paradoxically involves the opposite of what the signature is designed to secure: the countersignature is a necessarily transformative performance, where every new proclamation of the "I" in the mark requires the revolutionization of the signatory itself. For this reason, Derrida calls the repeated affirmation of the self "the singular adventure of a proper name and a signature" (AL 279). The relationship that we have to our signature (whether it be the signature attached to an academic or artistic work, but also, say, a meal that you've prepared, a house you've built, an outfit you've selected for the day, or an imprint you've made in the snow) is one that is never simply "present," but that can only be accessed through a movement of indefinite reaffirmation that allows for one's relationship to any mark: "The drama that activates and constructs every signature is this insistent, unwearying, potentially infinite repetition" (S 20).

The "I" is therefore not a simple, empirical "fact of consciousness," but is better thought of as an appropriative desire that must ceaselessly be re-expressed: the "proper" of the proper

signature ("proper," a term that Derrida uses repeatedly in a wide range of works, means "one's own," deriving as it does from the Latin *privus*) exists only to the extent that it is reaffirmed; the signature never simply "is," but "is" to the extent that it is being countersigned. This explains why Derrida describes the signature as "a frantic call, the distress of a signature that is asking for a *yes* from the other, the pleading injunction of a counter-signature" (AL 282–283). The moment of the signature is an appeal to be reaffirmed, and only takes place as a plea for its own continued recognition. As Derrida contends in *Signsponge,* every signature or "self-remark" presupposes a "one," a figure who, however, never actually arrives, but is always "at once fictive, prophetic, and eschatological" (S 8), a figure whose very identity is always a challenge before thought, "challenging you to know what original present or last judgment it belongs to" (S 8). Like the archive, at no moment is the "I" finally or even momentarily achieved: any signature or expression of sovereign desire is made possible by the "heterotautology of the *yes*," that is "implied in any *cogito* as thought, self-positing, and the will to self posit" (AL 300–301). That is, the condition for any saying of the "I" is a *differantial yes*, which implies the necessary divisibility of the "I" wherever it is proclaimed. For Derrida, then, any signature or saying of the "I" is a yearning for a plenitude that never actually arrives. Inasmuch as it never manifests itself, "the self" just is this drive for self-appropriation. In countersigning a mark as one's own, one is, as Derrida writes, "an illegitimate son" (AL 283), the inheritor of that which is never properly one's own. This is, for Derrida, the condition for the continuation not of "the self," but of the name that one ceaselessly reaffirms. If one's name is to live on, it *must* be effaced, which means that effacement is not simply a negative value; rather, "effacement is itself an equivocal value, undecidable. Negative in that it annuls and causes to disappear. … Inversely, however, this menace (negative, therefore) is

presented as a chance. The common name loses, but then again, by cancelling the debt, it seals and keeps the proper name" (S 72).

Conclusion – Violence and the Metaphysics of Presence

Derrida thus identifies the frantic drive to posit the "I" as being motivated by a desire to secure a sovereign, fully present vision of the self, one that is *at once* undercut by the conditions that make *any* sign of life possible–i.e., by survival, according to which there is an "irreducible non-presence" that has "a constituting value, and with it a nonlife, a nonpresence or nonself-belonging of the living present, an ineradicable non-primordiality" (SP 6-7). This vision of human life is, for Derrida, the history of metaphysics understood as the "absolute will-to-hear-oneself-speak" (SP 102), where the repetition that allows one's life to carry forward is the repetition of the present to itself. On Derrida's reading, the value of presence expresses the desire to escape the radical finitude of life. The belief that the present perpetually repeats itself in the same confirms the desire that "all experience, and therefore all life, has always been and will always be *present*" (SP 53). Every proclamation of presence–every moment where one proclaims "I am"–is therefore driven by a longing to transcend the absence, finitude, contingency, and death that are constitutive for how life happens. Yet as survival suggests, "I" exist as the differential happening of marks that both transcend and will survive "me." However, the fact that the present survives me means that "I" can only make this declaration against my own death or dying, which, in truth, takes place at the moment a mark "appears": "*I am* originally means *I am mortal. I am immortal* is an impossible proposition" (SP 54). As Derrida proclaims in *Speech and Phenomena*:

> The relationship with my death (my disappearance in general) ... lurks in this determination of being as presence, ideality, the absolute possibility of repetition. The possibility of the sign is this relationship with death. The determination and elimination of the sign in metaphysics is the dissimulation of this relationship with death, which yet produced signification" (SP 52).

This complex passage conveys that because "I am" only through or as the movement of differance, my continued existence *implies* my death, and not only in the sense that "I" will, one day, cease to be entirely. Rather, my death is announced at every moment. Importantly, the possibility of any "I am" is due to this original finitude, where within the "I am" of presence, "the origin of presence and ideality is concealed in the very presence and ideality it makes possible" (SP 55). The possibility of presence rests on a constituting absence: any isolated present moment can only be announced from within a sign system that immediately betrays the presence being announced. The moment I say "I" or "I am," I am living in the effect of a repetition that has already taken place.

Hence, at no moment is the sovereign conception of the self "achieved"; it is only relatively stabilized, always being undermined under the weight of its own incoherence. More precisely, any moment of self-affirmation is instantaneously overwhelmed by the finitude that makes life (human or non-human) possible: because it can only emerge differentially, no moment of lived experience is self-identical or fully present. By externalizing that which is nevertheless *constitutive* for life to carry on, Derrida interprets the history of philosophy as the unceasing attempt to bolster a vision of human life as living presence, one that has always been untenable, strained, and deconstructible. As we will now see, "the animal" proves central for how this dominant understanding of the human living present continues to be maintained despite its incoherence. For Derrida, the self-affirmation of the sovereign "I am" only takes place as a "self-engendering act" that produces the simulacrum of a "self." As he argues in "Eating Well," the "subject" can only be thought of as an act or performance of stabilization, one that is however never finally achieved and that requires tireless repetition: "The subject assumes presence, that is to say sub-stance, stasis, stance. Not to be able to stabilize itself absolutely would mean to be able only to be stabilizing itself" (PS 270). Derrida's argument, then, is that the possibility of maintaining the (human) "self" is neither simple nor

without conceptual violence, but is at all times enforced in a way that is always tragic and ineffectual. As he writes in *The Animal That Therefore I Am*: “My hypothesis is that the criterion in force ... is inseparable from the experience of holding oneself upright, of uprightness as erection in general in the process of hominization” (AT 61). As we will now see, human life as living presence has been maintained through the institution of an essential difference between humans and animals which, however, is not and has never been stable.

Chapter 3 – "that animal at unease with itself" – Survival and the Recalcitrant Animal

I have argued that Derrida's overarching concern throughout his career is to show how the deconstruction of living presence gives way to survival. His writings therefore express a philosophy of "life," though one that reimagines precisely what this term means. By showing how absence, passivity, temporal-non-presence, automaticity, and death are intrinsic in how human experience functions, survival devalues the role of, and in many ways undermines the very existence of, the self understood as a self-present, vital agency. How do these insights connect to the issue of human/animal difference in Derrida's philosophy?

Derrida's concern with "the animal" stems from the unstable role that it plays in upholding a vision of human life as living presence in the specific sense that I have tried to describe. While special focus is devoted to this figure in his later writings, Derrida states in *The Animal That Therefore I Am* that he has always been concerned with "the animal" in connection to the problem of "life." Derrida refers to

> arguments that for a very long time, since I began writing, in fact, I believe I have dedicated to the question of the living and of the living animal. For me that will always have been the most important and decisive question. I have addressed it a thousand times, either directly or obliquely, by means of readings of all the philosophers I have taken an interest in, beginning with Husserl and the concepts of rational animal, of life or transcendental instinct that are found at the heart of phenomenology (AT 34).

As Derrida writes in "The Ends of Man," not only has the "we" or the "human" been a central, self-referential obsession throughout the history of philosophy, but has always been determined through the logic of presence: "the 'we' […] in one manner or another, has always had to refer back to itself in the language of metaphysics and in philosophical discourse" (MP 44). Yet for Derrida, "the human," like the "I," is not a self-evident or transparent concept, but is generated by the same persistent drive to preserve presence that we have examined. This is not to suggest that

"human beings" are not in any way meaningfully different from other creatures, just as there is much that distinguishes a blue whale from a great horned owl. It is rather that a traditional vision of the beings we call "human" is sustained by being opposed to "animal life," for which reason the longstanding human/animal distinction is not one opposition among others. "The animal" is *made* to embody those features thought to be extraneous to the living presence of human conscious life, in what Derrida calls "a war against the animal, … a sacrificial war that is as old as Genesis" (AT 101). Emphatically, the persistent characterization of animals as unfree, utterly instinctual, merely mechanical beings does not simply bolster the relative superiority of human beings. It rather maintains an *essential* and specific difference, preserving that singular value that motivates philosophy on Derrida's account: living presence. Accordingly, "the animal" is not a trivial or secondary philosophical theme, but is consequential for supporting a dominant though perennially unstable metaphysical vision of "human" life:

> This question of the animal is not just interesting and serious in its own right. It also provides us with an indispensable intertwining thread for reading philosophers and for gaining access to […] a discursive apparatus, a coherence, if not a system. One understands a philosopher only by heeding closely to what he means to demonstrate, and in reality fails to demonstrate, concerning the limit between human and animal" (AT 106).

Yet like all of the distinctions that are generated to protect this value, deconstruction exposes how the features that most essentially define "animal" life are constitutively involved in the happening of "human" life.

As we will see, deconstruction not only compels us to reimagine what "the animal" and "the human" are, but what "life" itself is. Derrida's deconstruction of human/animal difference gives way to survival, which possibilizes human and non-human life alike. Derrida makes this clear in the opening pages of the first volume of *The Beast and the Sovereign*: by interrogating "the animal" and "the human" (or "the beast" and "the sovereign"), his aim is not to reduce either

notion to the other. Rather, he wishes to reveal how the values that are traditionally thought to define each figure contaminates the other. This is the case even while they are thought to be conceptually opposed. As Derrida writes:

> [W]henever we speak of the beast and the sovereign, we shall have in view an analogy between two current representations (current and therefore problematical, suspect, to be interrogated) between this type of animality or living being that is called the 'beast' or that is represented as bestiality, on the one hand, and on the other a sovereignty that is most often represented as human or divine (BSi 14).

As this passage suggests, Derrida is not claiming that "the animal" is identical to "the human," nor is he simply claiming that humans are highly deluded animals. On the contrary, *neither* notion suffices to explain how "life," human or otherwise, carries on. Indeed, and for reasons that we will explore, neither "the human" nor "the animal" is thinkable *as such* except in relation to what is ostensibly foreign to it, for which reason reducing either "concept" to the other would ignore the contamination that possibilizes both. As Derrida writes, "cultivating this analogy, clearing or plowing its territory, does not mean either accrediting it or simply traveling in it in only one direction, for example by reducing sovereignty … to prefigurations said to be zoological, biological, animal or bestial" (BSi 14).

In this chapter, I examine how Derrida's deconstruction of human/animal difference proceeds from and continues his project of deconstructing presence. Human/animal difference upholds the same vision of human subjectivity whose deconstruction we examined in the previous two chapters. I will describe *how* and *why* this distinction is maintained despite Derrida's judgment that it is aporetic. For like "writing," "the animal" is never posited as a simple "concept." This is so despite the confidence with which philosophers have often described animal life. Because living presence is deconstructable, the animal proves enigmatic and destabilizing, threatening the living present even as it is made to support it. Indeed, for Derrida, the strange status of non-human life

has always been an issue, both in philosophy and beyond: whereas "the animal" is in some sense "alive" (i.e., in some sense affects itself) it is so in an utterly "reactional" way. There is therefore no present self that determines its behaviour or for whom its life happens. Yet as was also the case with "writing," reactivity is not foreign to, but is essential for life to carry on as survival. This complicates the distinction between unthinking automaticity and the free, volitional "I." As Derrida writes in *The Animal That Therefore I Am:*

> [E]very living creature, and thus every animal to the extent that it is living, has recognized in it this power to move spontaneously, to feel itself and to relate to itself. However problematic it be, that is even the characteristic of what lives, as traditionally conceived in opposition to the inorganic inertia of the purely physico-chemical. No one denies the animal auto-affection or auto-motion, hence the self of that relation to the self. But what is in dispute—and it is here that the functioning and the structure of the 'I' count so much, even where the word I is lacking–is the power to make reference to the self in deictic or autodeictic terms, the capability at least virtually to turn a finger toward oneself in order to say "this is I" (AT 94).

Being at once automatic but nevertheless "alive," the animal is, to use the language of "Plato's Pharmacy," a *pharmakon*–a threat that is nevertheless necessary for maintaining the human living present. More exactly, it embodies a threat that has always, so to speak, "haunted" the human living present: "the animal" is "alive" yet utterly instinctual, is "driven" or "motivated" without subjective agency. For Derrida, then, the "animal" has *always* proved problematic. While this figure has been consequential for maintaining a vision of human life as living presence, the difference that animals are made to represent proves essential for the carrying on of human life (absence, mechanicity, non-presence, and death). It is precisely in this sense that Derrida writes *je suis l'animal*; not only does this convey that "one is," in some sense, an "animal" (i.e., that those features traditionally thought to be extraneous to human conscious life in fact constitute it), but highlights the instability of the role this figure has been made to serve. For Derrida, "the animal" is followed or pursued (*suivre*) but is always recalcitrant in our attempts to "domesticate" or

determine it. As Derrida writes, "the animal" pursues us as we pursue it: "The animal is there before me, there next to me, there in front of me–I who am (following) after it. And also, therefore, since it is before me, it is behind me" (AT 11). The "animal" preserves and frustrates the living present: the persistent use that philosophers make of this figure to protect "the human" always suffers from a basic deficiency implied in every new affirmation of the living present.

§ 3.1 – Reactionary Animals

As we saw in chapter 1, the distinction between speech and writing has allowed philosophers to avoid acknowledging essential aspects that make human life possible: "speech" preserves the living present, allowing repetition to take place in a way that avoids the threat that iterability poses. Human/animal difference upholds this same distinction: whereas both humans and animals are, *in some sense*, communicative creatures, and while both, *in some sense*, are thought to exist in ways that are meaningfully different from inert matter, there is nevertheless a subtle distinction between them. This difference is expressed in the apparent distinction between a "reaction" and a "response": whereas animals are thought to be thoroughly instinctual, human beings genuinely "respond" to their world. This is so even when animals exhibit similar behaviour as humans do: whereas animals at least appear to, for example, engage in deception,[4] romantic love,[5] monogamy,[6] play,[7] and experience grief,[8] such behaviour is nevertheless explicable in purely instinctual terms. Animals are therefore thought to lack that quality reserved for humans alone, what Derrida calls the "inability of the animal as limit to the response" (AT 84).

We cannot exhaustively examine each of the philosophers whom Derrida treats in these late writings. Several estimable books have been written on this subject.[9] For Derrida, Descartes has been consequential in determining how later philosophers think about animals. Previously, thinkers were somewhat more equivocal about the status of animal life. As is well known, Socrates

argues in the *Phaedo* that the soul is not only non-perceptible and intelligible, but is furthermore sovereign, ruling over its body from which it is thought to be strictly separate. Yet the soul is in some sense present in all life forms–not only humans, but "all animals and plants, and, in short, … all things which may be said to have birth" (*Phaedo* 70d). In his discussion of reincarnation in both the *Phaedrus* and the *Timaeus*, whereas Plato discriminates which souls can become implanted in human beings, this is not based on any *essential* difference between different kinds of souls. Plato writes: "a human soul can be reincarnated as an animal, and someone who was formerly human can be reborn as a human being once again, instead of being an animal. For a soul which has never seen the truth cannot enter into human form, because a man must understand the impressions he receives" (*Phaedrus* 249b). Aristotle, meanwhile, affirms human/animal difference in the *Metaphysics* by claiming that whereas human beings possess rational souls, all creatures possess locomotive souls suited to their survival. Animals, Aristotle writes, operate essentially through automotive repetition: "The animals other than man live by appearances and memories, and have but little of connected experience; but the human race lives also by art and reasonings" (*Metaphysics* 980b25). Yet interestingly, Aristotle elsewhere acknowledges a continuity between human and animal life. While he elsewhere maintains that humans alone have rational souls, in Book VIII of *The History of Animals* Aristotle nevertheless writes:

> In the great majority of animals there are traces of psychical qualities or attitudes, which qualities are more markedly differentiated in the case of human beings. For just as we pointed out resemblances in the physical organs, so in a number of animals we observe gentleness or fierceness, mildness or cross temper, courage, or timidity, fear or confidence, high spirit or low cunning, and, with regard to intelligence, something equivalent to sagacity. Some of these qualities in man, as compared with the corresponding qualities in animals, differ only quantitatively: that is to say, a man has more or less of this quality, and an animal has more or less of some other" (*History* 588a).

Thus, Derrida's claim is not that human/animal difference does not precede Descartes. Nor does he claim that the basic tension that led philosophers to assert the opposition between humans and

animals was foundationally different prior to Descartes. Derrida's claim is rather that Descartes posits that opposition in a far more absolute way than had previously been done, which he does by intensifying the rigidity of the distinction between body and soul–between the programmed nature of the physical world and the freedom of the spiritual realm.

Descartes' arguments for distinguishing human from animal life is on its surface straight-forward: whereas animal behaviour can be explained in mechanical terms, human thought cannot. We must therefore hypothesize the existence of immaterial souls who inhabit human bodies. Descartes justifies this argument in *Treatise on Man*: while the operations of the human body are certainly complex, much of this can be explained mechanically. Such an explanation is likewise sufficient to account for how animal bodies operate. Indeed, for Descartes, every organic body operates like a machine, though they are immeasurably more complex than anything that had been designed by humans up to that point. Why, then, does Descartes judge it necessary to hypothesize the existence of human souls? This is so because of a seemingly unique aspect of human beings that resist any mechanical explanation: human thought. As Descartes explains in section 17 of *The Passions of the Soul*: "there is nothing in us which we must attribute to our soul except our thoughts" (*Passions* 335). Whereas any non-volitional reaction is the result of physical, mechanical laws, only the hypothesis of a soul can account for the volition that human thought seems to express. By deducing the existence of immaterial souls in this way, Descartes establishes a strict opposition between two wholly different levels of being. Inasmuch as human beings are to any extent volitional, those aspects that are rational and free must belong to an entirely different ontological order, uncontaminated by materiality and the laws that govern the physical world. Indeed, because of the rigidity of the oppositions that Descartes insists on between materiality and

immateriality (but also volition and compulsion, freedom and unfreedom), any mixture between these two levels of being is not possible in principle.

For Derrida, this way of framing animal life, in which animals are defined on the basis of this lack of the power to respond, has remained dominant since Descartes. While this claim perhaps finds its most powerful expression in Descartes' work, Derrida argues that it informs an entire post-Cartesian tradition that includes Kant, Hobbes, Hegel, Marx, Levinas, Heidegger, Lacan, Agamben, Deleuze, and many others, each of whom …

> … share, *vis-a-vis* what they call 'the animal,' a considerable number of what I'll call 'beliefs,' which, if you prefer, you might name axioms, prejudices, presumptions, or presuppositions. ... [T]hey, like Descartes, think that in contrast to us humans–a difference that is determined by this fact—the animal neither speaks nor responds, that its capacity to produce signs is foreign to language and limited or fixed by a program (AT 89).

For Derrida, the presumption that responsibility exists and is unique to humans underlies each of the texts that uphold a strict difference between humans and animals. This claim seems largely correct: among the many places where human/animal difference is asserted, Hobbes writes in *Leviathan* that because animals are utterly instinctual, they are unable to properly *signify* to others: "[Animals] have no other direction than their particular judgements and appetites; nor speech, whereby one of them can signify to another what he thinks expedient for the common" (Hobbes 105). Kant, Meanwhile, writes in his *Metaphysics of Morals* that animals are "beings lacking reason" (*Morals* 36), and further argues in his *Anthropology*: "The fact that the human being can have the 'I' in his representations raises him infinitely above all other living beings on earth. Because of this he is a person ... [and so] an entirely different being from things, such as irrational animals, with which one can do as one likes" (*Anthropology* 15). Hegel writes in Volume I of *Aesthetics* that, in contrast to humans, "every animal life is throughout restricted and tied down to entirely specific qualities. The sphere of its existence is narrow and its interests are dominated by

the natural needs of nourishment, sex etc. Its soul-life ... is poor, abstract and worthless" (Hegel 132). Furthermore, and despite the enormous differences that separate him from Descartes, Heidegger consistently defines animal life in broadly Cartesian terms throughout his work: in addition to the claim that animals are "poor" of world from *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics*, Heidegger argues in *Being and Time* that animals have no understanding of being *as such*.[10] He draws a similar conclusion in "Language": "man, in distinction from plant and animal, is the living being capable of speech. ... [O]nly speech enables man to be the living being he is as man" (*Language* 187). Toward the end of part three of his essay "The Nature of Language," furthermore, Heidegger defines human beings as "mortals" precisely for the fact that they are receptive to "saying" and belong to the four-fold. Animals have no such relationship: "Mortals are they who can experience death. Animals cannot do so. But animals cannot speak either" (*Nature* 107).

If responsibility is foundational for upholding the distinction between humans and animals, what exactly is it? To be sure, the power to authentically "respond" to others or to one's environment is not simply a matter of "language," even while it is by examining "human language" that Derrida often approaches human/animal difference. It is rather a certain power that is thought to underlie and determine language use as such. As always with Derrida, its existence is undermined by the conditions that make any language or code possible–i.e., repetition, and so non-presence, death, and mechanicity. Even if for the moment we grant that animals are purely reactive, what do we mean when we attribute to ourselves the power of the response? For Derrida, no adequate answer can be given to this question, for the simple reason that a "response" is not a concept. It is rather a contradictory notion which, like living speech, secures a metaphysical vision of human experiential life. If humans are unique in being able to authentically respond to others

and to their environment in "language," this is due to an autonomous and sovereign power that vitalizes language. This power that *means to say* is "[t]his presence to oneself, this self of the presence to itself, this universal and singular 'I' that is the condition for the response and thus for the responsibility of the subject" (AT 93). Yet as we explored in the previous two chapters, it is precisely this vision of living speech that the logic of survival undermines. For this reason, Derrida counsels: "let us not hasten to attribute speech to the mouth of man supposed to speak and voracity or even the vociferation of the cry to the animal's maw. It is precisely this simple and dogmatic opposition, the abuses of this oversimplification that we have in our sights here" (BSi 65).

§ 3.1.1 – Reaction and Responsiveness

Given our discussion in chapter 1, we already have reason to be skeptical of human/animal difference: like those who rely on writing in Plato's *Phaedrus,* animals are thought not to engage in *living* speech.[11] To take what seems like an uncontroversial example, a mosquito does not "desire" blood. It locates blood by "detecting" carbon dioxide in the air, and pursues its victim by following the trail of CO2 it emits. Once located, the mosquito does not "decide" to puncture its victim's skin (say, in the "interest" of producing eggs). Rather, this event is commonly understood as a calculated process; it in no way involves the deciding power of a "pure egological subject" (EU 91), nor does a world *appear* for a mosquito in the present. Derrida describes this same approach for understanding insect life in his treatment of Lacan's "the Function of Speech and Language in Psychoanalysis": whereas bees in some sense communicate through a "code or signalling system," (Lacan 246), Lacan contends that they do not apprehend the signals they receive or emit. Discussing this understanding of bee sociality, Derrida writes: "When bees appear to 'respond' to a 'message,' they do not respond but react; they merely obey a fixed program, whereas the human subject responds to the other, to the question from or of the other. This

discourse is quite literally Cartesian" (AT 123). This assumption determines how animal life and behaviour is generally approached, and not only by philosophers. If we restrict ourselves to recent ethological studies on animal communication, the overwhelming tendency among researchers is to describe animal communication in ways that avoid the assumption that some intentional agency governs how communicative signals are delivered and received. In a 2012 study by Herler and Stoeger, the authors identify fully three hundred and twenty-seven types of vocalizations among Asian elephant calves, each of which falls into one of five "call types": the "roar, rumble, chirp (for single call), bout of chirps and trumpet" (Herler and Stoeger 2012). Yet at no point do the authors presume that an agency motivates a calf's vocal cries, and instead describe the function that each type of vocalization has, as well as the contexts in which they are typically produced. Similarly, an article by O'Shea and Posché on vocal communication among manatees concludes that "sound communication in Florida manatees has revealed a simple pattern in social function based on signals that are sometimes complex in structure" (O'Shea and Posché 1069). Yet revealingly, the vocalizations themselves are defined as "complex, single-note calls with multiple harmonics, frequency modulations, nonharmonically related overtones" (O'Shea and Posché 1069). A vocalization is therefore not "speech"–i.e., does not emanate from a self-possessed, intentional subject. If we consider gestural, apparently non-linguistic forms of animal communication, consider David Lusseau's 2003 study of social behaviour among bottlenose dolphins. The author examines how decisional power in dolphin pods is concentrated among relatively few group members. The "signals" that these creatures perform produce decisive behavioural shifts in the group as a whole. Yet importantly, Lusseau's description of "social behaviour" in no way ascribes conscious agency to dolphins: whereas it exhaustively documents

the physical signals that determine the pod's behaviour ("side-flops," "upside-down lobtails"), this study nowhere implies that they are delivered or received by intentional agents.[12]

For Derrida, this ethological approach for describing animal behaviour is not, on its surface, entirely wrong. It rather highlights an enigma concerning how "life" (human or non-human) should be understood. Derrida does not deny that "animal" life is "mechanical," even while this model proves insufficient *in itself* for describing animal communication. He is rather concerned with the oppositional framework underlying how human and non-human life continues to be understood, and how this ultimately hinges on an unstable commitment to living presence, on account of which human beings are thought to be free, autonomous, and sovereign. If the dominant approach for examining animal life is misguided, it is not because we are misled in thinking that animals are not intentional. Rather, we are misguided in believing that the value in terms of which human life has traditionally been understood is coherent. If Derrida is correct that the distinction between a reaction and response underlies the belief that humans and animals are essentially different, he will argue that these two values in fact contaminate one another. And as is also the case wherever he deconstructs speech and writing, exposing the contamination between reaction and response gives way to survival, which possibilizes human and non-human "life" alike.

The reaction/response distinction is examined by Derrida in several places outside of his later "animal" writing. Discussing it in *Typewriter Ribbon*, Derrida writes that on the one hand, a reaction is thought to be fully calculable, and in no way requires the hypothesis of a self-present "I." A reactive creature is therefore "destined to repetition. It is destined, that is, to reproduce impassively, imperceptibly, without organ or organicity, received commands. In a state of anesthesia, it would obey or command a calculable program without affect or auto-affection, like an indifferent automaton" (WA 72). A response, meanwhile, is thought to be conceptually opposed

to a reaction in the way that it operates: an authentic response is spontaneous and free, and so emanates from a self-present "I." Yet the power to respond does not exceed repetition. When, for example, I write a letter, there is of course an element of repetition involved: whereas I am generating new, often unprecedented combinations of words from one moment to the next, this is possible only because I am repeating words that are already known to me. This is similarly the case when I respond to a student's question or to a person asking for directions. To the extent that there is an *essential* difference between these activities and the coded, programmed communicative behaviour of non-human creatures, this cannot be due to the role that repetition plays in both cases. Like speech and writing, what essentially differentiates a reaction from a response is the *way* that repetition takes place.

Derrida often deconstructs human responsibility in connection to language: if humans alone speak in language, they are not unique in using vocal or physical signs that are, in some sense, "intended" for others. It is clear that animals "communicate" to one another through "signals," whether these are expressed vocally or physically. Despite that they might be described in merely reactive terms, these signals are nevertheless delivered in reaction to stimuli. When, for example, a dog or wolf expresses submission after losing a fight by rolling onto its back, it has performed a specific gesture in reaction to a specific event. This is similarly the case when we consider gestural and vocal communication among higher primates. As Pollick and de Waal note, these creatures, like humans, "regularly communicate by means of vocalizations, orofacial movements, body postures, and locomotion patterns, [and] free brachiomanual gestures (i.e., manual communication without touching another individual or a substrate)" (Pollick and de Waal 2007). Such behaviour can and very often is explained in largely reactive terms. Animal life, including animal "communication," is thought to be thoroughly "coded": "It is thought that 'the

animal' is capable only of a coded or of a meaning that is narrowly indicative, strictly constrained; one that is fixed in its programmation" (AT 122). Yet while we have seen that iterability complicates this understanding of repetition as the repetition of "the same," what distinguishes a code from a language?

For Derrida, the apparent distinction between a code and a language does not ultimately rest on the comparative complexity of the latter, even while this argument has been adduced (for example, by Descartes, Noam Chomsky, and Wilhelm von Humboldt[13]). It is rather determined by a particular, present vision of language users: linguistic signs are both received and delivered by a subject who in some sense genuinely apprehends the words she puts to use. By not "appearing" in a present, a vocal or physical gesture does not authentically "appear" at all, either to the animal performing the gesture or to the one receiving it. Yet a necessary condition for our being able to respond to others is that we do so through iterable marks. If, for example, I am having a discussion, I can only receive the other person through signs. This is the case not only for the words being spoken, but also applies to how verbal content is delivered and received–for example, through vocal inflections, facial expressions, physical gestures, and so on. Yet not only is signification necessary for me to understand the "meaning" of what is being conveyed to me. Beyond this, the other only appears to me *in any sense* through iterability. For Derrida, one does not have immediate and present access to others (a point that will prove important when we discuss his relationship to Levinas). Even in moments of pure intimacy, others appear through the same distance (or spacing) that allows us to receive verbal signs: the mediating power of iterable marks. To use Derrida's language, one cannot encounter any other but through a "narcissistic gesture," where "I" identify the other in terms of "myself" (something which all living creatures appear to do).

Indeed, because iterability is a *general* feature for how experience operates, no object of experience escapes this limitation: a songbird's warble, the smell of roasted vegetables, or a sunset only appear as experience in terms of an already established network of differential marks. If Derrida is correct that iterability (and therefore difference, alterity, and spacing) make experience possible, then the view that *any* creature could exist presently as a self-conscious subject is undermined. For Derrida, no such creature could possibly exist: absolute presence would be beyond differentiation, and so would be "absolute death." For this reason, Derrida argues that a purely reactive creature is not in opposition to, but would be identical to, a fully present self: neither being would be capable of receiving "the other," which is the minimal condition for any "sign of life." We can connect this point to the theme of human/animal difference by considering Derrida's discussion of how both "the animal" and a sovereign God are exterior to the human realm. Both figures are apparently opposed: the animal, being purely reactive and unable to authentically respond, is in this sense purely absent. Because it "operates" in a way that is wholly dictated by instinct, animals cannot ever truly *engage* (i.e., respond) with others. God, meanwhile, is pure presence, and is therefore absolutely beyond the realm of human affairs; because of its absolutely hyperbolic highness–its "highness beyond high"–such a being is beyond all reciprocity and exchange. As Derrida claims when treating Hobbes' political theory, this image of the sovereign as the absolute origin and source of law justifies the claim that the (human) sovereign is beyond the possibility of the response: "The sovereign does not respond, he is the one who does not have to, who always has the right not to, respond, in particular not to be responsible for his acts" (BSi 57). Yet the similarity that holds between the animal and divine sovereignty–that neither can engage in "exchange, shared speech, question and response, proposition and response" (BSi 55)–betrays a further similarity, one that leads Derrida to repeat the claim that absolute presence

and absolute absence–"the beast" and "the sovereign"–*amount to the same thing*. Derrida makes this point in connection to the "law": neither beasts nor the sovereign are capable of existing within any community, association, or social economy. While the former might, in some sense, "live" among one another, they are not properly law-bound, social creatures, their "communities" operating according to the instinctual impulses of their members. The sovereign, meanwhile, is pre-social by definition: sovereign power transcends the law so as to found and conserve it. While apparently opposed, then, both figures are beyond the possibility of difference, negotiation, and play–are in a space "where the law does not appear, or is not respected, or gets violated" (BSi 17). In this sense, the two "resemble each other while seeming to be situated as antipodes" (BSi 17). Yet as Derrida argues, if human beings are not purely present nor purely absent, they do not "live," but survive: i.e., are radically finite, being neither present nor absent. Put briefly, what the beast and the sovereign have in common–their mutual inability to respond–is death. The sovereign and the beast are both beyond life understood as survival, the former because it is absolute vitality and power, the latter because of its absolute lack of *any* such sovereign power.

Yet if "I am" only in relation to iterable marks that are ceaselessly being repeated, and if experience only happens on account of "the other," then what is "the human person" for whom life carries on? If the possibility of *any* self-relation minimally requires that I "pass through" the mark, then "I am," at any given moment, only as the non-present emerging of marks that ceaselessly slip away. Furthermore, because the future only arrives on account of "the other," experience only takes place as the ceaseless interruption of presence. Inasmuch as every moment of a human being's intentional life involves the reappearing of marks in new and unanticipated contexts, "the self" is ceaselessly suffering its own death. As Derrida writes, one carries on as "a living dead machine" (BSii 131):

> From the first breath, th[e] archive of survivance is at work. But once again, this is the case not only for books, or for writing, or for the archive in the current sense, but for everything from which the tissue of living experience is woven, through and through. A weave of survival, like death in life and life in death, a weave that does not come along to clothe a more originary existence, a life or a body or a soul that would be supposed to exist naked under this clothing (BSii 132).

In other words, human experience takes place in a way that is automatic, but that is not irreducibly mechanical. How do these insights connect to the theme of human animal difference?

§ 3.1.2 – *Bêtise* and Living-On

Like the distinction between speech and writing discussed in chapter 1, Derrida's deconstruction of the apparent opposition between a reaction and a response gives way to survival, which he believes allows all of life to carry on. We must be careful when assessing this claim. This insight does not erase *every* conceivable difference between a response and a reaction, no more than it effaces every difference between humans and "animals." It rather affects the proposition that there is a line that separates the two:

> we are not concerned with erasing every difference between what we are calling reaction and what we commonly name response. It is not a matter of confusing what happens when one presses a computer key and what happens when one asks a question of an interlocutor. … My hesitation concerns only the purity, the rigor, and the indivisibility of the frontier that separates—already with respect to 'us humans'–reaction from response and in consequence, especially, the purity, rigor, and indivisibility of the concept of responsibility that is derived from it (AT 125).

As this passage suggests, Derrida does not believe that there are no meaningful differences between human beings and non-human creatures. A honey-bee, a toucan, an orangutan, and a human being are each biologically and behaviourally very different kinds of creatures. For this reason, Derrida does not suggest that we abandon every distinction between, say, a housefly and a human being, but rather that we reconsider the essential nature of these distinctions: "Of course, the animal doesn't eat like us, but neither does any one person eat in the same way; there are

structural differences, even when one eats from the same plate! ... But what I wanted to suggest … is that these differences are not those between 'as such' and 'not as such'" (AT 159). Whereas discarding the limits that separate different creatures would lead to a far too general understanding of the living world, Derrida seeks to complicate and multiply these distinctions in a way that addresses their complexity–in such a way that these frontiers "can no longer be traced, objectified, or counted as single and indivisible" (AT 40).

Yet while Derrida does not deny that there are differences between different expressions of life, his deconstruction of reaction/response nevertheless implies that there is a common differential structure that makes any "sign of life" possible. On this account, neither "reaction" nor "response" are adequate in themselves to describe the phenomenon of "life." If Derrida's reimagining of life as survival is correct, then what ultimately drives human life forward is the movement of differance, where repetition takes place in a way that is always inaugural. As Derrida makes clear in *The Animal That Therefore I Am*, differential repetition happens in a way that is always prior to conscious agency: "Traces erase (themselves), like everything else, but the structure of the trace is such that it cannot be in anyone's power to erase it and especially not to 'judge' its erasure, even less so by means of a constitutive *power* assured of being able to erase, performatively, what erases itself" (AT 136). As this passage makes clear, the view that one has "conscious" or ultimate decisional power over how repetition takes place is betrayed by the conditions that make iterability possible: "one must begin not from the pure concept of sovereignty but from concepts such as drive, transference, transition, translation, passage, division" (BSi 291). Yet this fact recasts "life," "human" or "animal," as a play of differential forces that never arrive in the present and that never constitute a final, homogenous, conscious unity. As Derrida writes in his first *The Beast and the Sovereign* seminar, "every finite living being" is made possible on

account of "differences of force and intensity," "there is no finite living being (a-human or human) which is not structured by this force-differential" (BSi 183). The view that any *essential* difference separates humans from animals is therefore untenable: all life happens as the mechanical, passive, non-present, but always inaugural and differential movement of repetition, what Derrida describes as "another thinking of life" (AT 126).

This vision of life compels us to reimagine all of the distinctions that have until now distinguished human and non-human life, beginning with the apparent difference between the "what" and the "who." For Derrida, the supposed contrast between the "what" and the "who" rests on the supposition that such entities exist that are non-reflective, non-"conscious" objects, while others cannot be so reduced because they possess what Derrida always deconstructs: sovereignty, autonomy, the capacity for self-reflection–in other words, living presence. Yet survival makes any such distinction among different life-forms untenable.[14]

However, this does not mean that "animals" are "human" or vice versa; to the contrary, Derrida argues that survival is *precisely* what allows different beings to exist in the manifestly very different ways that they do. Derrida makes this point by focusing on the term *bêtise*, a noun and adjective that commonly means "stupid" or "foolish": the charge that one is behaving "bêtise" suggests that one is behaving stupidly (like a beast). Yet as Derrida argues over the course of *The Beast and the Sovereign* seminars, not only does our being irreducibly "bête" make "life" possible, but makes differences within the living world possible. The way that Derrida makes this point is quite complex and has to be interpreted, as the term "bêtise" is discussed intermittently over the course of these works. Put briefly, to be bêtise–to be imperfectly rational, finite, existing according to the specificities of a calculable program even while one is never reducible to it–is required for one to "live" or to live on. This is why Derrida often stresses the non-definability of bêtise: when

one calls someone bêtise (as in stupid or silly), one is not calling them a specific or definable thing, but is defining them in terms of a lack which is central to how survival works.

Yet there is a strange supposition at play when we call others bêtise (or, more generally, when we describe them in animalistic terms through such expressions as "busy as a bee," "stubborn as a mule," or "sly as a fox"). When we do so, it is nevertheless often thought that animals themselves do not *exist* their bêtise. When, for example, I describe someone as "slow as a slug," that person presumably knows what I mean by this simile. A slug, meanwhile, does not know what it means to "be" a slug, as it exists according to a species-specific program. For this reason, bêtise is, Derrida writes, "proper" to human beings alone. Yet our radical finitude, I have argued, undercuts the distinction between creatures that genuinely apprehend their existence *as such*, and those who do not. To be sure, Derrida is *not* claiming that nothing *happens* when humans or animals "experience" the world, but rather that human experience is itself generated through the same differential movement that possibilizes all of life. The question of whether some but not all creatures authentically apprehend their world is therefore misguided, relying as it does on a present model of "life." Human beings, like all non-human creatures, "exist" in and "receive" the world in very different ways, though never on the level of pure, present apprehension. In this sense, Derrida does not simply deny the "as such," but multiplies it:

> [T]he strategy in question would consist in pluralizing and varying the 'as such,' and, instead of simply giving speech back to the animal, or giving to the animal what the human deprives it of, as it were, in marking that the human is, in a way, similarly 'deprived,' by means of a privation that is not a privation, and that there is no pure and simple 'as such.'" (AT 160).

Hence, far from erasing difference, survival allows for the emergence of an indefinite variety of different ways of encountering the other, even while no creature can "apprehend" the world on the level of presence.

Thus, whereas survival undermines the view that any creature authentically "exists" their world or behaviour, at the same time, by eschewing the distinction between genuine apprehension and non-apprehension in the way that different creatures live, Derrida suggests that there is incalculable, perhaps infinite variation in the movement of differance throughout the natural world, even while we perhaps do not have phenomenological access to how different animals "exist" in and negotiate their worlds. Accordingly, Derrida counsels that we regard "life" as being "infinitely differentiated" in terms of reaction and response. Rather than thinking of life as being differentiated along a single, highly determined line, we should endeavor to think of it as being divided along an indefinite plurality of boundaries. In perhaps the most poignant theoretical statement of *The Animal That Therefore I Am*, Derrida writes:

> Far from erasing the difference–a nonoppositional and infinitely differentiated, qualitative, and intensive difference between reaction and response–it is a matter, on the contrary, of taking that difference into account within the whole differentiated field of experience and of a world of life-forms. And that means refraining from reducing this differentiated and multiple difference, in a similarly massive and homogenizing manner, to one between the human subject, on the one hand, and the nonsubject that is the animal in general, on the other, by means of which the latter comes to be, in another sense, the nonsubject that is subject to the human subject (AT 128).

We should, in other words, challenge the framework on which this distinction between reaction and response is based. As Derrida writes: "the logical, and thus the rational, fragility of certain of its articulations should induce us to recast in a general way the whole conceptual framework" (AT 136).

Derrida describes bêtise as "a transcategorial category, a transcendental or, as I would say, a quasi-transcendental" (BSi 151). Survival expresses the necessary conditions for the emergence of life, and this gives rise to an incalculable variety of living beings. Yet at the same time, it does not operate in a way that generates a fully present manifestation of life (hence *quasi*-transcendental). Bêtise therefore turns out to be roughly synonymous with survival itself, referring

as it does to that basic lack that is necessary for one to live on. We should not read this to mean that we are irreducibly "beastial" or "animalistic": survival renders such terms problematic owing to their connection to living presence. For this reason, we cannot reduce human life from a "who" to a "what": human/animal, who/what, reaction/response, each is generated through a conceptuality that Derrida endeavors to exceed: "what if, at bottom, the distinction between what and who came to sink into indifference, into the abyss?" (SBi 137).

Yet in a claim that is not without humour, Derrida maintains that to the extent that human beings are "properly" bêtise–to the extent that "we" are distinctive in the way that we "behave" or "think"–this is owing to the tragic drive to secure presence explained toward the end of the last chapter. If we are stupid (bêtise) in some distinctive way, Derrida suggests it is on account of "the bêtise of definition, of the definite article that commands the grammar of essence, of what is proper to this or that, proper to 'the' bêtise, as much as of what is proper to man or the beast or the sovereign" (BSi 161). What is "proper" to human beings is the "proper pure and simple." By this, Derrida does not simply mean that the drive to secure presence ultimately betrays itself (though this is also the case). In addition, human bêtise signifies the "death of thought" involved in what is traditionally held to be distinctively human–the drive to define and essentialize, the drive to render presence, and in particular the drive to posit the "I" understood as a self-present and "lucid consciousness, a pitiless intelligence that gives in to no physical or social reflex, to no coded reaction" (BSi 191). This bêtise that is apparently proper to "man"–an asininity of the "proper appropriating itself, the proper positing itself, the proper appropriated to itself, autoposited, the appropriation or the fantasy of the proper" (BSi 139)–is not, however, simply misguided. As we will see in the following section, it is motivated by an appropriative, violent, and sacrificial drive which, for Derrida, has always subsisted through a reductive relationship to animal life.

§ 3.2 – Sovereignty and Sacrifice

In light of survival, the "I" is best thought of as a bêtise to secure a sovereign, fully present vision of the self–one that is, however, *at once* undercut by the conditions that make *any* sign of life possible. Inasmuch as "the animal" is consequential for maintaining this vision of "the human," survival not only disrupts the claim that essential distinctions exist between human and non-human life, but compels us to reconsider how animals have been made to serve this role. For as Derrida often notes, this singular term "animal" is conventionally used to signify a vast plurality of creatures. Furthermore, the only criterion that lends the notion "animal" definition and apparent unity is its negative association with "human beings." Derrida writes: "'the beast' designates a set with no other unity […] than a negative one, or one supposed to be negative: namely that of not being a human being" (BSii 30). Along with noting the oppositional logic according to which "the animal" operates, Derrida suggests that this notion is distinctive in that it signifies not only a heterogeneous set, but an incalculable multiplicity of very different creatures, which possess no common characteristic that might justify their being classed under a common name other than their not belonging to the category "human being": "there is no other positively predicable unity between the ant, the snake, the cat, the dog, the horse, the chimpanzee–or the sperm whale" (BSii 30). Reducing this plurality of different creatures to a single class is not, Derrida maintains, a simple or innocent gesture. If experience only takes place as survival, then the production of the free, non-mechanical, fully present conception of a "self" requires what Derrida describes as "sacrifice"–in this case, of the "animal" against which "the human" is unstably founded.

We have already reviewed this dynamic that preserves "the human" as living presence: when discussing the distinction between speech and writing, we saw how "writing" (or "arche-writing") is foundational for how experience carries forward through time. If "consciousness" is

minimally the experience of repeatable marks, then everything traditionally associated with writing figurs centrally in how human life carries on. Yet this conflicts with the understanding of conscious life which, on Derrida's reading, motivates metaphysics. This gives rise to a tension, where what is constitutive for the emergence of experience is renounced or "sacrificed." Human/animal difference expresses this same dynamic: in order to preserve "the human" understood on the order of presence, "the animal" is made to embody those features without which no life, human or otherwise, could carry on. For this reason, Derrida describes the drive or passion to preserve presence as "an immunizing movement (a movement of safety, of salvage and salvation of the safe, the holy, the immune, the indemnified, of virginal and intact nudity)" (AT 67). This "immunizing movement" guards the sovereign, fully present understanding of "the human" by evicting automaticity, absence, and death, all of which are thought to be improper to the proper essence of human *ipseity*. This sacrificial performance is, Derrida writes, the "mark of the self-affirmation of free sovereignty" (BSi 194).

The sovereign vision of "the human" is not only impossible, but is secured through "violence": for Derrida, "sacrifice" is a general feature in philosophical writings on animality, where a particular conception of humanity rests on a metaphysical vision of animality: "at the heart of all these discourses sacrifice beats like a vital impulse" (AT 90). In view of this sacrificial logic that structures the human/animal distinction–what Derrida sometimes calls a "forced translation"–Derrida generates the neologism *animot* (what David Wills calls "animal-word," an accurate if artless translation) to describe how philosophers seek to contain "the animal." On the one hand, this term marks the plurality that lies hidden within the word "animal": *animot* is orally indistinguishable from the French plural of "animal," "animaux." By having the plural of "animal" stand in for the singular, Derrida highlights the diversity that exists within the singular "animal,"

a plurality that is nevertheless repeatedly simplified. Furthermore, through the word "mot" that is coupled with the word "animal" in "animot," Derrida draws attention to what has served to differentiate human beings from "the animal" over the course of the history of philosophy: "language." As we have seen, language use is often cast as what essentially differentiates human from non-human life, even while the conditions that make "language" use possible turn out to efface this difference. Language, Derrida writes, has served as that "reference point by means of which one has always sought to draw the limit, the unique and indivisible limit held to separate man from animal" (AT 125). Most importantly, "mot" connects to "naming"–to that sovereign right that humans apparently alone have to name others: "The animal is a word, it is an appellation that men have instituted, a name they have given themselves the right and the authority to give to the living other" (AT 23). In this way, Derrida casts "language" as the possibility of the sacrifice of animal life: in "naming" non-human life "animal," Derrida emphasizes the sovereign, reductive power of language itself.

As his use of "animot" suggests, Derrida is not simply dissatisfied with the distinctions that separate the "animal" from "human beings," but with the entire metaphysical framework that generates this difference–that "feeds the limit, generates it, raises it, and complicates it" (AT 29). To be sure, Derrida is not simply claiming that "the human" is defined in opposition to "the animal." While this is true, it is also superficial. What Derrida is ultimately concerned with is how "the animal" conforms, or is made to conform in order to confirm, a conceptuality that casts humans beings as free, decisional agents. Thought of in this sense, the "human" does not "exist," but is better thought of as a sacrificial performance, where the self ceaselessly asserts and reasserts itself against its other. "The animal" maintains this aporetic understanding of sovereignty in terms of which "the human" has and continues to be defined:

> [W]hat is proper to man, his subjugating superiority over the animal, his very becoming-subject, his historicity, his emergence out of nature, his sociality, his access to knowledge and technics, all that, everything (in a nonfinite number of predicates) that is proper to man would derive from this originary fault (AT 45).

Just how consequential the human/animal distinction is for Derrida is apparent when we consider his various discussions of animality in connection to the biblical Genesis. Writing toward the end of the first volume of *The Beast and the Sovereign*, Derrida states that these two figures are opposed even prior to "paradise": "The beast and the sovereign, the one and the other … were already two, and the one commanded the other, even before paradise, even before our paradise, before the garden of Eden" (BSi 312). The reference to Eden in this passage is significant: it refers to that original sacrifice that forcefully positions animal life in a way that engenders and safeguards the human as sovereign. Derrida elsewhere calls this the "awful tale of Genesis" (AT 18), where the animal is *made* to maintain the integrity of this overwhelmingly dominant understanding of human beings: "at the heart of all these discourses sacrifice beats like a vital impulse. … [A] founding sacrifice, within a human space where, in any case, exercising power over the animal to the point of being able to put it to death when necessary is not forbidden" (AT 90-91).

This produces a novel understanding of what goes on when philosophers discuss "humanity" or the "human" as a unique and essentially distinct kind of creature. For Derrida, "the human" is never simply "posited," but is *pressed* through argumentative and rhetorical strategies. This further clarifies why Derrida understands "the human" in terms of "sacrifice," which is built into the very *possibility* of upholding the unity and integrity of "the human." If "humans" are distinctively *bête* in their longings to secure presence, this is not simply because we are misguided or "foolish," but violent. Derrida elaborates on these sacrificial moments that secure human exceptionalism when he writes that exclusion is never the simple or innocent institution of borders, but is rather a violence that protects human living presence:

> The term 'barred' indicates not only the excluded, the dissociated, what is set apart, put outside, or cannot return, but also often the sacrificed, the scapegoat, what must be put to death, expelled, or separated, like the absolute stranger who must be thrown outside so that the inside of the city, of consciousness, of the self can self-identify in peace. One must chase out the stranger in order for belonging, identification, and appropriation to be possible (Sacrifice 5).

For this reason, Derrida interrogates not only "self-presence," but "sovereignty" as what fundamentally defines "the human" in *The Beast and the Sovereign* seminars. Far from being an exclusively political concept, sovereignty is itself generated through the logic of presence, presuming as it does that supreme power and authority ultimately derives from some singular source (whether this be a monarch, the population of a polity, and so forth). Sovereignty expresses "absolute potency" (BSi, 23)–the highest, the supreme, the greatest, deriving as it does from the Latin *superanus*. Not only is sovereignty only conceivable through the logic of presence, but it expresses that vision of living presence that we have interrogated up to this point–of decisional power that derives from an autonomous, self-identical source: "The concept of sovereignty will always imply the possibility of this positionality, this thesis, this self-thesis, this autoposition of him who posits or posits himself as *ipse, the (self)-same, oneself*" (BSi 67).

We will complicate this account of "sovereignty" in the following section, where I will show how this impulse to reduce non-human life to the "animot" is similarly a flight and attempted dissimulation from it. Yet as I have shown, this vision of the human "sovereign self" rests on a sacrificial relationship to animals, though one that never finally succeeds. Whereas we saw that such a vision of the human self is, to use the terminology of the previous section, *bête*, it is so in a way that restlessly tries to dominate the *bête* that it nevertheless is–i.e., that denies the conditions that give rise to it. In this sense, "the human," like the "I," is the creation of a bêtise force: "the conscious and responsible Me I is also what claims to dominate the beast and the bêtise in me"

(BSi 182). In a word, the positing of the "I" is a performative that says to itself that it is not *bête*, trying to exceed the *bête* in the very moment where it is being most *bête*. *Bête*, Derrida writes:

> [P]osits itself, still triumphant, as intelligent, which is nothing other than the self-confidence and the self-consciousness of a vigilance that is non-*bête*, not so *bête*, inasmuch as it posits itself as such, inasmuch as it posits and posits itself, and finds itself. Positing, thesis, the thesis of self, the triumph of self-positing, reflects and reflects itself as *bêtise*. *bêtise* always triumphs, it is always, in the war we are talking about, on the side of the victor. There is a certain *Triumph of Life* in *bêtise*. A certain triumph over which a certain life tries also to triumph (BSi 183).

Hence, the struggle of this beast (the human "I") that posits itself is a hopeless drive to triumph over not simply animals (no such being actually exists), but what the animal is made to represent, in "a desperate struggle against *bêtise*" (BSi 184). "[B]etween the beast and the sovereign" within which we live, the bêtise of philosophy involves the institution of limits that are strict and rigorous; while they cannot be maintained, they are nevertheless forced and ceaselessly reinforced: "[i]nventing limits, installing limits" (BSi 298), our bêtise is precisely this "sovereign impulse," which, in the end, *is not sovereignty*, but is rather what might be described as the desire or passion for sovereignty.

§ 3.2.1 – *Sovereignty* and Animality

While this sovereign passion to dominate animals (and the "animal" that we are) expresses itself throughout Western thought, for Derrida, it is arguably most vehemently affirmed in works of philosophy. Yet if "the animal" contaminates "the human" and so betrays this sovereign impulse, *how* does deconstruction reveal this to be the case? For Derrida, the way that "the animot" operates in philosophical texts is often quite complex: "the animal" functions alongside a host of related notions to sustain a more wide-ranging metaphysical vision of human life and society. Indeed, it is in part to show this complexity that Derrida interprets "the animal" within political philosophy. In the first volume of *The Beast and the Sovereign*, Derrida interchangeably

interrogates human and political sovereignty as they appear in the works of Rousseau, Schmitt, and most extensively Hobbes, demonstrating how both rely on the common presumption of a fully present self, which is ultimately premised on the strict opposition between unthinking mechanicity (frequently exemplified through the figure of the "animal-machine") and sovereignty. The "sovereign" is normally conceived as a transcendent, originary source of law and action. Yet while "sovereignty" is normally framed as an essentially political concept, Derrida argues that the idea of political sovereignty reflects and is generated by the logic of presence, which structures not only how political power is thought to operate, but how human beings are thought to exist as free, autonomous, decisional, and responsive creatures. The common conceptuality underlying both political and human sovereignty is, Derrida claims, a power that posits and recognizes itself, that says "I am," without which neither the "self" nor political sovereignty would make sense. Thus, underlying both human and political sovereignty is a vision of *ipseity*. As Derrida writes:

> [T]he sovereign appear[s] most often in the masculine figure of the king, the master, the chief, the paterfamilias, or the husband–of the *ipseity* of the *ipse* … [which] implies the exercise of power by someone it suffices to designate as *himself, ipse*. The sovereign, in the broadest sense of the term, is he who has the right and the strength to be and be recognized as *himself, the same, properly the same as himself* (BSi 66).

Sovereignty, at its core, rests on this prior vision of *ipseity* or selfhood that we have been examining: because it is said to be indivisible, the sovereign is an originary potency that is beyond the possibility of exchange or diminution–beyond difference and play–a "maximum of potency, the greatest potency" (BSi 257). There is, then, a "thought of sovereignty and its majesty in the figure of present and self-present ipseity, sometimes present to itself in the form of the ego, the living present of the ego, the 'I'" (BSi 270).

Yet for Derrida, this understanding of sovereignty only maintains itself through an awkward and often contradictory relationship to "the animal." Derrida shows this most extensively

in the first volume of *The Beast and the Sovereign*: despite the assumption that animals are incapable of participating in politics, they are nevertheless rhetorically used at moments when the logic of sovereignty breaks down. Derrida examines, for example, texts that attribute "cunning to the fox, strength to the lion, voracious and violent and cruel savagery to the wolf" (BSi 81). He similarly cites examples where the power of state authority is characterized in terms of "the formless form of animal monstrosity" (BSi 25). Yet the significance of these moments of anthropomorphization goes beyond the awkward use of animal life to metaphorically convey the human political realm. For Derrida, they betray the supplementary role that animality plays to sustain a thinking of sovereignty that is inadequate in itself to describe the political (what he describes as a necessary "element of inventive and passionate hallucination" (BSi 81)). Yet why, in Derrida's view, do animals return to describe human political life? And what does this tell us about the role that "the animal" plays to inform a historically dominant understanding of human beings more generally? If, as Derrida claims, animals are an essential resource that political thought draws from, this means that they are not one category of metaphor among others. Rather, their indispensability betrays a limitation within political philosophy itself, one that emerges from a common limitation within Western thought regarding "the human": animals are routinely used to supplement what *should* be foreign to human life, whether this be the undeniable savagery of human life, but as importantly the role played by "the natural," "the technical," and "the mechanical" animal to describe political existence. It is precisely for this reason that "the animal," like "writing," is a *pharmakon*–it both supports and threatens the properly human. Derrida explores this theme by interpreting the writings of several philosophers and writers.[15] Returning to our main discussion, I will investigate why this tendency to secure a present, sovereign vision of "the human" over "the animal" dominates Western thought on Derrida's view.

§ 3.3 – *Autobiography* and the Recalcitrant Animal

I have argued that "the human" is generated through the sacrifice of "animal" life. As we also saw, human/animal difference is untenable for an essential reason: life carries on as survival. As such, philosophers can affirm and reaffirm humans/animal difference only on account of features traditionally thought to be foreign to human life. This complicates the sovereign, sacrificial passion for the animal that we examined in the last section. Specifically, it recasts the drive to secure a present vision of human subjective life as unfulfillable and tragic–in which, to use Derrida terminology, "I" am being "pursued" by "the animal" at the very moment that "I" pursue it. When philosophers speculate about human life (or about "animal" life against which it is so often opposed) they do so through repetition and spacing, which effaces the image of "the human" that they attempt to sustain. Writing, philosophical or otherwise, takes place through the same conditions that allow life to carry on. Derrida therefore does not read those writings that he treats in his later work as comprehensive, clear expressions of subjective thoughts, but as strained and very often contradictory efforts to establish a unified, metaphysical vision of human life. In "Nietzsche and the Machine," Derrida clarifies this approach to reading philosophical texts, claiming that Nietzsche is not "one with himself":

> The diversity of gestures of thought and writing, the contradictory mobility (without possible synthesis or sublation) of the analytical incursions, the diagnoses, excesses, intuitions, the theater and music of the poetic-philosophical forms, the more-than-tragic play with masks and proper names–these 'aspects' of Nietzsche's work have always appeared to me to defy, from the very beginning to the point of making them look somewhat derisory, all the 'surveys' and accounts of Nietzsche (N 216).

There are, Derrida goes on, "several voices" in Nietzsche's works. These voices are irreducible to one another, and will perhaps interminably continue to generate future readings as long as he is read. Yet as Derrida continues, whereas Nietzsche was perhaps less concerned with the overall consistency of his "philosophy" than certain others thinkers, and while he was more willing to

intensify the "play" of thought in his work, this irreducible plurality marks every thinker whose writings Derrida deconstructs. As Derrida writes: "What have just said about Nietzsche, I would also say about Plato, Hegel, Husserl, Freud, Blanchot, and so on. My writing on them remains fragmentary, oblique, elliptical, open–I hope–to surprise and to the return of other voices" (N 216-217). To be sure, the essential incompleteness of philosophical texts is not something that can be corrected; it is rather the result of how "life," and so any act of writing, works.

For this reason, Derrida discusses human/animal difference in connection to autobiography in his later works on animality, though this theme also features prominently in *Memoires for Paul de Man* and "To Speculate–on 'Freud.'" Derrida is not, or is not simply, concerned with autobiography as a literary genre. The "autobiographical animal" rather expresses the conditions that allow the "I" to testify about itself, be it in the form of "personal" testimony (such as a traditional autobiography), but more importantly for this discussion, when we testify about our own humanness. As always, the etymology of this term is important: "auto" derives from the Greek *autos* ("self," "same"), while biography derives from the Greek *bios* ("life") and *graphia* ("to write"). As was also the case when we discussed "auto-affection" in chapter 1, Derrida's concern with autobiography has to do with the presumptive "I" that can testify about and recount itself: "All autobiography presents itself as a testimony: I say or write what I am, saw, see, feel, hear, touch, think" (AT 77). Understood in this sense, the "I" of autobiography presupposes a particular conception of life as self-presence, where the

> "I" shows itself, it speaks of itself and of itself as living, living in the present, in the living present, in the moment in which "I" is said. … The auto-bio-graphical derives from the fact that the simple instance of the "I" or of the autos can be posed as such only to the extent that it is a sign of life, of life in presence" (AT 56).

Yet as is implied by the connection between life and writing implied by the term "bio-graphy," Derrida is once again concerned with how life only emerges through writing–i.e., as survival. As

Derrida writes in "Otobiographies," "the graphical must … be working between the biological and biographical" (EO 5).

This characterization of philosophical writing as autobiography therefore compromises the existence of an enduring "I" capable of giving an account of itself. If the possibility of any "self-relation" happens through iterable marks, then at no moment can I access a prior moment of self-presence. Rather, "I" relate to "myself" only through traces that never emerge in a fully constituted temporal present. Derrida thus writes that "I am" only by following or pursuing "myself": "I am (following) someone else, I am followed by someone else, I pursue a desire or a project, I hunt and chase myself at the same time, I do, me" (AT 69). This partially accounts for why Derrida describes "human beings" as "autobiographical animals": by this, he is not simply saying that humans are animals. As he makes clear, animality (or what non-human creatures have been made to represent) is involved in every autobiographical or testimonial experience, in a way that upsets living presence and gives rise to a vision of experience as the ceaseless, non-present movement of differance. As he writes in *The Animal That Therefore I Am*, the claim that "I am" an "animal" does not produce an "immobile representation of a self-portrait," but gives rise to a vision of life that "rac[es] breathless after a round of traces" (AT 78). Derrida thus describes the various works that he treats in his later writings as autobiographical–as efforts to posit a self-present conception of what "we" uniquely are–while also undermining the integrity of "autobiography" as I have just described it. In light of survival, autobiography is, in a sense, a fictional performance–what Derrida calls a "self-engendering act"–where the self is presented to itself in a way that avoids the full implications of the role that iterability plays in the possibility of any self-relation. As we saw toward the end of the last chapter, Derrida reinterprets the "I" as a passion to assert a self-identical and sovereign self. Yet because iterability is always involved in any pronouncement of the "I,"

such a self never appears. As such, this sovereign conception of the self can only be relatively stabilized by externalizing those features that "animals" are made to embody.

Hence, the "autobiographical animal" expresses what I have described as that *bête*, unfulfillable, ultimately tragic passion to assert the living present, one that is similarly at work whenever "the human" is posited as a unique and authentically responsive being: like "the self," "the human," as it has been affirmed through the history of philosophy, is not a self-evident or simple concept. But neither is it a performance that is *simply* driven by a passion to dominate "the animal." This passion is equally one of flight and dissimulation, one that strives to avoid or conceal the conditions that make human life possible. To paraphrase what he says in an interview with Jean-Luc Nancy, "the human" is never stable, but is ceaselessly stabilizing itself against "the animal" that it posits as its other.

As such, "the animal," like "writing," poses a ceaseless threat to the metaphysical vision of human "life," where "I" am continuously dissimulating myself *from* the animal who "I am" and who always betrays the fragility of the living present that I am trying to assert. This explains why Derrida interprets the "animal" and its problematic connection to "man" through the French *je suis*, which he reads both as the declaration of one's self (*je suis* is normally translated "I am"), but that can also be understood as "I follow." This is so because *suis* is the first-person singular present indicative of both the verbs *etre* ("being," "to be") and *suivre* (which can be translated either as "to follow," but more disconcertingly as "to pursue" and even "to hunt"). For Derrida, the connotation of "being after" that *je suis* can signify proves important in his treatment of the self–more precisely, the "self" that proclaims itself, that says *je suis* or "I am": "everything in what I am about to say will lead back to the question of what 'to follow' or 'to pursue' means, as well as 'to be after,' back to the question of what I do when 'I am' or 'I follow,' when I say 'Je suis,'"

(AT 3). Indeed, later in the text, Derrida alerts the reader to a contradiction that lies within the notion of *suis* or "self," which carries within it, *at once*, the idea of the presence or unity of the self, but also the notion of the pursuit:

> *Qui suis-je?* or *Que suis-je?* Who or what am I (following)? Henceforth it is disturbed by an ambiguity that remains, within it, untranslatable, in what remains small, the small, the small word falling in the middle of this three-word interrogative proposition, namely, the little homonym suis, which, in the first person of the indicative conjugates more than one verb— *etre*, to be, and *suivre*, to follow: *Qui suis-je?* "Who is it that I am (following)?" (AT 64).

If, as I have maintained, the living present is never finally secured, then this recasts the attempt to assert it as an endless pursuit, as though we were donkeys being baited by a carrot hanging from a stick. Yet equally, this drive is motivated by a flight from what animals represent. To follow and to be pursued is, for Derrida, the question of the animal: the drive to posit a self-present vision of the human self is not *simply* a sovereign, sacrificial, violent drive to subjugate non-human life to the *animot*, but is equally a response to the threat that "the animal" ceaselessly poses. "The human" as it is expressed in the history of philosophy is therefore as much a matter of one hunting "the animal" as it is the animal hunting "the human," an ambiguity that Derrida captures through the word "suis": the question "who am I (following)" ("qui suis-je"), expresses this double meaning of the pursuit in the very way that the "human self" is formed and unstably maintained.

Hence, the role that the "animal" plays in generating a metaphysical imagining of "the human" self is two-fold: on the one hand, the "animot" is something that is ceaselessly reaffirmed. On the other hand, inasmuch as human/animal difference is untenable and deconstructible, the animal ceaselessly haunts and pursues us–is always *there* in a way that upsets metaphysics even while we ceaselessly attempt to deny this. Like writing, automaticity, and absence to which this figure has traditionally been linked, the "animot" always appears in dynamic and precarious ways

in philosophical texts, where we "flee" from the animal (i.e., deny, avoid, or dissimulate ourselves from this figure), at the same time that we endeavor to reduce it. However, when we in some moments "break through" our assumptions about the animal, we encounter what Derrida describes as the "animal abyss, the vertigo of the beast" (AT 66)–that is, a vision of life that upsets the logic of presence. For this reason, Derrida characterizes "the animal" as an enigma that upsets the metaphysical understanding of "life" that we ordinarily have: "every animal, as distinct from l'animot, is essentially fantastic, phantasmatic, fabulous, of a fable that speaks to us and speaks to us of ourselves" (AT 66). As I will now show, it is precisely this drama that Derrida recounts in his famous encounter with his pet cat in the opening pages of *The Animal That Therefore I Am*, a theme that we will return to in chapters 4 and 5 when we discuss Derrida's ethics in connection to Levinas and animality.

§ 3.3.1 – Derrida's Cat and Survival

I have argued that Derrida's claim that the animal "pursues" us (that it haunts us even while we ceaselessly endeavor to dominate and master it) is not to be understood as a "back-and-forth." Rather, the animal pursues us at the moment when we pursue it, ceaselessly upsetting the desire to reduce it to absolute mechanicity. This dynamic is dramatized in perhaps the most famous passage in *The Animal That Therefore I Am*, where Derrida engages in a long meditation on nudity and shame in connection with his cat. "Shame" is David Will's translation of *pudeur*, which is most often associated with sexual modesty. It is clear that Derrida uses "pudeur" in this way, at least at first. Derrida describes how his initial, reflexive response to his cat seeing him frontally naked is to conceal his penis: "I have trouble repressing a reflex of shame. Trouble keeping silent within me a protest against the indecency. Against the impropriety that can come of finding oneself naked, one's sex exposed, stark naked before a cat that looks at you" (AT 3). This sense of shame,

furthermore, is thought to be a uniquely human feeling: humans are the only creatures who clothe themselves out of sexual modesty. This connects to the point discussed above concerning human bêtise: the animal is thought not to authentically live its nakedness, just as it does not genuinely apprehend itself. To be sure, there is a host of documented cases where animals conceal themselves for a variety of reasons.[16] Yet humans are apparently unique in that the absence of clothing is a cause for shame: "Man would be the only one to have invented a garment to cover his sex. He would be a man only to the extent that he was able to be naked, that is to say, to be ashamed, to know himself to be ashamed because he is no longer naked" (AT 5).

Why is this important? For Derrida, there is a paradox in the concept of nudity, one that he will subtly generalize as a feature that structures how "human beings," and certainly humans as they figure in philosophy, relate to non-human living creatures. Derrida phrases this paradox thus:

> Man could never be naked any more because he has the sense of nakedness, that is to say, of modesty or shame. The animal would be in non-nudity because it is nude, and man in nudity to the extent that he is no longer nude. There we encounter a difference, a time or contretemps between two nudities without nudity (AT 5).

By this, Derrida means that only humans *experience* their nudity as something to be concealed. By contrast, the animal has no drive to conceal its naked body because it has no concept of nudity *as such*. This is not simply a comment on "actual" human nudity. Nor is it simply an epiphanic moment, where Derrida suddenly recognizes that his cat is, in some inscrutable sense, a "singularity" or "singular being." Though this is also true, it is so in a sense that we will complicate in chapter 4.[17] As Derrida writes: "If I say 'it is a real cat' that sees me naked, this is in order to mark its unsubstitutable singularity. When it responds in its name (whatever 'respond' means, and that will be our question), it doesn't do so as the exemplar of a species called 'cat,' even less so of an 'animal' genus or kingdom" (AT 9). Yet as Derrida develops this scene, he expresses the insights that I have been developing concerning how "the animal" figures in the unstable

production of "the human": far from being a self-evident "concept," "the human" is originarily a performance of dissimulation in response to "the animal" who in some sense "sees" me. One's (human) feeling of nudity is indistinguishable from a desire to be concealed, and no one who does not at once feel this shame is truly naked (as, for example, when one is alone in their bathtub or shower). The *experience* of nudity can therefore be understood as that initial moment that prompts "the human" to be posited, which is a response not to "the animal," but to the abyssal, unsettling question of "life." Considered in this way, "nudity" is indistinguishable from the desire to take flight or dissemble, which connects to a more general theoretical point that Derrida often makes: one cannot present "the self" but through substitution and dissimilation. This is the case not only with respect to "animals," but to an unstable network of terms to which it is connected: automaticity, the non-apprehension of being, instinct, and so on. Yet the connection between shame and animality in this context raises a further point that will lead back to the double meaning of *je suis* that I develop above: what prompts Derrida's shame as he exits the shower is precisely the affinity that holds between himself and other animals. Without clothing, Derrida's body is exposed to the other's gaze, and he immediately feels the impropriety of exposing his "animality"– of betraying an affinity between himself and "the animal." This affinity that we humans deny between ourselves and non-human animals (and this is, we have seen, the principal theme of the entire work: the denial of and the failure to deny "the animal" that we are) is crystalized in this encounter between Derrida and his cat, where Derrida feels "[a]shamed of being as naked as a beast" (AT 4). Yet paradoxically, he is ashamed before a creature who has no concept of nakedness to begin with.

Hence, when Derrida claims that nudity (or the experience of nudity) is in some sense distinctively human (though can we be sure that this is the case?), he means that "the human" is

originally motivated by a reflexive sense of propriety to conceal what we nevertheless are. This first sense of shame is therefore precisely that unfulfillable and tragic passion to escape the animal who nevertheless always pursues us. Rather than freely and without reservation expose his body to the other's gaze, this encounter incites Derrida to appear otherwise. The animal other therefore provokes this drive to supplement "the self," which is the minimal condition for the metaphysical "self" to appear at all: "Rather than chasing it away, chasing the cat away, I am in a hurry, yes, in a hurry to have it appear otherwise. I hasten to cover the obscenity of the event, in short, to cover myself" (AT 10). My point is not simply that Derrida is disturbed by the other, but that one "is" only inasmuch as it feels this sense of shame before it. This can therefore be read as a general deconstructive claim about the possibility of the self-present "self," which exists only in being opposed to that which is nevertheless constitutive for it to exist. However, the other in this scene is a cat, and so Derrida is highlighting the role that "the animal" *in particular* plays to maintain the living presence in terms of which human beings are understood. This "shame," then, can be read as that originary flight from "the animal" discussed above, a flight from that radically finite vision of "life" that Derrida contends is never successfully philosophically refuted, but only avoided or denied. Revealingly, Derrida describes this experience of shame as "animalseance": "the single, incomparable and original experience of the impropriety that would come from appearing in truth naked, in front of the insistent gaze of the animal, a benevolent or pitiless gaze, surprised or cognizant" (AT 4). The significance of "animalseance" should be stressed: while "seance" very often connotes a "meeting" or a "session" in French, Derrida also captures the idea of a spiritual seance, a meeting with a ghost who does not appear as such. He thus captures the idea of an originary experience of impropriety and shame before the animal, where I recognize the

animal not as an "animot," but as an enigmatic, "abyssal" figure of "life" that motivates me to conceal myself.

Yet in a second moment of shame, Derrida describes feeling ashamed about feeling shame for being naked before this creature who, so it is thought, has no concept or sense of nudity–what he calls a "reflected shame, the mirror of a shame ashamed of itself" (AT 4). Derrida recognizes that this second moment is "specular, unjustifiable, and unavowable" (AT 4)–is ultimately premised on an unfounded and speculative metaphysical understanding of this creature. This is not to say that Derrida now, in an epiphanic moment, regards his cat as a being who understands "nudity," nor does he now understand it to be "perspectival" or "conscious." Indeed, survival undermines the view that a threshold between the "conscious" and the "non-conscious" exists. Derrida rather expresses that "the human" *is* only as this response to the animal, who prompts us to be aware of our nudity and who compels us to clothe ourselves. Emphatically, Derrida does not claim that he is now suddenly capable of receiving individual animals "anew" in ways that somehow exceed metaphysics. In a seldom referenced passage from "But as for me, who am I following," Derrida mentions a third moment of shame, prompted by our being caught in a cycle of shame that seems presently inescapable. This is a

> shame without apparent fault, the shame of being ashamed of shame, ad infinitum, the potential fault that consists in being ashamed of a fault about which I'll never know whether it was one. I am ashamed of almost always tending toward a gesture of shame when appearing naked before what one calls an animal" (AT 57).

This suggests that the conceptuality in terms of which non-human creatures are overtly understood cannot simply be "thrown off," and certainly not spontaneously. Derrida later refers to this third moment of shame in terms of paralysis: the desire to flee or to clothe oneself are gestures that we are, for the most part, compelled to make. More generally, the problematic concept of "the animal," which sustains the (human) self, is presently intractable. For this reason, Derrida writes of being

"paralyzed by a movement of shame, of embarrassment and of modesty: the desire to go and get dressed as quickly as possible, even to turn my back so that such a cat doesn't see me naked" (AT 58).

Yet while the "animot" remains dominant, Derrida's description of this scene raises a point that I believe is crucial for understanding his understanding of animality: "the animot" is a secondary response to an even earlier event. The second moment of shame follows the initial sense of impropriety and dissimulation. This is important: if we were absolutely reduced to conceptualizing non-human creatures as "animals" defined metaphysically, the first moment of shame clearly never would have occurred. One way that this scene is significant is therefore that it relates the foundational, original instability of the "animot" despite its apparent hegemony. Not only is the metaphysical conception of animality tenuous and deconstructable. As importantly, it is a reaction to this primary moment of dissimulation. This upsets the self-assured way that we believe we understand non-human life. For Derrida, the first moment of shame is originary, a response to an enigmatic, threatening vision of life as survival. "The human," conditioned as it is through the logic of presence, is therefore originarily a response not to "the animal," but to a threat that non-human life poses, which motivates the sacrificial drive to reduce non-human life to the "animot." In other words, one's radical finitude is revealed in this encounter.

Hence, the significance of this passage is not that Derrida's cat is suddenly revealed to be a singular though inscrutable life-form. While this is in some sense true, this reading carries with it an understanding of "life" that Derrida's work consistently undermines. The importance is rather that "the human" is originally a response to a threat posed by a disturbing and bewildering vision of life. Derrida therefore describes his cat as a "visionary or extra-lucid blind one" (AT 4), an other who is "wholly other" and whose gaze "remains a bottomlessness, at the same time innocent and

cruel perhaps, perhaps sensitive and impassive, good and bad, uninterpretable, unreadable, undecidable, abyssal and secret" (AT 12). The cat is not only very different from Derrida, but expresses the threatening enigma of "life" which, for Derrida, motivates metaphysics. In this sense, one's encounter with the animal's gaze is, Derrida writes, like "following the apocalypse": "in these moments of nakedness, as regards the animal, everything can happen to me, I am like a child ready for the apocalypse, *I am (following) the apocalypse itself*, that is to say, the ultimate and first event of the end, the unveiling and the verdict. I am (following) it, the apocalypse" (AT 12). While this passage is fairly abstract, it proceeds from the reading I have offered: the longstanding metaphysical conceptuality in term of which "animal" and "human" life is not only deconstructable, but is itself only motivated by this passion to conceal what one "is." Hence, human/animal difference is a response to an originary disturbance that motivates it to be drawn, like an apocalypse that always precedes and will forever disturb "the animal" and "the human" alike.

Conclusion

I have argued that Derrida's concern with "the animal" stems from the complex and unstable role this figure plays in maintaining a metaphysical vision of human life as living presence. I have argued furthermore that the living present is only ever reaffirmed in ways that prove deconstructible. It follows that whereas "the animal" has been instrumental in buttressing a vision of the living present proper to human life (in contrast to humans, animal life is essentially "calculable," "reactional," "instinctual," and "programmed") "the animal" has always been an unstable notion. For Derrida, the ceaseless reaffirmation of human/animal difference through the history of philosophy is motivated by a passion to preserve the living present by externalizing those features without which human experiential life could not carry on–mechanicity, absence,

passivity, and death. “The animal” plays an essential, though involuted and contradictory, role in maintaining this understanding of human life. By deconstructing this liminal and uncertain figure, Derrida shows that life, human or otherwise, carries on as survival. Yet as we will explore in the remaining chapters, this fact does not, *of itself*, have positive or negative consequences regarding how some or all non-human beings should be regarded and treated.

Derrida’s reasons for deconstructing human/animal difference is therefore not simply to shudder the human/animal divide. His analyses certainly have this effect, in particular through his questioning of the supposed purity of uniquely “human” characteristic.[18] Yet Derrida’s contention is not that “humans” are more “animalistic” than has previously been thought. Rather, Derrida’s deconstruction of human/animal difference gives way to a vision of life as the movement of differance itself.

Chapter 4 – Derrida, Levinas, and Animal Ethics

As I have argued, "the animal" is one of multiple themes that unstably maintains a vision of subjective life as living presence. On this view, experience happens to a self-present, temporally unified, "living" agent. In chapter 1, I showed how the living present is deconstructable. In chapter 2, I outlined how its deconstruction leads to a transformed understanding of life as survival, where those features that are apparently extrinsic to experience are in fact essential for it to carry on, though in a way that compels us to reconsider longstanding metaphysical assumptions about human subjectivity. In chapter 3, I showed how "the animal" is both essential for maintaining this vision of human subjectivity even while it perennially undermines it. "The human," I claimed, is not a self-evident concept, but is rather what I termed a sacrificial though tragic performance. The dominant philosophical understanding of what we uniquely are sustains itself not simply against other creatures, but against a particular, metaphysical imagining of non-human life–what Derrida terms the "animot"–who are made to embody those same features that Derrida ascribes to writing: non-presence, automaticity, reactivity, and so on. Yet whereas "the animal" is essential for maintaining human presence ("the human" exists only in relation to "the animot"), it also undermines it. For this reason, "the animal," like writing, is a *pharmakon*.

Yet do the conclusions that Derrida arrives at regarding the distinction between human and non-human life generate any ethical conclusions? For Derrida and many of his followers, the exteriorization of non-human creatures in large part accounts for a general lack of empathy towards them, and weakens the possibility of our developing concerned, compassionate relationships with them. If this is the case, then it seems that normative approaches to non-human ethics, for example those developed by Gary Francione, Tom Regan, and Peter Singer, are inadequate for promoting increased concern and better treatment for non-human life. After all, and as Derrida himself notes, the norms and criteria at work in these approaches were designed with humans alone in mind.

Many thinkers who follow Derrida's work have therefore attempted to develop more inclusive, non-normative visions of ethics. In particular, they have developed interpretations of Derrida's animal writings that emphasize our pre-subjective responsiveness to non-human life. Such readings contend that Derrida's thinking about animality agrees with Emmanuel Levinas' pre-ontological ethics in important respects: while Derrida corrects Levinas' untenable anthropocentrism, he nevertheless preserves the core of his ethical message. As Kelly Oliver writes: "While Levinasian philosophy begins with an ethical command inaugurated in our relationships with others and thereby opens philosophy to the vulnerability and suffering of others, as Derrida shows, it does not open philosophy to the animal other" (Oliver 41). Yet the view that Derrida's philosophy promotes a broadly Levinasian vision of non-human ethics ignores the considerable challenges that survival poses to Levinas' thought, and indeed to "ethics" generally. While I believe that we should regard and treat others (and in particular non-human others) with more sensitivity and respect, I cannot maintain this position in a way that is fully consistent with my reading of Derrida's work. Whereas deconstruction generates unforeseen insights about what life is, it also undermines the security of any ethical conclusions that it might help to generate. As I will argue, this conclusion is avoided by some scholars by assuming that there is a primary "ethics" that precedes and grounds any normative ethical framework. Yet while this is the case for Levinas, it is emphatically not so for Derrida.

I defend this position by examining a number of thinkers influenced by Derrida's work in the field of animal studies. Animal studies is, as Linda Kaloff writes, "an interdisciplinary scholarly endeavor to understand the relationship humans have with other animals" (Kaloff 1)– one that includes a variety of disciplines including anthropology, biology, philosophy, and even film studies. Derrida's work has been influential among a number of this discipline's most

prominent thinkers–for example, Donna Haraway, Kelly Oliver, Cary Wolfe, Matthew Calarco, Diane Davis, Gerald Bruns, among others–for whom Derrida is a "forefather of a dramatically renovated version of animal studies, extending across the disciplines and linked to the theoretical project of 'posthumanism'" (Fraiman 91). While Derrida plays a consequential role in this discipline, this is in large part owing to a particular, Levinasian reading of his work. By focusing on Levinas' philosophy, I will demonstrate that while his anthropocentrism is indeed untenable and deconstructable, the reasons for its being so also undermines the integrity of his ethics. Despite that Derrida's animal writings (in particular *The Animal that Therefore I Am*) seem to support an ethics that extends beyond the human, survival problematizes *both* the "singular" status of living creatures (human and non-human), as well as the view that others can ever be encountered on the level of transcendence. These insights pose serious problems for thinkers who rely on Derrida to develop an ethics of non-human life. Yet before demonstrating why Derrida in many ways upsets a prominent, ethical reading of Levinas' work, we must first explore how scholars have used Derrida to develop alternative approaches to non-human ethics, and how these differ from broadly normative approaches to animal ethics.

§ 4.1 – Derrida, Animal Studies, and Normative Ethics

Thinkers influenced by Derrida's work in animal studies have developed approaches to animal ethics that are each considerably different from criteria-based approaches propounded by philosophers in the Anglo-American tradition, according to which there are minimal conditions for who or what is worthy of moral concern. This tradition generally defends the ethical status of non-human life by using either or a combination of two approaches drawn from a wider ethical movement. On the one hand, for Tom Regan, Gary Francione, and Gary Steiner, the ethical standing of some animals (specifically, those who possess the characteristics of what Regan terms

a "moral patient") is defended by claiming that if a creature is, to use Regan's term, the "subject-of-a-life" and sufficiently cognitively complex that it is concerned with its own welfare, then that creature has moral worth and so deserves to be treated with equal consideration. Stephen Bostock clearly states this position: "individual animals claim our respect because they can feel, suffer pain, and experience pleasure, and because, in short, it matters to them how they are treated" (Bostock 37). Underpinning this claim is the view that many of the differences that separate non-humans from humans are either empirically incorrect, overstated, or incidental for determining a creature's moral status. On this latter view, contemporary and historical approaches that deny to non-human creatures moral worth because of a lack or paucity of distinctively human traits (such as language, reason, or self-awareness) are misguided. In light of these creatures' claim to equal moral consideration, these authors argue that some or all non-human creatures are deserving of certain rights, the most important of which is the entitlement not to be harmed. It should be acknowledged that the manner by which "rights" is understood varies considerably among these authors.[19] Despite such differences, what these thinkers share in common is the claim that animals have equal moral rights as humans in virtue of certain morally salient features shared by both.

The second approach for defending the ethical status of non-human life argues from a utilitarianism perspective. Among the most prominent proponents of this view are Peter Singer, Alastair Norcross, and Gary Varner. While considerable differences distinguish this utilitarian approach from most rights-based animal ethical views–differences that essentially mirror the wider debate between utilitarianism and deontology–the arguments in favour of extending to non-human creatures ethical worth are nevertheless similar inasmuch as they both look to criteria to determine who or what is worthy of ethical respect. In his *Animal Liberation*, Singer suggests that the differences that exist between different categories of living beings, such as between women and

men, black and white people, and between different species, are not ethically significant, and should not prevent us from assigning to any of these groups the right to equal concern. While the different capacities and abilities of each group might restrict their eligibility for certain rights (for example, it is difficult to conceive how a man might have a right to abortion, or how a pig possesses a right to vote), each group nevertheless has the right to "equal consideration"–that is, to equal ethical respect and concern.[20] Hence, while real differences exist between different classes of living creatures, no capacity possessed by one or some of them should be regarded as the criterion for its eligibility as a being to be ethically respected. Indeed, equality demands that we efface any such criterion: "It is an implication of this principle of equality that our concern for others ought not to depend on what they are like, or what abilities they possess" (*Liberation* 4). For Singer, and like Bentham, "suffering" is an appropriate criterion for assessing moral worth, as it represents the standard for whether a being is capable of experience to begin with. Accordingly, "suffering" is the only defensible criterion for whether a creature should be eligible for ethical concern because it represents what he terms the "limit of sentience," that is, the absolute boundary for whether a being can be said to "experience" at all: "The capacity for suffering and enjoyment is a prerequisite for having interests at all, a condition that must be satisfied before we can speak of interests in a meaningful way. ... The capacity for suffering and enjoyment is ... not only necessary, but also sufficient for us to say that a being has interests" (*Liberation* 7-8).

Like Regan et al., the utilitarian strategy for justifying extending ethical rights to non-human creatures consists in isolating one or more characteristics that humans and non-humans share alike, and arguing that such characteristics are necessary and sufficient for a creature to be considered ethically important. What is more, the majority of critics who deny that animals possess any or more than incidental moral worth do not question the logical validity of this claim–do not,

in other words, question whether the shared possession of certain relevant characteristics (such as reason, the capacity to suffer, and so forth) would render a creature as morally significant as a human being. They have rather questioned the criteria according to which animal ethicists have extended to non-human animals the right to equal concern. More exactly, the approach for criticizing animal ethics has in large part consisted in questioning either whether non-human animals possess the features that animal ethicists claim they do; whether they possess them to a sufficient degree; or whether such features are the appropriate criteria to render a creature worthy of ethical concern.[21]

Hence, despite the obvious differences that separate the utilitarian and rights-based approaches, the basic claim that what makes a creature morally respectable are features that humans and non-human creatures share is not only common to both approaches, but is furthermore shared by most of the critics of animal ethics. For Regan et al., it is by isolating those features that certain creatures share in common that justifies endowing non-human creatures with "rights" commensurate with human beings. As Regan writes in *Animal Rights, Human Wrongs*: "Moral rights breathe equality. They are the same for all who have them, differ though we do in many ways. This explains why no human being can justifiably be denied rights for arbitrary, prejudicial, or morally irrelevant reasons" (Regan 27). Similarly, for Singer, it is only by first identifying those morally relevant features that he judges non-human and human creatures share in common that we can justify including them as part of the general utilitarian calculation. Furthermore, critics of animal ethics do not criticize the validity of this view, but question the appropriateness of the criteria, in such a way that were it the case that any non-human creature could suffer (or could suffer in as rich a way as a human being, or, if suffering turns out to be an incorrect criterion for

evaluating whether a creatures deserves ethical respect, possess some other feature that is the correct such criterion) then the equal ethical status of animals would have to be conceded.[22]

At first sight, Derrida's writings about animality would seem to support many of the claims made by these rights-based theorists. If we have reason to believe that some or all animals possess, in some sense or to some degree, morally salient features that we previously believed were exclusively human, or if we human beings do not possess those same features to the extent or in the same way as has been traditionally believed, then we should, for reasons of consistency, think of animal as "ethically valuable." As we have already noted, one common insight held by philosophers of the rights-based approach is, as Gary Francione writes, that it is inappropriate to use "a morally irrelevant criterion … species membership–to determine membership in the moral community ... speciesism is no more logically or morally defensible than is any other form of prejudice against the other or bias in favor of those who are like the self" (Francione 17). If what makes a creature ethically valuable is that it possesses one or some combination of features, and if these features are not exclusively humans, then it would seem that Derrida's writings are generally aligned with the project of increasing our ethical commitment towards animals.

However, there are a large number of animal studies thinkers who argue that a criteria-based approach is inappropriate for considering other creatures ethically to begin with. They argue that the traditional, rights-based approach for deriving normatively-based ethical commitments towards other creatures is misguided, and betrays a humanist bias wholly unsuitable when thinking about non-human life. As Kelly Oliver argues: "ethics must go beyond rights" (Oliver 37). The injunction to develop an alternative model given the inadequacies of "humanist" ethics is summarized nicely in Cary Wolfe's "Learning from Temple Grandin":

> A fundamental problem with the liberal humanist model ... is not so much what it wants, as the price it pays for what it wants: that in the very attempt to recognize the unique

> difference and specific ethical value of the other, it reinstates the very normative model of subjectivity that it insists is the problem in the first place (Wolfe 98).

The logic of this charge runs as follows: the identity of "the human" has emerged through a complex history in which "the animal" figures prominently. More exactly, "the animal" has served as that category against which "the human" is defined, in such a way that those features considered uniquely human could only have emerged by depriving those same features to non-human "animals." For this reason, not only has "the animal" acquired meaning on the basis of this relationship, but it has been defined negatively as a category whose members lack those features considered properly and uniquely human. Included among those many features broadly considered "human" is a host of ethical and legal concepts whose development could only have emerged through this hostile relationship to the non-human world. As Claire Colebrook summarizes, "'the human' is an effect of processes that cannot be contained within the human, just as 'the animal' is a seeming identity that is contaminated by all the potentialities that would safeguard the sanctity of the human" (Colebrook 70). If this is the case, then it seems inconsistent to endow animals with features the very existence of which derives from a violent, sacrificial relationship with animal life. To do so would not only run the risk of wrongly attributing to animals features that they do not possess or do not possess completely or to a sufficient extent. It would also fail to take seriously the challenge that Derrida's philosophy poses to the integrity of these features. As I have argued, the qualities traditionally associated with human beings on account of which we are thought to be rights-bearing agents is not only misleading, but untenable and deconstructible.

This anti-humanist critique can be attributed to Derrida himself. In *For What Tomorrow…,* Derrida claims:

> It is too often the case—and I believe this is a fault or a weakness–that a certain concept of the juridical, that of human rights, is reproduced or extended to animals. This leads to naive positions that one can sympathize with but that are untenable. A certain concept of the

> human subject, of post-Cartesian human subjectivity, is for the moment at the foundation of the concept of human rights—for which I have the greatest respect but which, as the product of a history and of a complex set of performatives, must be relentlessly analyzed, reelaborated, developed, and enriched (historicity and perfectibility are in fact essential to it) (FT 65).

This criticism seems at least partially correct: inasmuch as the notion of a "right" was developed with a particular notion of the human subject in mind, and should we wish to respect creatures in ways that correspond to their individual or conspecific "needs," "attitudes," "desires," etc., (I put these nouns in quotation marks to highlight the obvious danger of anthropocentric attribution) we might need to either amend our existing models for doing ethics, or revolutionize existing ethical models should they prove incapable of accommodating non-human creatures. Yet this is an extremely difficult task, as it is uncertain how we can derive an alternative ethics that excludes humanist biases. Should we agree with the view that the rights approach betrays a humanist bias, the theoretical task, it seems, should be to develop an ethics that is at once restrictive (i.e. applies to "lives" but not to discarded tissue paper or nylon socks) but that is not reductive (i.e. does not diminish or efface the uniqueness of individual creatures, but rather seeks to accommodate those differences).

Yet thinkers in animal studies who are influenced by Derrida's later work contend that the deconstruction of human/animal difference offers a compelling critique not only of the rights approach to animal ethics, but of the view that ethics is originarily a matter of theory. Such a critique is, at best, implicit in Derrida's writings: to my knowledge, nowhere does he engage explicitly with the thinkers of the rights approach mentioned above, with the exception of Bentham.[23] However, the view that we can extract a radically inclusive ethics from deconstruction is, I argue, a misreading of Derrida's work. Yet before I can make this argument, we must explore why, specifically, he is read in this way. To answer this question, I will return to discuss the theme

of Derrida's cat, which, more than any other passage in Derrida's work, has been read as inaugurating a novel vision for how we can relate to non-human others.

§ 4.1.2 – Derrida and Animal Studies

In chapter 3, I offered a novel reading of the opening pages of *The Animal That Therefore I Am.* This, I argued, is in large part a dramatization of the passion to reduce animal life to the *animot*, which is connected to the experience of nudity and shame. When Derrida describes himself standing "naked, my sex exposed, stark naked before a cat that looks at me without moving" (AT 8), this is not simply an epiphanic moment where he reconceives his cat "anew." This passage rather conveys the emergence of "the human" itself, understood as an act of flight and dissimulation from this enigmatic creature. While the logic of presence is "sacrificial," reducing non-human life to the level of pure automaticity, such a sacrifice is motivated by the threat that non-human life–in this case, Derrida's cat–poses to him. Yet the first fifteen pages of this work has also been widely interpreted as having enormous ethical value, in particular the following passage:

> [M]y cat, the cat that looks at me in my bedroom or bathroom, this cat that is perhaps not 'my cat' or 'my pussycat,' does not appear here to represent, like an ambassador, the immense symbolic responsibility with which our culture has always charged the feline race, from La Fontaine to Tieck (author of ''Puss in Boots''), from Baudelaire to Rilke, Buber, and many others. If I say 'it is a real cat' that sees me naked, this is in order to mark its unsubstitutable singularity. When it responds in its name (whatever 'respond' means, and that will be our question), it doesn't do so as the exemplar of a species called 'cat,' even less so of an 'animal' genus or kingdom. It is true that I identify it as a male or female cat. But even before that identification, it comes to me as *this* irreplaceable living being that one day enters my space, into this place where it can encounter me, see me, even see me naked. Nothing can ever rob me of the certainty that what we have here is an existence that refuses to be conceptualized. (AT 9).

This passage is among the most frequently cited passages for writers interested in Derrida's views on animality. Indeed, it has, as Seung-Hoon Jeong remarks, "virtually ignited recent animal studies

in the humanities." (Jeong 142). The suggestion that all living creatures are irreducibly singular, coupled with the claim that there are no *essential* differences among different creatures should perhaps lead us not only to develop a different vision of "life," but to reconsider how we should regard and treat different forms of life.

Derrida's "cat" has generally been understood as relating the experience of an encounter with a non-human creature that exceeds the reductive categories that ordinarily dissimilate the singular nature of individual animals. What marks this encounter, and the reason for why it is apparently profoundly different from the more routine way that we normally experience animals, is that Derrida is confronted by his cat's "gaze"–he encounters it encountering him. This fact is judged significant for the following reason: by being captivated by his cat's gaze, Derrida engages with it in a way that precedes the various discourses that reduce its "absolute" or "irreplaceable" singularity, in such a way that its status as an "absolute other" is revealed. The possibility of developing less objectifying and more complex ways of relating to animals is therefore premised on a belief in every creature's singular status, which can be glimpsed when we encounter animals in a similar way as Derrida apparently does in this passage. In such moments, we transcend the objectifying categories that have traditionally defined animals, such that their complex uniqueness shines through, a "'bottomlessness', an alterity that is finally 'uninterpretable, unreadable, undecidable' by reason alone" (Bump 63).

Many authors have interpreted Derrida in this way. For Gerald L. Bruns, the humanist lens through which we usually view animals is due in large part because "philosophers and poets have traditionally engaged animals dogmatically by way of appellations from above rather than on the basis of ethological evidence that comes from being with animals in an extended systematic way" (Bruns 414). But should we be able to genuinely *encounter* individual animals, we would then be

confronted with an absolutely unique and singular creature, one that exceeds categorization, and perhaps metaphoricity generally: "there is no metaphor in the look of Derrida's cat, no embodiment of sinister felinity. Derrida's cat, like the naked philosopher himself, is a who, not a what" (Bruns 408). This reading is echoed by Diane Davis, who writes that in the moment of this encounter, Derrida's cat becomes an "irreducible singularity," one marked by finitude and vulnerability: "Here, in the face-to-face, Derrida is addressed by another mortal, not a human mortal but an absolutely other sort of mortal, who responds to her name, who responds, that is, to the call of an other" (Davis 2009, 616). And as Michael Naas writes, it is by encountering the animal in this way that Derrida is able to exceed a highly reductive understanding of an "animal" that he has inherited from the philosophical tradition:

> By broaching the question of the animal not by means of 'the animal' in its generality, the animal as a concept, and not even by means of a particular species of animals, but by means of a very real and individual animal—Derrida's household cat, an absolutely singular, unique cat that will have one day surprised him naked with its gaze—Derrida quite literally reorients our philosophical gaze with regard to this question (Naas 25).

Hence, rather than beginning our philosophical and ethical investigations of animality from the theoretically over-determined, anthropocentric tradition that we have inherited, taking the animal's gaze seriously might help us to reorient our understanding of animals in more complicated and differentiated ways.

This popular reading of the "cat encounter" is therefore premised on the view that if only one were able to pierce the prejudicial veil that has dominated philosophy with respect to non-human life, we might glimpse individual animals as unique and incalculably complex–as creatures who defy categorization. This, in turn, might lead to a general re-orientation toward animal life, one marked by "compassion, sympathy, and empathy." This is captured in Jerome Bump's hoped for transition from "biophobia"–what he calls a "superstitious fear of animals" (Bump 58)–to

"biophilia"–defined as "the feeling that we are deeply, instinctively connected to all living beings" (Bump 58))–a vision that he believes Derrida's animal writings has inaugurated: "Ultimately, Derrida focuses on a new experience of compassion that can bring about the political change needed to save our planet" (Bump 57). To the extent that this is possible, there are many impediments that continue to hinder this transition. There is, as we have already noted, the general ossification of the view that human beings are exceptional: as Cary Wolfe notes, "the human being" emerges and comes to understand itself as human by excepting itself from the animal world–indeed from nature in general. In doing so, it loses the world within which it was once immersed. In this sense, nature is, as Antoine Traisnel writes, "born out of man's dissociation from it" (Traisnel 13). This belief in human exceptionalism therefore impedes the hoped-for revaluation of animal life. As several authors have noted, this is exacerbated by the fact that non-human creatures are apparently non-verbal, which effectively makes them mute. More exactly, the privilege we accord to human language causes us to be deaf to non-human creatures–or at least hinders our ability to be receptive to them. As Mick Smith writes:

> [O]ur carnivorous culture privileges the human voice as the paradigm of self-expression, the harbinger of self-consciousness and the "inner-voice" of conscience. Yet the corollary of this privilege is modernity's conscious and unconscious use of certain voices and certain forms of language to deny self-expression to animal Others, thereby ensuring that their sufferings fail to impinge on our thoughts or our values (Smith 56).

The apparent muteness of the animal has arguably only intensified in modern times, owing in no small measure to the mass industrialization of animal slaughter and processing, where few ever encounter how the animals we consume live and die.

While there is no reason to think that becoming increasingly sensitive to non-human creatures might lead to increased compassion on our part, underlying this discourse is the view that non-human animals are absolutely singular, and that our failure to view them as such is due

to an anthropocentric bias that prevents us from hearing them "speak." The animal has, as Christian Diehm writes, a "face [that] is not an analogue of the face of another human; it signifies as the face on its own. It is the immediate presence of the singular need, the singular exposure and weakness, of every other who meets me in the flesh" (Diehm 40). Yet if Derrida's work can be said to promote our becoming more attentive to the "face" of non-human creatures, this is due to a problematic interpretation of his thought, one that reads Derrida's thought as being in line with much of Levinas' philosophy. Quoting Kelly Oliver, by avoiding anthropocentrism, Derrida offers "a new twist to Levinas's nudity in the face-to-face relationship" (Oliver 119). Levinas' revaluation of subjectivity is foundational for justifying the claim that ethics, while not necessarily *heterogenous* to the concerns in the analytic, normative tradition, is best explored primarily in terms of what he describes as "the lived experience of authentic humanity" (*Righteous* 182). In doing so, ethics becomes "no longer a simple moralism of rules which decree what is virtuous. It is the original awakening of an I responsible for the other; the accession of my person to the uniqueness of the I called and elected to responsibility for the other" (*Righteous* 182). This emphasis on the primacy of ethics thought of in terms of phenomenological experience does not, of itself, negate normative ethics (of which the "rights" approach is an example). Nevertheless, it challenges the view that ethics is foundationally normative–i.e., is a matter of an autonomous and rational self who identifies moral rules. Ethics is rather the demand that others place on me by facing me, a demand that I *must respond to*. This idea of the pre-ontological "ethical encounter" is in turn used to varying degrees by the thinkers we have been discussing to justify the belief that animals should be shown compassion and respect: for them, there is a general reluctance to secure for animals heightened ethical compassion in terms of "rights" owing to an apparent "humanist bias" that inheres in that term. For this reason, the appropriate way forward is to dismantle the objectifying categories

through which animals continue to be interpreted. Doing so might allow us to retreat from our blinkered relationship to animals, in such a way that we can develop the kind of pre-normative ethical relationships that emerge when we are struck by the animal's face.

For Levinas and the writers just cited, normative approaches to non-human ethics get the source and inspiration of ethics wrong. Ethics does not derive from any prior justification on the basis of which we then adjudicate the ethical standing of others. As such, the view that we must first justify our feelings of compassion toward them is simply misguided. Indeed, a good case can be made that normative approaches to ethics not only do not exhaust or fully capture, but might blemish and disfigure, ethics. By reducing it to a moribund complex of laws, we distance ourselves from a more primary sense of ethics grounded in experience (what Levinas calls "the ethical in relation to oneself in a comportment which encounters the face as face, where the obligation with respect to the other is imposed before all obligation" (*Righteous* 49)). By failing to ask after the source and nature of ethics, and by failing to attend to it when negotiating ethical questions, there is the risk that such questions will be determined by a calculable formalism, by a program that is not only not animated by that originary experience that is apparently the source of ethics, but that is potentially at odds with it. As Kelly Oliver writes:

> The certainty with which we claim the right to decide on the sameness or difference of animals belies a reactionary position at odds with ethical responsibility. Moral rules and juridical legalism help us sleep peacefully at night, whereas ethical responsibility, as Levinas might say, produces insomnia. Rights can be granted, laws can be followed, but ethics and justice cannot rest there (Oliver 37).

On this view, the ethical relationship that emerges through the face-to-face encounter is itself the primary and most fundamental source of "the ethical," in the absence of which it would be impossible to think of ethics as a matter of calculation to begin with. The moment of the ethical

encounter, then, grounds ethical responsibility in a way that renders the above objections irrelevant.

Even a cursory look at the animal studies literature suggests a consensus that a Levinasian perspective is the correct approach for affirming the increased ethical worth of non-human animals, even while there is some disagreement about how this should be done. Donna Haraway, for example, beckons thinkers of animality to undertake a far more expansive research program than Derrida (and certainly Levinas) attempt, as doing so would significantly increase the chances of our encountering animals as fellow creatures:

> Actually to respond to the cat's response to his presence would have required his joining that flawed but rich philosophical canon to the risky project of asking what this cat on this morning cared about, what these bodily postures and visual entanglements might mean and might invite, as well as reading what people who study cats have to say and delving into the developing knowledges of both cat–cat and cat–human behavioral semiotics when species meet (Haraway 22).

Kelly Oliver, meanwhile, argues that by examining the various levels of interdependency that compose our relationships with animals, "we may come to see both animals and humans in a different light," (Oliver 21) one that would facilitate our regarding animals as fellow creatures with whom we share the planet in a way that exceeds the concept of "right." Cary Wolfe, meanwhile, asks us to regard animals in terms of "an irreducibly different and unique form of subjectivity … a shared trans-species being-in-the-world constituted by complex relations of trust, respect, dependence, and communication." (Wolfe 140-141).

If the origin of ethics *just is* the pre-ontological obligation that I have before the other, then the claim that animals have "faces" may be sufficient to ground the claim that animals deserve our "compassion, sympathy, and empathy." Yet the claim that animals have "faces," (i.e. that some or all living creatures are "singular Others" who, as Matthew Calarco writes, "I encounter … as *ethically different*, as radically different from me, as irreducible to my usual ways of understanding

and my usual projects and interests." (Calarco 31)) is itself problematic for reasons having to do with Derrida's philosophy. It is important therefore to assess these difficulties, which few of the scholars in animal studies literature have adequately considered.

§ 4.2 – Animal Studies and the Levinasian Reading of Derrida

In what follows, I interrogate the claim that a creature, because it has a "face," is for that reason a creature for whom I am in some sense responsible. I also question the belief that any such creature could ever be encountered by a "living" (i.e. surviving) being. These claims are fundamental in the writings of those non-normative theorists who pursue animal ethics from a modified Levinasian perspective. Despite strategic differences regarding how to increase the chance of encountering animals differently, the thinkers we have been considering generally disagree with Levinas only to the extent that he debars animals from entering into authentic ethical relationships. Yet is this approach to thinking the animal consistent with Derrida's philosophy, whose later work has been harnessed by the animal studies community and is, as Cary Wolfe points claims, "arguably the single most important event in the brief history of animal studies" (Wolfe 570)? In particular, do Derrida's various readings of Levinas' philosophy, beginning with "Violence and Metaphysics," complicate this approach? In what follows, I suggest that Derrida's philosophy raises considerable problems for this entire scheme, and that the thinker who has apparently done so much to "inaugurate" a revolution in animal studies also provides the grounds for a massive critique of many of its central assumptions. Whereas these theorists largely presuppose that animals can *in principle* be integrated into the ethical community in virtue of their being wholly other, I will demonstrate that this is not so, and for reasons suggested in Derrida's critique of Levinas. Before doing this, however, I will explore Levinas' philosophy itself, with special attention paid to why he privileges the human face. I will then explore why Derrida's

critique of Levinas not only frustrates the claim that non-human creatures can ever be encountered as "singularities," but frustrates Levinas' entire ethical project.

§ 4.2.1 – Levinas and Originary Ethics

For Levinas, ethics has its source not in the self who can rationally derive for herself concrete ethical rules, but in the other who inspires the desire, indeed the demand, to be "ethical." This view proceeds from Levinas' powerful rejection of those accounts that frame lived experience in terms of agency: "The human I is not a unity closed upon itself, like the uniqueness of the atom, but rather an opening, that of responsibility, which is the true beginning of the human and of spirituality" (*Righteous* 182). Whereas much of the world is perceived by persons on the level of intentionality, the way that we encounter other humans is unique because it exceeds intentionality and resists objectification. This is an important departure from both Husserl and Heidegger: for these thinkers, the way we experience other human beings is not *essentially* different from how we experience other everyday objects, even while we might comport ourselves toward them differently. But for Levinas, there is a staggering qualitative difference between the two types of experience: in contrast to most everyday objects, I cannot appropriate the other. To the contrary, the other calls my self-understanding into question, and inspires my responsibility and compassion. If the source of ethical responsibility is this dynamic encounter with the other, then ethics is not foundationally a matter of subjects rationally developing ethical rules (whether by devising normative principles, formulating principles of good behaviour, and so on). Rather ethics is rooted in the other–in the pre-theoretical, pre-intuitive demand that she makes upon me. In the moment of the face-to-face encounter, the ethical experience happens. This allows normative ethical theories to be developed in the first place, without which *no* ethical theory would be compelling.

Yet how does Levinas justify this view? To answer this, I will first briefly examine Levinas' overall project by focusing on perhaps his most influential book, *Totality and Infinity*. In this work, Levinas characterizes the pre-social state in which people initially exist as essentially egoistic and solitudinous. He contrasts this state of being with the one that ensues following the transformative moment when one genuinely encounters others, a phenomenon that he calls "the epiphany of the face." For Levinas, one's pre-social life is one of "enjoyment," where objects are intuited in purely egoistic terms, and in which the world is reduced to "the same"–that is, appropriated and integrated within the confines of one's private intentionality. Importantly, because consciousness is purely egoistic in enjoyment, one lacks what could be called consciousness in any robust sense; the world is not yet a world of "perception" or "representation," but one of fleeting, dynamic activity marshaled by a pre-reflective ego (*Totality* 187). In a way that is similar to Derrida's deconstruction of living presence, for Levinas, if persons were entirely self-determined, sovereign, and free, they would have an impoverished and elemental consciousness, indeed would not be "conscious" in any properly human sense. Levinas closely associates such a private existence with animals, whose existence human beings transcend upon encountering the other. He writes: "Animal need is liberated from vegetable dependence, but this liberation is itself dependence and uncertainty. An animal's need is inseparable from struggle and fear; the exterior world from which it is liberated remains a threat" (*Totality* 116).

For Levinas, in order to explain not only ethics, but the richness of human consciousness itself, the autonomous model of selfhood is insufficient, and must be supplemented in order to explain how human beings transcend this fundamental yet primitive, "animal" level of being. For this reason, "the other" allows us to transcend our private intentionality. The possibility of reflecting on my world–of *autodeixis*–requires that a person's private existence of egoistic

enjoyment be ruptured by a "calling into question" (*Totality* 84), without which one would be unable to transcend their impoverished state of private intentionality. This breach is precisely what the face-to-face encounter incites. Much of *Totality and Infinity* describes how the experience of the other is absolutely unique because it is that singular kind of being that cannot be appropriated or reduced to "the same": "how can the same, produced as egoism, enter into relationship with an other without immediately divesting it of its alterity?" (*Totality* 38). In contrast to the way that we experience apparently *all* other normal, everyday objects, the other resists objectification, and so cannot be reduced to my private, pre-social intentional life. Yet why does the other's resistance to the same cause us to transcend my personal egoism? Why, quoting Levinas, does "the inexhaustible surplus of infinity overflow ... the actuality of consciousness" (*Totality* 207)? While in enjoyment, the human subject appropriates for herself a rich and complex world of objects– what is called in *Totality and Infinity* a "dwelling"–that enriches the self to the point that it resists conceptualization or thematization. In contrast to other creatures and inanimate objects, the human other's existence is immeasurably rich and complex. Thus, while one is not yet self-reflective, one is nevertheless absolutely singular and unique: "the ipseity of the I … is more than the particularity of the atom and of the individual. … the refusal of the concept is not only one of the aspects of its being, but its whole content; it is interiority" (*Totality* 115). In this sense, the individual is not a species or type, even if it is possible to falsely regard them as such. To the contrary, each human person is immeasurably unique. Even prior to its encounter with the other, the self escapes totality: "The I is not unique like the Eiffel Tower or the Mona Lisa. The unicity of the I does not merely consist in being found in one sample only, but in existing without having a genus, without being the individuation of a concept" (*Totality* 117-118). While animal or plant life can be so reduced, such is not the case with human beings:

> The Other is not other with a relative alterity as are, in a comparison, even ultimate species, which mutually exclude one another but still have their place within the community of a genus-excluding one another by their definition, but calling for one another by this exclusion, across the community of their genus. The alterity of the Other does not depend on any quality that would distinguish him from me, for a distinction of this nature would precisely imply between us that community of genus which already nullifies alterity (*Totality* 194).

For Levinas, my interiority is disrupted by the other, and it is this that marks the emergence of the ethical as well as "the human." Such is the case because I am incapable of not responding to the other, and the other, in addressing me, upsets my life or "dwelling" and calls me into question: "The presence of the Other is equivalent to this calling into question of my joyous possession of the world" (*Totality* 75-76).

The other, then, is not one object among others who I can integrate into my own intentional world. Critically for Levinas, not only am I unable to reduce the other, but in being confronted by it, the other interrogates and consequently constitutes *me*–places a demand on me that cannot be effaced. Levinas is clear that this demand does not take place on the level of "thought"; indeed, I only respond to the other prior to comprehension or understanding. This is so because the other, being *infinitely* other, resists intentionality. Accordingly, "the face is not what is presented to me because I disclose it, what would therefore be presented to me, to my powers, to my eyes, to my perceptions, in a light exterior to it. … It is by itself and not by reference to a system" (*Totality* 76). Crucially, I do not respond to the other because she is powerful–because she forcibly overwhelms me and in doing so compels me to recognize her. Levinas is clear that the other claims me because it is weak, needy, and destitute. The other "arouses my goodness": "The being that expresses itself imposes itself, but does so precisely by appealing to me with its destitution and nudity–its hunger–without my being able to be deaf to that appeal" (*Totality* 200).

As should be clear, Levinas' project in *Totality and Infinity*, as in his subsequent works, is not only to phenomenologically interpret ethical experience, but furthermore to explain how the emergence of human consciousness takes place as an essentially ethical, social event. Levinas' account is therefore very different than autonomous models of subjectivity that fail to recognize the role that others play in the way that we receive and engage the world. Yet Levinas is narrowly humanistic in his assumptions; his project is constructed with human beings in mind, a fact that might complicate efforts to extend the ethical implications of his philosophy beyond "the human." This becomes clear when we consider the role that apparently uniquely human abilities play in the face-to-face encounter–for example, the central role that Levinas accords "language" and "speech" to explain the emergence of human consciousness. The ethical relation emerges through "language," and the experience of the other is called "speech" by Levinas. In speech, one encounters the other in a way that is wholly qualitatively different from the way that we encounter entities through the other senses. This is the case because in listening to the other's speech, above and beyond the actual linguistic content of what she is expressing, I am responding to a demand that she makes on me. The ethical moment does not occur in speech as a result of hearing what the other says; it is rather the fact that, regardless of her tone or the linguistic content of what she proclaims.

Yet despite that language is an important feature of the ethical relation, it is only made possible by the logically *primary* encounter with what Levinas terms "the face" of the other. This point will become important when considering the transformation of Levinas' ethics by thinkers in animal studies. It is because the other is infinite that the elemental world of enjoyment is disrupted, and that the world is constantly open as a discursive phenomenon that does not slide into private intentionality. Yet the initial moment where the other invades my private intentionality

and so creates language is, in a certain sense, pre-discursive even while it initiates the world as an intelligible, shared phenomenon. The face expresses not "information," but signals an infinite being: "In expression a being presents itself; the being that manifests itself attends its manifestation and consequently appeals to me. … To manifest oneself as a face is to impose oneself above and beyond the manifested and purely phenomenal form, to present oneself in a mode irreducible to manifestation" (*Totality* 200). Yet not only does "the face" appear in a way that is pre-discursive; for Levinas, this phenomenon exceeds *sensibility*: to identify the face as, say, the physical properties of one's face would already objectify the other in a way that goes contrary to their status as *wholly* other: "The face is present in its refusal to be contained. In this sense it can not be comprehended, that is, encompassed. It is neither seen nor touched-for in visual or tactile sensation the identity of the I envelops the alterity of the object, which becomes precisely a content" (*Totality* 194). It is this notion of "the face," which seems to exceed any specifically "human" attribute such as language or the physical properties of the human body, that thinkers in animal studies have largely drawn on to support their animal ethical project.

§ 4.2.2 – Levinas and Anthropocentrism

I have described how several scholars–David Clarke, Barbara Jane Davy, Christian Diehm, David Metzsger, and many others–have tried to show that Levinas' vision of a pre-ontological, primary ethics is consonant with the general aims of animal studies, and that nothing in Levinas' philosophy prevents us from affirming that each and perhaps every animal has a "face" in the Levinasian sense. Non-human animals therefore do, or at least *should*, inspire our responsibility. Levinas himself is deeply ambiguous about this point. In *The Paradox of Morality*, for example, he considers dogs specifically to have "faces," though in a qualified sense that he fails to clarify. He claims: "The phenomenon of the face is not in its purest form in the dog. In the dog, in the

animal, there are other phenomena. For example, the force of nature is pure vitality. It is more this which characterizes the dog. But it also has a face" (*Paradox* 49). We should pause to consider this passage. First, it is unclear whether Levinas is here referring to all animals, or only to dogs; while the statement "In the dog, in the animal" might suggest that Levinas is speaking of animals in general by using the dog as an example of a broader class of beings, this reading is complicated a little later in the same text, where Levinas privileges dogs specifically as having faces. This is so because dogs, in contrast to other creatures, inspire our sympathy, regard, and compassion. Levinas states, "In the dog, what we like is perhaps his childlike character. As if he were strong, cheerful, powerful, full of life. On the other hand, there is also, even with regard to an animal, a pity. A dog is like a wolf that doesn't bite" (*Paradox* 50). As this passage makes clear, if Levinas values animals in general, he does so because he values precisely those features found most prominently among domesticated dogs and not, or far less so, among wolves, spiders, or cattle. The issue is therefore not whether the animal can signal, in its own unique, non-human fashion, its "face," but whether the animal is sufficiently like us to possess a face in the first place. And if they are not, the animal is simply "pure vitality."

This reading seems to be reaffirmed in passages where Levinas discusses an individual dog, "Bobby." A figure about which there is considerable scholarly debate, Bobby is discussed in "The Name of a Dog, or Natural Rights" as well as in certain of Levinas' interviews. In the former text, Levinas describes how this creature appeared for a brief time around the POW camp in which he and other French Jewish soldiers were interned. In contrast to how they were regarded both by their guards and the surrounding population, Bobby treated them "as men." Levinas writes:

> [A]bout halfway through our long captivity, for a few short weeks, before the sentinels chased him away, a wandering dog entered our lives. One day he came to meet this rabble as we returned under guard from work … we called him Bobby, an exotic name, as one does with a cherished dog. He would appear at morning assembly and was waiting for us

> as we returned, jumping up and down and barking in delight. For him, there was no doubt that we were men (*Paradox* 49).

Levinas writes that Bobby was "the last Kantian in Germany," a reference to the creature's apparently pre-reflective willingness to treat these prisoners as human beings irrespective of their particular ethnic background or religious beliefs, a point made by Levinas in an interview Francois Poirie: "In this corner of Germany, where walking through the village we would be looked at by the villagers as Juden, this dog evidently took us for human beings" (Poirier 41). Yet as with other passages we have looked at, Levinas regards Bobby as valuable precisely because he affirms the humanity of himself and his fellow prisoners. Rather than recognize the infinite within Bobby in a way that exceeds intuition or understanding, what Levinas values about him is that he behaves in a way that corresponds to how humans ought to act towards one another, but often do not. To the extent that this passage suggests a face-to-face encounter across species-lines, what makes Bobby this way is that he conforms to a vision of the human ethical relationship that many humans themselves sometimes fail to live up to.

It seems, then, that Levinas is ambiguous with respect to the ethical potential of non-human lives. As we have only partially observed in our consideration of *Totality and Infinity*, in his more systematic philosophical works Levinas is not only reluctant to consider animals as singularities, but, in a classical philosophical move, he uses animals as a foil to augment the singular nature of human beings. Levinas repeats many of the traditional distinctions used by philosophers since Descartes, such as the claim that the animal is "ignorant of its own death" (*Totality* 259) or that the human has the ability to rigorously distinguish being from mere phenomena: "unlike the animal [the human] can know the difference between being and phenomenon" (*Totality* 179-180). He also often characterizes animals in terms of pure calculation and automaticity. Yet certain of his discussions of animality bear more directly on Levinas' individual philosophical project, as with

his refusal to the animal the capacity to encounter others, and his description of animal life as remaining inescapably within "the same" in a movement that he describes as "centripetal" or selfish. Levinas suggests that not only are human beings properly singular and unique but, in virtue of their enjoyment, they create for themselves the conditions for encountering others, and so for becoming creatures with the capacity for ethics:

> [W]ithin the very interiority hollowed out by enjoyment there must be produces a heteronomy that incites to another destiny than this animal complacency in oneself. … in this descent into itself along the path of pleasure … a shock is produced which, without inverting the movement of interiorization, without breaking the thread of the interior substance, would furnish the occasion for a resumption of relations with exteriority. Interiority must be at the same time closed and open. The possibility of rising from the animal condition is assuredly thus described (*Totality* 149).

By contrast, animals are primarily motivated by need, indeed a form of need that is "inseparable from struggle and fear; the exterior world from which it is liberated remains a threat" (*Totality* 116). As such, the interiority of animal phenomenological life is neither complex nor profound, for which reason "it is only man who could be absolutely foreign" (*Totality* 73). How can we render this philosophical system, which is at once so revolutionary yet so humanistic, amenable to the animal studies project?

§ 4.2.3 – A Levinasian Ethics of Non-Human Life

Along with the fact that it is apparently non-normative, the attraction of Levinasian ethics stems from the way that it revaluates what motivates us to be ethical. On a certain reading of Levinas, one does not feel compassion for others who are relevantly like oneself, but due to the other's alterity. Taken by itself, this might suggest that animals, because they are "different," are or can be creatures who concern us ethically. Many thinkers have sought to demonstrate this, in particular by extraditing those elements of Levinas' thought that are anthropocentric, while retaining the core of his ethical insights. This claim can be expressed syllogistically. While there

is considerable variation within the literature, the main thrust of the argument proceeds as follows: such creatures who possess "faces," through which they express vulnerability and transcendence, can in principle, if not in fact or presently, be encountered ethically. Animals possess such faces. Therefore, animals can be encountered ethically. Peter Atterton expresses this argument thus:

> If the capacity to suffer is the most obviously morally relevant characteristic that the Other possesses, and if the capacity to express that suffering is what qualifies a being as having a face in the broad sense, then, granted that every such face is a unique face that cannot be compared with any other face without committing a violence, […] there can be no blanket justification for prioritizing human interests simply because humans possess language or have superior mental attributes (Atterton 31).

Matthew Calarco argues that "Levinas's ethical philosophy is, or at least should be, committed to a notion of universal ethical consideration, that is, an agnostic form of ethical consideration that has no a priori constraints or boundaries" (*Zoographies* 55). Calarco goes so far as to claim that not only humans but also animals can develop increased cross-species compassion: if there is no sharp distinction between human beings and non-human animals, and if humans can displace the egoism that prevents them from being compassionate toward animals, then there is no reason to think that animals cannot also do so; being-for-the-other is not, Calarco claims, an exclusively human phenomenon, but "can be couched in a more expansive, fully naturalistic perspective on human and non-human existence" (*Zoographies* 58).

On a certain level, there are compelling reasons for thinking that if we correct certain problematic aspects of Levinas' philosophy, a case can be made for a broadly Levinasian animal ethics. As we have seen, central to Levinas' claim that the ethical encounter founds not only "ethics," but human consciousness itself, is the belief that each human being is not only absolutely unique, but resists thematization. This is the case because of the kind of inner life that humans develop in the transition from simple need: in this pre-discursive state of pure sensibility, humans form a nucleus that organizes the world according to egoistic desire, one that is immeasurably

complex: "Sensibility constitutes the very egoism of the I, which is sentient and not something sensed. Man as measure of all things, that is, measured by nothing, comparing all things but incomparable, is affirmed in the sensing of sensation. Sensation break up every system" (*Totality* 59). Yet if this determines whether a being is a "singularity," it seems untenable to deny this wholesale to other creatures: Levinas can only exclude non-human creatures as possessing sensibility by adopting a simplistic conception of animality, one that he describes in Darwinian terms in "The Paradox of Morality": "The being of animals is a struggle for life. A struggle of life without ethics" (*Paradox* 50).[24] Yet without entering into the ethological debate about altruism among animals, the view that others must themselves be "altruistic" to justify our feeling responsible for them is simply not the case: Levinas does not claim that one only feels responsible to those who feel similarly towards them. It is rather that human beings, because they have a dwelling, resist thematization and objectification. This is what grounds Levinas' primary ethics. Indeed, were it the case that I only feel responsible for the other *because* she or he feels responsible for me, the essence of ethics would be grounded in reciprocity, which Levinas explicitly wants to avoid.

If animals–or at least some animals–are sensible creatures in Levinas' sense, then there seems to be no reason why they should be excluded as creatures for which we feel responsibility. Recall that Levinas resists founding ethics based on the fact that human beings possess certain apparently unique attributes, for example language: as we have seen, language emerges *through* the face-to-face encounter, and is first of all a response to the other. Such is the ethical foundation of human consciousness. But the fact that humans possess the capacity for language use (or rationality, or morality, or self-knowledge) does not account for why we are responsible for human others. Additionally, it is not at all clear why, in order to be a sensible creature, one must also have

the capacity to form a linguistic world. If what arouses my sense of responsibility for the other is the fact that it is a sensible, singular, and unique creature, then the fact that it might lack the capacity for language is irrelevant for determining whether I am responsible for her. It is probably true that such an other might be unreceptive to me or my attempts to respond to her. Needless to say, this same point should apply to all of the other apparently unique human attributes that have been used to distinguish human beings as creatures worthy of ethical respect. For example, "rationality," on Levinas' view, is generated through language as a *response* to the other, but is not the initial reason *why* I am responsible for her. In sum, if all that renders a creature ethically significant is that she is a "singularity"–i.e., a sensible, vulnerable creature capable of building and inhabiting a dwelling–then there is no clear reason why we should not feel responsible for non-human animals.

If Levinas' reductive account of animals is incorrect, then it seems there is little reason not to consider them ethically. And as we have seen in his ambiguous treatment of animals in certain of his interviews, Levinas' reluctance to grant that we do or can encounter the animal ethically rest on presuppositions that seem untenable. (For example, the view that the dog has, in some qualified sense, a "face," but only because it recognizes or affirms the "humanity of man"–that is, because it tends to respond to human persons in ways that correspond to how we would like to be responded to). What, then, is wrong with a Levinasian approach to animal ethics? And why is it so in light of deconstruction?

§ 4.3 – Survival and the Levinasian Approach to Animal Ethics

The reason why Levinas' ethics proves incompatible with survival rests on a deconstructable understanding of life that underlies his discourse. In particular, the view that some, but not all, objects are "singularities," and the view that human beings are or can be responsive to

them in the way that Levinas describes, is premised on a vision of life as living presence. If "life," human or otherwise, only carries on as differential repetition, this undermines the view that we are "singular" creatures in Levinas' sense. Indeed, Derrida is quite explicit that Levinas' notion of "the other" before whom I am responsible betrays a commitment to living presence, and is for that reason deconstructable. Importantly, "life" as survival also undermines the view that any creature can access any other on the order of transcendence. On my reading of Derrida, no creature receives any other in the transformative, epiphanic way that Levinas describes, which undermines the foundational claim that ethics is pre-ontological. For these reasons, an ethics of non-human life grounded in Levinas' philosophy proves problematic. Yet rather than interrogate whether the notions of a "face" or a "singularity" are themselves deconstructible, the tendency among the thinkers I have discussed has been to argue that these are not uniquely human. Yet for Derrida, the view that any creature exists and receives the world as an "other" in Levinas' sense reflects a commitment to living presence.

These claims are perhaps not immediately convincing. There are considerable similarities between these two thinkers' philosophies: in addition to making solidarity, community, and companionship possible, for both thinkers, "the other" inspires "self-reflection" and the richness of experiential life. On Levinas' account, the moment of the ethical encounter disrupts the closed economy of "the same"–that is, the static egoism of enjoyment. In many ways, this claim presages Derrida's notion of an originary difference that makes experiential life (and therefore "personal identity" and human social existence) possible. As with differance, the claim that experience is originarily furcated and relational (which for Derrida applies to any origin generally) is required by Levinas to explain the uniqueness of human experience. It is only because of this relationality that there is an openness through which experience finds passage, an openness to the other that

"appears" before any manifestation of presence. To this extent, there is an undeniable affinity between Derrida and Levinas' thought: autonomy cannot explain its own emergence, and it is only through the openness of the "face" of the other that any apparently "present" experience happens. As Derrida contends in "Violence and Metaphysics": "simple internal consciousness could not provide itself with time and with the absolute alterity of every instant without the irruption of the totally-other" (WD 117).

In addition, Levinasian transcendence, which is expressed in the face-to-face encounter, gives rise to–indeed is identical to–desire itself: for Levinas, desire is transcendence beyond the same–beyond the closed economy of *ipseity*. This is similar to survival: no moment of experience happens except through interruption by "the other." Because the other is never finally appropriable, human life can continue to carry on. In Derrida's case, this means that one is and continues to exist only on account of the disruptive force that "the other" introduces. The moment that it ceases to do so, desire evaporates, and experience expires. For Levinas, meanwhile, any authentic, uniquely human desire (as opposed to the mere animalistic striving for security or satisfaction) must forever be separated from what motivates it, for which reason the other is "height beyond height." Derrida puts this point thus: "Desire ... permits itself to be appealed to by the absolutely irreducible exteriority of the other to which it must remain infinitely inadequate. Desire is equal only to excess. No totality will ever encompass it. Thus, the metaphysics of desire is a metaphysics of infinite separation" (WD 115). For both thinkers, then, any moment of experience is a breach or scission in the economy of the same, in such a way that the future already involves itself in the presence of the present moment. The future, understood as an opening to the other, occurs as a rupture, a "wound or inspiration" that possibilizes not only speech and reason, but experience generally:

> [T]his encounter of the unforeseeable *itself* is the only possible opening of time, the only pure future, the only pure expenditure beyond history as economy. But this future, this

> beyond, is not another time, a day after history. It is *present* at the heart of experience. Present not as a total presence but as a *trace*. Therefore, before all dogmas, all conversions, all articles of faith or philosophy, experience itself is eschatological at its origin and in each of its aspects" (WD 118-119).

Thus, central to both thinkers' understanding of human experience is the notion of a primary "affirmation" of the other: the other only arrives because we are unconditionally open to it prior to any decision or judgment. In Derrida's case, this is so in the sense of "affirmation" that I develop in chapter 2: in order for "me" (understood as a deciding subject) to affirm, deny, or make any judgment concerning *anything* that appears in experience, "I" must already have said "yes" to it. Interestingly, in *Adieu to Emmanuel Levinas*, Derrida claims that the notion of "unconditional affirmation" so central to his own work at least partially originates with Levinas, for whom there is a "responsibility that exceeds and precedes my freedom, that of an 'unconditional yes,' ... of a 'yes older than that of naive spontaneity,' a yes in accord with this uprightness that is 'original fidelity to an indissoluble alliance'" (AL 3). Indeed, Derrida's thinking of double-affirmation is developed through his reading of Levinas in "Violence and Metaphysics," where the originary openness to the other is described as what founds the "possibility of possibility" itself–that is, the possibility of any moment of life.

These and other similarities raise the question of whether, how, and to what extent Derrida departs from Levinas. And if Derrida's philosophy is indeed different from Levinas' in important respects, is this so in a way that nevertheless leaves intact the central and most attractive aspects of Levinas' ethics? We have discussed why many believe this to be the case. The similarities that we have just identified should perhaps lead Derrida to draw the same ethical conclusions as Levinas, even while he might complicate the nature of what the "face" is whose expression inspires obligation. Should we therefore conclude that Derrida's philosophy commits him to similar ethical

conclusions as the one's drawn by Levinas? Or perhaps to a revised Levinasian ethics, one where the face expresses itself through encounters with creatures or entities who are not human?

I argue that we should not. First, and despite that Levinas reconceives human subjectivity on the host-hostage model, Derrida's notion of what a "singularity" is betrays his commitment to living presence. While the passage beyond enjoyment is originarily a response to the other, our being able to relate to the other is nevertheless due to the enigmatic power of the response examined in chapter 3. For this reason, Levinas' understanding of human life is founded on a vision of the human subject who announces itself in the present, an ability without which we would be unable to relate to the other *at all*, let alone in the profound and transformative way that Levinas believes we do. As Derrida writes in one of the few passages where he discusses Levinas' views on animality, the possibility of the other being received rests on this "self-presentation, this *autotelic*, autodeictic, autobiographical" imagining of a self that we have been examining: "'Here I am' as responsibility implies the possibility of 'responding,' of answering for oneself in the response to the appeal or command of the other" (AT 111). For Derrida, then, Levinas remains allied to metaphysics inasmuch as he is committed to a particular vision of the human subject. This is so despite that he reconceives subjectivity on the host-hostage model: "[I]t is not sufficient to subvert the traditional subject by making it a subject-host or hostage of the other … not sufficient for an ethics to recall the subject to its being-subject, host or hostage, subjected to the other, to the wholly other or to every other" (AT 117). What is more, this vision of human responsibility is in stark contrast to animals: "The animal remains for Levinas what it will have been for the whole Cartesian-type tradition: a machine that doesn't speak, that doesn't have access to sense, that can at best imitate 'signifiers without a signified'" (AT 117).

Interestingly, Levinas' thinking about animal life, in particular his remarks about Bobby the dog, betrays his commitment to presence. Levinas does not claim that at least certain animals, such as dogs, are *entirely* devoid of personality. For Levinas, this is not the case for complex ethological reasons. As his discussion in "The Name of a Dog" suggests, Bobby's behaviour clearly evinces some form of "sentience," even while Levinas is reluctant to attribute to him a full or complete "face." However, a "singularity" as Levinas describes it is not a variable concept: there is no middle position between a "singularity" on the one hand and a non-singularity (represented by plant and animal life in *Totality and Infinity*) on the other. For Levinas, the emergence of the human person as a singularity is a complete qualitative leap from a realm of generality (in which objects, including animals, exist as non-singular and repeatable types without distinctiveness or uniqueness) to a state of being that is altogether different–one that absolutely resists generality or thematization, in which humans exist "without having a genus, without being the individuation of a concept" (*Totality* 117-118). To be a singularity is, in other words, all or nothing. How, then, can the animal's singular status be *at once* absolute (which is a necessary condition for a creature's being authentically other and so arousing my responsibility) while also limited. The tension between these two propositions is not only irreconcilable; as Derrida writes in *The Animal That Therefore I Am*, it betrays a problem that Levinas does not resolve, but elides. By failing to resolve whether Bobby has a face, Levinas is

> declaring that he doesn't know where the right to be called 'face' begins, [which] means confessing that one doesn't know at bottom what a face is, what the word means, what governs its usage … Doesn't that amount, as a result, to calling into question the whole legitimacy of the discourse and ethics of the 'face' of the other, the legitimacy and even the sense of every proposition concerning the alterity of the other, the other as my neighbor or my brother, etc.? (AT 109).

In spite of what is widely believed, Levinas' reluctance to endow the animal with a face is not *simply* the result of mere anthropocentric prejudice. Were this the case, then the approach of simply

extending "faces" to animals might be successful. It is rather due to Levinas' vision of "the human" which, though in many ways meaningfully new, nevertheless retains an understanding of human conscious life that conflicts with the account of survival that I have developed.

Thus, the notion of what a "singularity" in Levinas' thought is problematic, and raises considerable challenges to the integrity of his ethics. These challenges are far more significant than those thinkers who have tried to use Levinas' philosophy to address environmental and animal-ethical concerns seem to appreciate. For if Levinas' ethics is premised on a present conception of human beings, and if that conception turns out to be false, then it is possible that his ethics will similarly be misled. One might respond that we can determine which creatures are properly singular from those who are not.[25] Yet this is problematic in at least two ways: first, accepting that certain "animals" but not others, or that all animals but not vegetative life, are "singularities" compels us to negotiate which entities have faces and which do not. Not only does this risk arbitrariness and error. In addition, the fact that we must *negotiate* which creatures are pure singularities and which are not already upsets the view that the ethical encounter is pre-ontological, and so undermines precisely that aspect of Levinas' ethics that distinguishes it from the rights approach. Deliberating who or what is properly a "singularity" involves looking at criteria to assess whether certain beings are deserving of an ethical response. Yet the notion that the ethical response is in any sense deliberative goes contrary to Levinas' view that it is aroused prior to any thought, decision, or intention. If some or all animals are indeed singular, but if their singularity does not impact us in the way that the human face does, then it would seem that the primary, pre-ontological moment of the ethical encounter must be supplemented by evaluative decisions about what or who properly has a face. Yet the requirement that we must deliberate about who counts as a creature before which I am responsible forces us to return to that model about thinking about ethics that

Levinas' philosophy was meant to help us escape. For Levinas, there is no critical distance between who is and who ought to be the object of my responsibility. This, in turn, raises the question of whether any creature–human, animal, or otherwise–is indeed singular in the sense that Levinas maintains, and whether any compromise on this point threatens the integrity of Levinas' ethics.

There is a more serious problem here: the tension between the claim that humans are singular, while other creatures are only limitedly so, raises the question of whether any creature exists in the way that Levinas defines human beings. For should we agree that there are degrees to which a creature possesses a "face," this undermines the view that *any* creature is ever properly singular, as well as whether one ever receives another creature as an "other." This is not something that Levinas can admit. If certain creatures are only limitedly or partially "singular," in such a way that the force of their face is weak compared to others, then it seems that there is variability in terms of the force or intensity of the response that certain faces elicit from me, a claim that goes contrary to Levinas' account. For just as the logic at play in Levinas' conception of a "singularity" is absolute, so too is his notion of the ethical response. Levinas' characterization of the ethical response emerges from an encounter with that which resists *all* thematization and that is beyond *all* conceptuality, and the encounter with a partially singular being would commit us to the view that the ethical encounter is at once absolute and partial. Yet as we have seen, the belief that we are capable of receiving others in a way that exceeds repetition and so reactivity is incorrect, a fact that modifies the nature of the ethical response itself.

Derrida was aware of this tension concerning the claim about human beings' transcendent singularity. However, he does not extensively treat Levinas' thought in his later animal writings, nor does he integrate important insights from his various critiques of Levinas into these works. Despite that he sometimes seems to endorse a broadly Levinasian position with respect to "animal

ethics," Derrida's writings on Levinas trouble this reading of his work. In particular, the claim that the other is infinitely and absolutely other, in addition to the claim that one can ever encounter the other's absolute alterity, is deconstructable. No animal is an "other" in Levinas' sense, but neither is any human. Rather, the uncertain, liminal status in terms of which Levinas sometimes characterizes animals more accurately describes human life as survival. The logic that Levinas develops concerning the partial or quasi-transcendence of animal life turns out to be a necessary limitation that we humans share. Yet if each being is marked by this unconditional finitude, then no life ever expresses itself, nor is any being in principle receptive to the other, in a way that can ground Levinas' claim in a primary ethics.

If my critique of the singularity in Levinas' thought is correct, then far from being allied with the thinkers associated with animal studies discussed above, Derrida's thought turns out to be a thoroughgoing critique of their work. Yet there is an additional reason for why Derrida's thought undermines Levinas' ethics. While "the other" is required in order to interrupt "the same" on Derrida's view, this is so in a way that upsets the core of Levinas' ethics. As we have seen, for Derrida, every moment of experience happens as an "event," where "the other" arrives as an inaugural and unanticipated way. Yet "the other" in this context is not, or is not necessarily, a particular kind of creature or object–for example a "singularity," whether we define this as a human being or as a "living" creature. While Derrida agrees with Levinas that the other must be received "otherwise," this is a *general* feature that possibilizes *any* experience of *anything* whatsoever. If life carries forward as differential repetition, then we simply cannot access "others" (human or otherwise) in the epiphanic, transcendent way that Levinas believes we do. Rather, we can only access any other through the same iterable, differential framework that possibilizes any moment

of experience. As such, Derrida undermines the privilege that Levinas accords "the other" understood as a particular kind of being.

I will defend these claims by focusing principally on three of Derrida's essays on Levinas, beginning with "Violence and Metaphysics." While he does not treat animality extensively in these essays, Derrida's position makes any attempt to amend Levinas' philosophy in a way that might be more inclusive to non-human creatures doubtful. In "Violence and Metaphysics," Derrida points to certain problems in Levinas' work that problematize not only his ethics as it stands, but any modified Levinasean ethics that would embrace non-human life. The reason for this rests on Levinas' attempts to capture the alterity of the other as that which exceeds representation. For Levinas, the alterity that ruptures the economy of the same just is the face, which, because it defies any category, does not exist as an attribute or characteristic; the other does not possess a face that signals its alterity, but rather *is* the face. The face, then, is "not a metaphor, not a figure" (WD 122), but resists play and substitution, as captured by Levinas' claim that it does not "signal" or "refer," but "expresses." To put this in terms of Derrida's own philosophy, the face transcends the trace structure, for which reason it cannot be identified, thematized, or revealed; it expresses itself as other in a way that seems to defy logic (for how can one in any sense access the inaccessible and non-identifiable). The face "presents" itself to me as the other without supplementarity or metaphor, a claim which, for Derrida, underpins all of Levinas' thought: "the other is the other only if his alterity is absolutely irreducible, that is, infinitely irreducible, and the infinitely Other can only be Infinity" (WD 129).[26] Yet as we have seen, and despite its absolute alterity, speech and experience take place only because of an originary address made to this other: it is only because it transcends phenomenality and identification, but is nevertheless in some sense *there*, that one can access the other, and access it as other. "The other" is somehow absent while present,

indeed is present *as* absence: "I could not possibly speak to the other, make of the other a theme, pronounce the other as object, in the accusative. I can only, I *must* only speak to the other; that is, I must call him in the vocative, which is not a category … [T]he face is not 'of this world.' It is the origin of the world" (WD 128).

Yet for Derrida, Levinas' account of "the other" is problematic, and is so in a way that reveals the difference that alterity and "the other" play in their respective philosophies. As was similarly the case in our discussion of the singularity, the claim that any being can be encountered in a way that transcends the trace system further allies Levinas' ethics with the metaphysics of presence. This is so even while he self-consciously tries to escape it. Because Levinas' account of the face as infinite transcendence rests on the logic of presence, it is deconstructable: for Derrida, the infinite transcendence of the face is effaced the moment it is encountered and named, whether it is designated the "other," the "face," "God," and so forth. Each term that Levinas uses to capture infinite transcendence at once implicates it in an economy that it is supposed to exceed. The use of any supplement to describe the hidden and unknowable other "destroys itself after serving to indicate something beyond itself" (WD 132). Phrased differently, any statement made to refer to the other's alterity betrays itself. This is the case even where infinite alterity is stated negatively, as when one claims that alterity is beyond interiority or exteriority, is "non-exteriority and non-interiority." It follows that any claim that attempts to capture transcendence *in language* would paradoxically exceed language, whose existence owes itself to such oppositions. That language is differential, and therefore finite, bars the possibility that it might capture infinity or transcendence; any thinking of a positive infinity not only must come up short, but cannot approach the abyss that separates signification–which is always finite–and the infinite.

One might object that while any term used to describe the moment of the ethical encounter would surely be inadequate, that moment is itself transcendent despite that it cannot be properly captured in language. This would make Derrida's point correct, but trivial: no word reflects what it signifies with full precision, and so Derrida's objection is reduced to a point about the limitations of language, but not about the possibility of experiencing transcendence or alterity. Yet as I have stressed throughout this dissertation, for Derrida, experience generally is the differential repetition of marks. Hence, the possibility of any encounter, whether this be of an inert object, a human being, or anything whatsoever, is that it in some sense be identified as a mark. In "Violence and Metaphysics," Derrida makes this point by claiming that any thinking of the other as infinitely other is impossible unless one renounces the very thing that makes any conceptuality possible: the trace system. Derrida writes: "[a]s soon as one attempts to think infinity as a positive plenitude … the other becomes unthinkable, impossible, unutterable … it must not be possible either to think of state this call" (WD 142-143). Because the Levinasian other transcends the trace and therefore phenomenality–because it is "[n]either representation, nor limitation, nor conceptual relation to the same" (WD 117)–such an other "is" not in any sense. Hence, not only can such a being not exist (no being exists as a "singularity"), but even if it could, no one would be able to encounter it: it is only to the extent that the face has a body (is named) and so forms a trace that it can express and speak. The face must be "inscribed," and to this extent must be finite. For the infinite to be named (and it is only by being named that it can appear as meaningful in any sense) it must be iterable, finite, and exist within the trace system: "God is or appears, *is named*, within the difference between All and Nothing, Life and Death. Within difference, and at bottom Differance itself" (WD 144).

We are therefore confronted with a paradoxical difficulty: "How to think the other, if the other can be spoken only as exteriority and through exteriority, that is, nonalterity" (WD 144). The other can only appear before me as other on the basis of some symmetry between myself and it, which at once effaces the other's alterity. By this, Derrida means that one only receives the other through an already established system of iterable marks. As such, the other must in some sense be identified for it to appear. Were this not the case, it would in no sense be for me at all: "the other cannot be absolutely exterior to the same without ceasing to be other" (WD 158). This undermines the claim that any other can be encountered in its absolute alterity. Whereas we must, in a sense, "name" the other in order to encounter it, we can do so only by betraying its supposed transcendence. However, "the other," understood as that which interrupts the closed economy of "the same," is necessary for life, human or otherwise, to carry on. This is a difficulty that Derrida endlessly interrogates and which I have spent considerable time unpacking: in order for anything to appear in any sense, it must be identified from within the economy of the same even while it cannot be reduced to it. Yet the important point for this discussion is that the "face" cannot be infinitely other: we cannot experience the "other" whose presence announces itself in the face without it at the same time already manifesting as something within the same.

§ 4.3.2 – Consequences of Derrida's Reading of Levinas for Animal Ethics

What consequences can be drawn from this reading of Derrida to the question of animality within Levinas' ethics? No creature can exist as a singularity, and even if they could, their singular nature could never be encountered by a living being. As such, no other obligates me to it in the way that Levinas believes. For the other to manifest itself for me, it can only do so as a mark from within a finite "economy" or system of traces. This is not to say that I must "actively" identify the other in order for it to appear (as we have seen, every discrete moment of experience happens on

account of the "yes" of affirmation). It is rather to say that the other can only appear as a mark. This already undermines the claim that my encounter with the other, human or animal, is ethical in nature: there is no moment where another creature impacts me *wholly* otherwise, such that I receive the full radiance of their transcendent singularity. Accordingly, despite the repeated injunction that we view animals "otherwise," and even if our understanding of the non-human living world becomes substantially more variegated and diverse, there is no avoiding the requirement that the other must be reduced for it to be encountered. One's encounter with the other never exceeds categorization, for which reason we will never be able to encounter any other in terms of the alterity that grounds Levinas' ethics. Emphatically, our inability to do so is not the result of a failure of imagination, weakness of will, or moral wantonness. It is rather a result of the finitude that allows life to carry on. This is not to say that the other is *absolutely* reducible to the same. Rather, the other's otherness rests on what Derrida describes as an impossible logic where sameness and otherness exist and exist *at once* at every moment of experience.

In addition, whereas Derrida claims that "the other" allows experience to carry forward through time, this is not to be understood as a particular kind of creature–for example, a "human being" or a "living creature." "The other" is rather that which comes to interrupt "the same." Hence, while Derrida to a certain extent agrees with Levinas' insight that difference and alterity make "human" life possible, he makes this a general point about life as such. Life does not exist as a full and present plenitude, but only by differing from and deferring itself. Restricting ourselves to human beings, the insight that "the other" involves itself in human life is not for Derrida simply a point about the passage out of enjoyment into the distinctively human realm. Rather, "the other" is involved at every possible moment of experiential life. This latter point displaces the transcendent role that "the other"–understood as a particular *kind* of entity (such as another human

being)–plays in experience. Contrary to Levinas' claim that "the other" (understood as other human beings) serves a unique role in producing a distinctive kind of human phenomenological life, for Derrida, "the other" (understood as the difference in terms of which every new experience arrives) is what allows us to encounter other human beings, just as it allows us to encounter anything at all. To use Derrida's terminology, any new experience only arrives through the "suspension" of sameness and difference, which is required for anything to appear. Derrida's critique of Levinas' infinite alterity is therefore not a critique of the role that otherness plays in how experience happens. Rather, Levinas' thinking of "the face" is not a thinking of the other in Derrida's radical sense: the other exceeds "the face"–exceeds all naming, recognition, and discernment prior to its arrival, and it is only through its interruptive power that experience finds passage.

Why is this discussion relevant for Levinasian non-human ethics? Derrida's point that sameness and otherness are each required at every moment of experience means that a creature can only be experienced by being encountered "otherwise." This means that while one can never escape the demand that other beings must be "named" in a necessarily reductive way, every event of experience nevertheless always involves difference–it is never the identical, seamless repetition of "the same." In this sense, no experience that one has of another creature is ever entirely reductive; not only can the "animot" be transgressed, it *must* be transgressed each time an "animal" is encountered.[27] This is not due to a pre-ontological ethical claim that animals have over us; it is simply a general feature of how repetition works. While iterability is the possibility of our being able to encounter animals in unforeseen and perhaps more understanding and compassionate ways, this proceeds from Derrida's insight that differential repetition takes place in ways that are always inaugural, which allows for the possibility of encountering animals, like anything else, differently.

And as we saw in chapter 3, while "the animal" has consistently been cast as a merely instinctual, non-present, automatic being, this notion of animal life must constantly be reaffirmed anew (though in ways that always prove insufficient).

The conditions that allow me to encounter other creatures at all, however, necessitate that I am not beholden or "obligated" to them in Levinas' sense.[28] Indeed, if others did obligate me in the strong and irrevocable sense that Levinas believes they do, I would not be able to encounter them at all. Derrida justifies this point in *Adieu to Emmanuel Levinas* when he writes that the "third," which interrupts the obligation that one has for the other, not only does not obstruct the "ethical relation," but makes space for it just as it makes any relation possible as such. The third–which, in this context, is what complicates the unbroken relation between the other and myself–allows me to receive the other by making space for differentiation. We have seen Derrida make this claim in different contexts: any new moment of experience only arrives through the always prior work of differance; inasmuch as I encounter and continue to relate to the other, this is due to the ceaseless rupturing of the relation that I have with it. This is another way of saying that I continue to relate to the other only by receiving it otherwise. "The third," like "the other" in Derrida's specific sense, is originary: "the third does not wait, it comes at the origin of the face and of the face to face. … [T]he face to face is immediately suspended, interrupted without being interrupted, as face to face, as the dual of two singularities" (AL 31). It is only because of the third (the other understood as the wholly unanticipatable that interrupts the closed economy of "the same") that any relationship with others can exist. This upset the notion that I am obligated to or a hostage of the other.

I have argued that the other–including any animal other–must be encountered otherwise for it to be encountered at all. It follows, therefore, that the chance of encountering any animal

with increased sympathy or regard is always possible owing to the unforeseeable unpredictability that the other or "third" introduces to any encounter. Yet this complicates what "a face" is, as well as the view that humans or non-human living creatures affect me in ways that are *essentially* different from any other object of experience. Derrida's thinking about the "third" suggests that a face is never encountered as a simple unity; inasmuch as it is ceaselessly being received otherwise, one encounters it as though "the unicity of the face were, in its absolute and irrecusable singularity, plural a priori" (AL 110). Derrida reinterprets the face not as the inscrutable singularity of a living being, however, but as what "gives itself to be read." Derrida makes this point in another of his treatments of Levinas, *At This Very Moment in This Work Here I Am*, with reference to what he calls the "work of the work," where anything that appears as experience is possible owing to the "call" of the work–what the work "gives" for thought. And this "work of the work" only *works* because of a text's incompleteness which calls to be completed.

If, as Derrida believes, this is a general rule that allows any moment of experience to take place, then it follows that one's encounter with any living being is only possible due to the same conditions that make any "event" of experience possible. There is therefore nothing essentially distinct in the way that we encounter humans or living creatures; we do so only through the negotiation of marks "calling to be read." "The face," as that which "inspires" or "calls" me, is not originarily anything that is specific to human beings or living creatures. One has access to the other only through a system of iterable marks, and there is nothing that rigorously distinguishes the way that I encounter living beings from how I encounter a "text" or any object of experience generally. This mean that we never receive *any* other in a pure or unadulterated sense. As Derrida writes, one receives the other in a way that is *a priori* imperfect and at fault: "'faultiness' is, a priori, older even than any a priori" (P 147). In *Adieu*, Derrida makes a similar point with reference to an "initial

perjury," which is "as originary as the experience of the face" (AL 33) and allows space for the relation between two faces:

> [E]ven if the experience of the third ... is defined as the interruption of the face to face, it is not an intrusion that comes second. The experience of the third is ineluctable from the very first moment, and ineluctable in the face; even if it interrupts the face to face, it also belongs to it; as self-interruption it belongs to the face and can be produced only through it (AD 110).

Originary difference or the third severs my infinite responsibility to the other[29], and thereby makes *any* encounter whatsoever possible.

It would be misleading, then, to endow the third with any strong ethical significance, at least not in the way that has sometimes been assumed. While the third does make ethical encounters possible, it does so only in the sense that it makes *any* encounter–and more broadly any experience–possible as such. It does not, however, obligate or incline me to encounter the other in any particular way, and indeed precludes any such obligation *a priori*. While differance possibilizes any encounter, what arrives at any particular moment cannot be predicted. While the other must be understood from within the finite context of iterable marks (no creature, for example, will ever be wholly or infinitely other for me, for were this the case, it could not be encountered at all), it is also the case that no encounter with the other could take place without what Derrida calls in "My Chances" originary *destinerrance*–where there "is, in the destination ... a principle of indetermination, chance, randomness, or destinerring" (P 360). Returning to the language of "Violence and Metaphysics," that the other is accessible only from within the trace structure undermines the notion that an originary peace is founded on a pre-ontological respect for the other that one has even before one is.

Conclusion

We cannot seamlessly and without considerable problems reconceive Levinas' philosophy in a way that promotes animal ethics. Indeed, the problem of animality, coupled with Derrida's powerful challenge to Levinas' thought, reveals the untenability of Levinasian ethics itself. No creature is ever singular in the Levinasian sense; I cannot encounter any other being as a singularity. This is the case not only because no such singularity exists; even if it did, the conditions that make experience possible would prevent any such encounter from taking place. Indeed, we can only encounter the other, including "oneself," on the basis of the same trace system that makes any moment of experience possible. While it is certainly the case that the categories in terms of which I encounter another creature can be modified (and for Derrida, such modification is always and necessarily at work), one can never exceed categorization itself. As such, no creature, and indeed no entity, is ever experienced in terms of the transcendent radiance of their singular being. No such being exists, and no such experience is possible.

In addition, the way that the other is encountered cannot be thought of in terms of ethical responsibility in Levinas' sense. Despite that Derrida complicates Levinas' philosophy, he does preserve the idea that the other must be encountered otherwise. This might suggest that the ethical thrust of Levinas' philosophy survives the challenges that Derrida sets forth in the three texts we have been considering. Yet one's reception of the other cannot be described as "ethical" without trivializing what this term means. This is due to Derrida's challenge to Levinas' belief that I am "obligated" to the other because of the transcendence that expresses itself through the face. For Derrida, there is a sense in which we are committed or obligated to the other even prior to any decision or question (as we reviewed in chapter 2, we are obligated to "affirm" or say "yes" to the

other). Yet this is not an ethical obligation, but rather conditions the possibility of life carrying on as survival.

This, in turn, causes Derrida to reinterpret "the face" in light of deconstruction. For Derrida, the face (whether human or animal) can no longer be thought of as that to which I am obligated *in any particular way*, as one can only access the other through the same conditions that make any moment of experiential life possible. One does not "respond" to any other in the "present" way that Levinas presumes, but through the finitude expressed in the notion of survival. Of course, this does not prevent the possibility that we might develop new and more compassionate relationships with animals. Indeed, for Derrida, differance is what makes this possible, just as it makes the reverse possible. Yet this can be called "ethical" only in the sense that differential repetition allows for the possibility of life.

More provocatively, there is a sense in which the face can no longer be thought of as something that only "lives" possess, whether these are human, animal, or otherwise. Indeed, the way that we encounter "the other" thought of as a living, breathing creature is structurally identical to the way that we encounter *any* other more generally. More precisely, there is no essential distinction in the way one experiences a particular class of entity–whether that class is comprised of other human beings, or all cognitively complex living creatures, or a broad conception of "living beings" that includes plant life–to the way one experiences *anything at all*. Thought of in this sense, what "inspires" my "recognition" of the other is not "the face" in Levinas' sense, but interruption and difference; any encounter with any other requires interruption, on account of which the other is always received otherwise. In a certain way, the view that Levinas' philosophy can be extended to animals because they have faces is, for Derrida, extended indefinitely to any object of experience, whether that entity be a bicycle, a boulder, or a piano, but also a concept or

a text. It follows that through his reading of Levinas' work, the privileged status that Levinas accords to human beings, a status that certain animal studies scholars wish to extend to non-human creatures, simply cannot be maintained.

As a final remark, one might object that the fact that who or what has "a face" cannot be restricted to any class of entity makes experience *itself* an "ethical" phenomenon. On this account, the unconditional nature of the obligation that one has to the other (understood here to mean *any* other) is ethical in the sense that one must embrace that which is other unconditionally and without invitation. This position would preserve Levinas' point regarding the nature of the ethical encounter while leaving the issue of what or who the other is permanently indefinite. This is problematic for several reasons. First, the fact that one *must* receive the other says nothing about *how* the other is received. The fact that the other might be received as hostile or unwelcome, and the fact that it might inspire violence in the wake of its reception, are no more or any less "ethical" than any response one has to the other's arrival on this view. Second, because it fails to discriminate between different types of beings, such a position cannot make evaluative claims regarding which entities are "ethically significant" and which are not. The standard of ethics in this case *simply is* that one receives the other. Such a view can therefore provide no grounds to justify that my experience of, for example, a mannequin is any more or less "ethical" compared to my experience of a human being. If we were to value the latter over the former (though it is uncertain how this could be justified on this view), we would be committing ourselves to the view that there is something about that entity that inspires my regard, sympathy, and compassion in a way that the other does not. But if that is the case, in what sense can we regard experience *generally* to be ethical? The claim that experience is "ethical" because it allows us *the possibility* to regard and behave compassionately (though potentially abhorrently or violently) toward certain beings

that we value amounts to the claim that experience is “ethical” because it allows us to be “ethical.” Yet it is also what allows to be profoundly *un*ethical as well. Indeed, it is the simple, minimal condition for us to be and to do *anything*. I will expand on these points in the following and final chapter of this work.

Chapter 5: Derrida, Justice, and the Future of "The Animal"

I have argued that Derrida's philosophy undermines Levinas' ethics in a way that similarly subverts a prominent reading of the former's work in animal studies. For Derrida, "life" does not operate on the level of transcendence, nor can a "living" being encounter a "face" in the manner that grounds Levinas' pre-ontological ethics. On my reading of Derrida's work, we have access to the other through the same conditions that allow us to encounter anything whatsoever, conditions captured by the notion of "survival." Yet if Levinas' ethics cannot without considerable problems be used to promote an "ethics" of non-human life, is it nevertheless the case that survival suggests an ethics? After all, not only is the distinction between human and non-human life far more porous and differentiated than has been traditionally assumed, but all of "life," human or non-human, takes place as survival. This is perhaps sufficient to justify that we treat non-human lives with more sensitivity and compassion, and that we try to transform how we encounter non-human life in ways that are far less reductive. Indeed, the metaphysical vision of "the animal" is, for Derrida, driven by a passion to preserve a present understanding of human life; if "the human" is untenable, and if all life happens as non-present events of repetition, then it seems unwarranted to privilege "human" life as the principal focus of ethical concern.

If this is the case, it is not so because we have a pre-ontological responsibility toward others. As I have tried to show, Derrida's philosophy subverts the claim that there are essential differences in the way that we encounter different phenomena, which only ever takes place through "the other" that disrupts "the same." If we can develop a non-human ethics on the basis of Derrida's work, we must do so in a way that is consistent with the vision of survival that I have developed. While the conclusions that he arrives at in his deconstruction of the human/animal distinction might lead many to view non-human life differently and with more compassion, it is nevertheless

unclear whether deconstruction itself inclines us in this direction for reasons that are not themselves deconstructible. We might judge people who contribute to the startling global oppression of non-human life to be morally wanton monsters, and we might do so having read Derrida's writings on animals, but it is nevertheless unclear whether and *with what qualifications* deconstruction or survival provide grounds to justify such beliefs.

Derrida does make pronouncements that can reasonably be construed as "ethical." He is, for example, clearly sympathetic to a great many social and political causes. While he does not frame his position with respect to them in obviously normative terms, Derrida has written on a number of "real-world" causes, whether it be the horrors of apartheid, nuclear war, the death penalty, the future of Europe, and many other topics. It is also undeniable that much of Derrida's "animal" texts are at least partially inspired by a desire to treat and regard non-human creatures with more compassion. For example, Derrida's suspicion of "animal rights" is due to the inadequacy of the rights-framework for accommodating non-human life. As he writes in *For What Tomorrow…*, "rights" cannot simply and without considerable problems be attributed to non-human animals: "It is too often the case–and I believe this is a fault or weakness–that a certain concept of the juridical, that of human rights, is reproduced or extended to animals. This leads to naïve positions that one can sympathize with but that are untenable" (FT 64). Yet while Derrida is, in an ambiguous though clearly positive sense, concerned about animal welfare, does deconstruction itself proceed in a way that it is aligned with the hopes and aspirations of animal ethicists?

We must be very careful when assessing this claim. There are compelling reasons to think that Derrida's work in no way justifies the view that we should treat or regard non-human life in any particular way, whether with increased compassion or savagery. This does not necessarily

mean that we should not develop different and more caring relationships with non-human life, but only that we cannot do in a way that is fully consistent with deconstruction. We can find justification for this position by interpreting Derrida's various discussions of the aporia that structures a host of quasi-ethical notions, such as "forgiveness", "friendship," "equality," and "hospitality." On a certain reading, Derrida's thinking of the aporia should, if not commit, then *incline* us toward developing more inclusive and solicitous relationships with non-human creatures.[30] Yet this reading of Derrida's "ethical" writings is misled, and presupposes precisely what I am putting into question. As is particularly the case with his treatment of the notion of hospitality, Derrida's concern with these themes is not to justify whether we should be more or less equitable, hospitable, and so on. He rather shows how the conditions that give rise to these notions similarly prevent the possibility that we can justify any decision or judgment made on the basis of them. The reason for this stems from a similar logic that we have examined several times up to this point in connection to survival. For Derrida, experience takes place through a ceaseless negotiation with alterity; one cannot exist except through discrimination and "naming." However, one cannot exist without "the other" that comes to upset "the same." Derrida expresses this point by highlighting the tension between "calculability" and "incalculability" when we make judgments about equality or hospitality; this very tension allows life to carry on as survival. Yet crucially, Derrida does not suggest that we should be more or less hospitable to others, just as he does not encourage that we be more or less inclusive about who or what we consider our equals. He rather outlines the conditions that give rise to any performance of hospitality or any judgment about equality, while simultaneously claiming that any such performance or judgment will itself be deconstructible.

To what extent then can we say that Derrida's philosophy in any way constitutes an "ethics"? I argue that the view that deconstruction is "ethical" is not entirely wrong, but short-sighted and to a large extent misguided. To the extent that it is so, deconstruction is "ethical" in a limited and qualified sense; it intensifies differentiation, and so promotes life in the specific sense developed in this dissertation. If deconstruction is an "ethics," it is so in a way that is absolutely non-normative: deconstruction is not "for life" in the sense that it can be used to justify the claim that it is good to be alive. Rather, it unconditionally promotes "life," understood in Derrida's specific sense, wherever it takes place. Derrida thus describes deconstruction as being "opened to the other" (OH 14) or an "opening onto the future" (N 219): the temporal continuation of life happens through "the other," on account of which repetition never happens in an irreducibly mechanical and programmatic way. For this reason, Derrida sometimes implies that deconstruction is the possibility of any ethics. If an ethical "judgment" is not the thoughtless, programmed application of a rule or law (if, in other words, it happens as an "event"), then it is made through the same conditions that make any event of experiential life possible–survival or the disruptive play of differance.

Yet importantly, deconstruction does not promote the arrival of any particular future, and for essential reasons. If life happens as survival, then it only carries on as a consequence of difference and alterity–through the arrival of "the other" (what Derrida sometimes calls the *arrivant*). Yet as we saw in our discussion of Levinas, "the other" in Derrida's specific sense is not something that one can anticipate. This point is essential for Derrida: were it known prior to its arrival, the other would not serve the essential function that it has for allowing life to carry on. If the future arrived in a fully predictable way, then it would not arrive as a differential "event." Yet as a consequence, whereas deconstruction promotes the "coming of the other," and so the

continuation of life, this "other" is always a potential threat inasmuch as we simply do not know what it will be. Whereas deconstruction extends life wherever it takes place, "the other" is always a potential threat because it is unforeseen, for which reason deconstruction is a "promise [that] always risk[s] being also a threat (RP 69). Yet life carries on into the future, for Derrida, only in this way.

We must therefore be mindful of what deconstruction *does not* provide as an ethics; any standard of ethical belief is deconstructible for Derrida, a point that he makes quite explicitly when discussing the aporicity of the various quasi-ethical concepts that I will shortly discuss. However, inasmuch as it inaugurates "the other," deconstruction does not necessarily promote a more inclusive and compassionate future. Whereas it *can* do so, it might also promote a future that is far less inclusive and more violent. This is *precisely* what cannot be known. Whereas deconstruction has clearly given rise to new and interesting possibilities about how we conceive of and relate to non-human life, it is simultaneously a potential threat to the integrity of any ethical vision that it might help to bring about. Derrida does not describe deconstruction as an "ethics," then, but as the "chance" and as a "threat" to ethics itself. Accordingly, the claim that deconstruction provides philosophical grounds for regarding non-human creatures more compassionately can be maintained only by ignoring the full implications of the very "theory" that serves to cast doubt on the animal/human distinction in the first place. The view that a deconstruction of the human/animal distinction should commit or even incline us in such a direction fails to appreciate the consequences that deconstruction holds for "ethics" generally.

§ 5.1 – Equality, Forgiveness, and Survival

In his later writings, Derrida deconstructs a number of apparently ethical themes. These writings complicate concepts that are central to normative approaches to ethics: in a number of

these late texts, Derrida confronts such themes as "equality," "rights," "hospitality," and many others. Derrida's principal interest in these terms is to show how the conditions that give rise to any judgment that is made on the basis of them simultaneously renders that judgment both insufficient and deconstructable. This is so owing to the conditions that allow us to make decisions based on these principles. To show how this is the case, I will examine two of these themes: "equality" and "hospitality." Beginning with the former, in a 2002 lecture published under the title *Rogues,* Derrida discusses equality, and identifies two criteria which, while they are mutually necessary for one to make judgments about who or what is equal, are simultaneously in conflict with one another. To use the language of this work, they are "autoimmune." The first such criterion is "equality as calculation": when, for example, we claim that all persons have rights, we have identified a finite community of individuals who we judge to be equal despite the differences that exist between them. Such a community, however, is by definition exclusive; for example, the notion of an equal "right" presupposes that certain beings though not others possess them, which minimally requires discrimination. Hence, if one is judged equal because she is, for example, a French citizen or a union member, this is so because we value certain features that he or she possesses. Similarly, if we believe that all of "life" is in some sense equal, this might imply that there is something valuable about each and every living being, for which reason they should be regarded equally. Yet for Derrida, the fact that there are criteria for whether beings are equal conflicts with the "spirit" that motivates us to make judgments on the basis of that principle: equality operates in such a way that the many differences that invariably distinguish certain beings are considered irrelevant. In this sense, judgments motivated by the principle of equality are at once conditional (i.e., are necessarily exclusive and discriminatory) even while they are "by essence unconditional, indivisible, heterogeneous to calculation and to measure" (R 48).

There is therefore a tension between "conditional" and "unconditional" equality: equality demands discrimination and the institution of limits, which goes contrary to unconditional equality, according to which the many differences that separate certain beings are considered immaterial. As Derrida writes, unconditional equality is "the incommensurable, which, itself and by definition, excludes all given criteria, all calculable rules, all measure" (R 52). Yet as was the case when we discussed transcendence in Levinas, conditionality is required in order for the unconditional to be expressed, and *vice versa*. As Derrida writes, unconditional equality "gets determined and becomes nameable, given some degree of semantic stability, only with the imposition of [...] the technique of equality, justice in the sense of calculable right or law" (R 52). In the case of ethics, this means that even while the differences between us are irrelevant as far as our moral worth is concerned, this is nevertheless discriminatory–i.e., it isolates a certain sphere of beings as worthy of ethical concern. At the same time, such discrimination is necessary for any expression of equality to be affirmed. The selection and exclusion involved in the "technique" of conditional equality is necessary for any judgments about equality to be made: "This technique is also the chance for the incommensurable, it is what gives access to it" (R 53). Yet given the antinomy between these two visions of equality, there are no principled ways to negotiate the tension that exists between them to arrive at a responsible decision: "Calculable measure [...] gives access to the incalculable and the incommensurable, an access that remains necessarily undecided between the calculable and the incalculable–and that is the aporia" (R 52). "Ethical" decisions involving equality are therefore "undecidable"; while they require discrimination and exclusion, this fact conflicts with the vision of equality in the name of which they are made. The absence of any definitive standard that would determine in advance which ethical decisions are correct and which are not is, to use Derrida's terminology, both the "chance" and the "risk" of ethics: it allows

for the possibility of a more inclusive, though also a less inclusive, future: “This chance is always given as an autoimmune threat. For calculating technique obviously destroys or neutralizes the incommensurable singularity to which it gives effective access” (R 53).

Hence, while equality is undecidable, its being undecidable is what allows us to make decisions having to do with equality. However, this in no way suggests that we be more or less inclusive when deciding who or what is equal: while Derrida does not argue that the belief that humans alone are beings worthy of ethical concern is “arbitrary” (it is based on a long and troubled history), it nevertheless cannot be justified in any rigorously defensible way. Indeed, no affirmation regarding equality could be. Before expanding on this claim, I will turn to *Of Hospitality*, a text in which this same tension is at play whenever we extend to others hospitality or recognition generally. As with equality, there is a tension between two necessary but contradictory laws that structure acts of hospitality. The first of these is “absolute” or “unconditional” hospitality: what motivates any performance of hospitality is a demand to accept others unconditionally and without any qualification. On the other hand, one cannot in principle extend hospitability to the absolutely other: whether one grants the other hospitality is always conditional and subject to qualifications. When one encounters another person, one minimally identifies who she or he is, which itself raises the possibility that they might be excluded or put out. Any decision of hospitality therefore transgresses itself by necessarily involving discrimination and the possibility of exclusion: “It is as though hospitality were the impossible: as though the law of hospitality defined this very impossibility” (H 76). Accordingly, the unconditional law of hospitality is always contravened whenever any law, right, or duty is instituted on the basis of it. In other words, there is an aporia between “[t]he law of unconditional

hospitality ... and on the other hand, the laws (in the plural), those rights and duties that are always conditioned and conditional" (H 77).

The aporia structuring hospitality is therefore similar to the one identified with equality: while both unconditional hospitality and unconditional equality entreat that we welcome the absolute other, we are nevertheless always compelled to identify and potentially reject that other, which effaces the demand that I accept them unconditionally. Why is this important?

At the very least, Derrida suggests that there is no absolute criterion to justify what it means to behave "ethically": "there is no given criterion, no assured rule, no incontestable unit of calculation, no trustworthy and natural mediating schema to regulate this calculation of the incalculable and this common or universal measure of the incommensurable" (R 53). Yet the consequences of "undecidability" are graver than this: not only do we not have secure criteria for how we should make decisions based on these principles, but there is no non-deconstructable reason to be *inclined* toward a more or less inclusive future. While I might agree with the aspirations of animal ethicists, the tension on the basis of which I believe, for example, that all or some animals are "equal" to me (or indeed are of greater "ethical" worth than a stone or an apple) means that any such decision is deconstructible. However, while the aporia that Derrida identifies at the heart of ethical decision-making permits the possibility of severely limiting those whom we might identify as "equal," it also gives rise to the possibility of a more sensitive, inclusive future. Thus, speaking about the possibility of extending our ethical responsibility outside of the boundaries of citizenship, Derrida writes:

> [D]oes this measure of the immeasurable ... end at citizenship, and thus at the borders of the nation-state? Or must we extend it to the whole world of singularities, to the whole world of humans assumed to be like me, my compeers–or else, even further, to all non-human living beings, or again, even beyond that, to all the non-living, to their memory, spectral or otherwise, to their to-come (R 53).

This "measure of the immeasurable" is thus what allows us to alter the standards according to which we make "ethical" judgments, while simultaneously undermining the possibility that we can rigorously justify the positions we take regarding who or what is worthy of our concern.

If these arguments sound familiar, this is because the aporia that structures equality and hospitality is the same tension that allows life to carry on as survival. This explains why Derrida so often returns to the theme of hospitality in his work: he is concerned with the conditions that allow "the other" to arrive. "The other" is *necessary* for life to carry on, even while this commits us to reimagine life as survival. Such being the case, we exist only to the extent that we are hospitable. For this reason, Derrida describes "a hospitality without reserve, which is nevertheless the condition of the event" (SM 82). Yet this unconditional hospitality is not one where we can let "anyone" or "anything" in, and for reasons explored in our critique of Levinas: one must identify and discriminate in order for the other to appear at all. This is not to say that an active agency determines in advance what other arrives, but only that it must arrive as an identifiable mark, which is the condition for my being able to receive it at all. In *Of Hospitality*, Derrida makes this point in connection to the "foreigner" who, being foreign, is imperfectly familiar with the language, customs, and laws that are required to speak in her own defense. Indeed, this is "where the question of hospitality begins: must we ask the foreigner to understand us, to speak our language, in all senses of this term, in all its possible extensions, before being able and so as to be able to welcome him into our country" (OH 15). It is precisely this uncertainty that renders the foreigner foreign, for were she perfectly familiar with the language and customs of the country where she resides, there would be little to distinguish her from that country's native citizens. However, in order to receive the other's care, the foreigner must enter into a contract, the terms and conditions of which are in large part determined by that other whose hospitality she seeks. Such conditions might

include, for example, possession of a proper name: "this foreigner ... is someone with whom, to receive him, you begin by asking his name; you enjoin him to state and to guarantee his identity, as you would a witness before a court" (OH 27). This precondition relates to the first law of hospitality discussed above: one never offers hospitality to the absolute other–that is, one cannot accept the other unconditionally. In order to exercise hospitality, one must discriminate. Yet what Derrida's discussion of the foreigner reveals is that in order to decide on whether or not to accept the other into one's care, the foreigner must inspire recognition in such a way that her fate becomes an issue to begin with. Hence, in order for me to make the decision to accept or reject the other, she must correspond to me in such a way that I can recognize her as such. For Derrida, this is not only a precondition for "ethics," but a requirement for the arrival of any other as an "event."

Yet importantly, and as was the case with our discussion of Levinas, there is no prior standard or inclination that urges us towards a more inclusive future *vis-à-vis* non-human life, just as there is no pre-ontological ethics that might ground the claim that we are beholden to the face. Whereas the claim that survival takes place as hospitality might suggest that we are in some sense irreducibly "ethical," this would misunderstand Derrida's claim: whereas we are open to "the other," this is not to be misunderstood as an openness to or inclination to a particular kind of other–for example, to another vision of "the animal." It is rather a general claim about the possibility of any future arriving as such. Yet the view that we should be more open or sensitive to non-human life simply cannot be grounded in Derrida's philosophy.

§ 5.2 – Ethics and the Affirmation of Life

If my reading of the aporia is right, then we cannot derive a normative ethics based on Derrida's thought. At best, Derrida outlines the conditions that allow us to make decisions on the basis of such principles as hospitality, equality, or forgiveness, while suggesting that any judgment

involving them will be deconstructible. It is nevertheless possible that deconstruction operates in a way that promotes more complex, inclusive relationships with non-human life. Yet we must be cautious in evaluating this claim. On the one hand, deconstruction certainly can have this effect. Indeed, Derrida's entire project is a thoroughgoing attempt to deconstruct a vision of human life as living presence, which, on his account, has always been partially sustained through an uneasy relationship with a metaphysical imagining of non-human life. Inasmuch as the human/animal distinction proves deconstructible, we might conclude that it is aligned with the aspirations of animal ethicists. Yet in my view, this misunderstands deconstruction: the notion that it has the *potential* to increase our sensitivity toward non-human life does not mean that the conclusions that we derive from deconstruction are not themselves deconstructable.

To the extent that deconstruction is an "ethics," it is so only in the sense that it is "against" the annihilation of difference. This explains Derrida's claim that deconstruction is "for life," though with a specific definition of life in mind. Derrida's vision of "life" is not to be confused simply as "human" or "animal" life; it is rather the non-present happening of differential repetition wherever this occurs. Accordingly, Derrida is aligned with "life" against the extirpation of difference. With this understanding of "life" in mind, Derrida writes that "deconstruction is always on the side of the yes, on the side of the affirmation of life. Everything I say … about survival as a complication of the opposition life/death proceeds in me from an unconditional affirmation of life" (LF 52). To the extent that this is an ethical claim, it is at the very least non-normative: deconstruction allows for the arrival of "the other" in a way that interrupts "death" or "the same." Accordingly, if deconstruction constitutes an ethics, it is so only in the sense that it accelerates differentiation. As he claims in "The Deconstruction of Actuality":

> The coming of the event is what cannot and should not be prevented; it is another name for the future itself. This does not mean that it is good–good in itself–for everything or anything

> to arrive; it is not that one should give up trying to prevent certain things from coming to pass (without which there would be no decision, no responsibility, ethics, or politics). But one should only ever oppose events that one thinks will block the future or that bring death with them: events that would put an end to the possibility of the event, to the affirmative opening to the coming of the other (N 95).

Derrida, and apparently deconstruction, is therefore aligned with the promotion of difference against the extirpation of life understood as absolute non-differentiation. Yet what follows from this claim? On the surface, it might lend credence to the view that deconstruction promotes pluralism, diversity, and increased sensitivity to that which is other. Yet Derrida himself never explicitly endorses this reading of his work. While in the above passage Derrida claims that it is not good for "anything to arrive," this is not a claim that he can rigorously defend.

Indeed, in other writings on the theme of "the promise" and the "perhaps," Derrida simultaneously describes deconstruction as a chance and a threat, as when he writes that the "promise always risk[s] being also a threat" (RP 69). We have already seen why this is the case: "the other" is not something known prior to its arrival. Yet while deconstruction promotes the coming of the other, this "other" is always a potential threat inasmuch it is unknown. While Derrida writes that he "would always prefer to prefer the promise" (RP 69), this is not in the name of a more inclusive future or anything else. It rather expresses a "commitment" to "the other": while potentially threatening, it is only through "the other" that life carries on. With this vision of "life" as survival in mind, Derrida challenges the claim that deconstruction is destructive. This criticism fails to appreciate the role that indeterminacy and risk–in other words, "the other"–play in the possibility of life. In this sense, deconstruction is "productive" even while we cannot foresee where it will lead. To use Derrida's terminology, deconstruction is an "affirmation of the future or an opening onto the future" (N 219). This "productive destructiveness" is required for any future to

arrive, which only happens as a "devastating upheaval, a sort of revolution that cannot proceed without destruction, without separation or interruption, or without fidelity" (N 219).

Yet while we "cannot and should not" prevent the "event" so as to avert the annihilation of life, this is not in the name of any particular future–for example one that is radically inclusive or pluralistic. Derrida does not make any such claim, and with good reason: the view that we should commit ourselves to the "maximization" of differences in the name of "life" or against "death" presupposes that these can serve as standards for or against which we can strive. In contrast to Leonard Lawlor's claim that we must strive against "the worst" in favor of the maximization of difference, neither "life" (understood as a plenitude) nor "death" can serve as measures of value: neither are conceivable as such, nor can one make any calculation with respect to them. This is so because there is no measure between something (*anything*, any existent or complex of existents) and absence or death. Because neither life nor death are measurable, they cannot serve as criteria, and so cannot be used to justify the claim that we must accelerate the proliferation of difference. Accordingly, the view that deconstruction itself inclines us to a more inclusive future is incorrect. It rather allows "the other," understood as the absolutely unanticipated and inaugural, passage. Should "the other" arrive, which is the minimal condition for "life" to carry on, there is no way to predict how it will arrive or what it portends.

In addition, the view that "the other" understood in Derrida's sense is "desirable" is itself paradoxical. This presupposes that one has already identified the arrival of what's other, and has identified it as valuable. Yet this misunderstands what the other is and how it functions in Derrida's writings. Alterity is generally required for any event to take place, and so, in a certain sense, cannot not be desired. We have already encountered this claim when discussing the yes of double-affirmation in chapter 2, whose logic is closely allied to Derrida's thinking about what he terms

"the messianic" and the "arrivant." Regarding the former term, Derrida argues that any thought, desire, or experience, understood as "events," can only take place through an originary receptivity to alterity that takes the form of an address. Without this, nothing resembling subjective life would be possible. Derrida discusses "the messianic" thus:

> For there to be an event and a history, a 'come' must be open and addressed to someone, to someone else whom I cannot and must not determine in advance–not as subject, self, consciousness, or even as animal, God or person, man or woman, living or nonliving (one must be able to call a specter, to appeal to it) ... The one, whoever it is to whom 'come' is said, cannot let him/herself be determined in advance (N 94).

Yet "the messianic," like "affirmation," is not, or is not simply, religious or ethical, but is rather minimally necessary for any event. As Derrida writes in *Spectres of Marx*, every experience of the present–of the "here-now"–is always an experience of non-presence that calls and anticipates the arrival of the other from the future. As was the case in our discussion of the "yes," this "call" takes place in the form of a promise or a pledge to be repeated, which opens the possibility of the "future-to-come" as a "call from the other." The messianic, then, is always to come but never actually arrives.

Hence, if I could anticipate this other that I am nevertheless open to, it would not be other, and so would not play the role that Derrida believes is required for the happening of each new moment of experience. Because "the other" is other in this strong, indeed unfathomable sense, it cannot be thought of as "good" prior to its arrival, and so cannot valued as such. This is the case even though it is apparently required for our being able to value and desire anything generally. In *Spectres of Marx*, Derrida argues that while the messianic is what makes any experience or desire possible, it does not "call" to any definable or foreseeable thing; rather, the messianic "[m]ark[s] any opening to the event and to the future as such, it therefore conditions the interest in and not the indifference to anything whatsoever, to all content in general. Without it, there would be neither

intention, nor need, nor desire, and so on" (SM 92). As Derrida states earlier in this text, the messianic is not a thinking of a future utopia, but rather a "thinking of the other and of the event to come" (SM 74). Yet the view that we might desire "the other" for any particular reason–say, with a view to creating a more diverse and pluralistic world–already presupposes that we've at least partially identified it and assessed its effect on the future. Yet this is precisely what one *cannot do*:

> The relation to the other … is without horizon. It is what I call the messianic; the messianic can arrive at any moment, no one can see it coming, can see how it should come, or have forewarning of it. The relation to the other is the absence of horizon, of anticipation, it is the relation to the future that is paradoxically without anticipation, there where the alterity of the other is an absolute surprise (N 242).

One can, of course, hope for a better future–for example, can desire a more diverse or inclusive world–but one cannot do so because she values otherness and difference as such: like death, these cannot be clearly valued or thought. The view that we can value alterity, otherness, or difference fundamentally mistakes what Derrida means by these terms.

Derrida makes similar arguments when he writes about the *arrivant*: "The arrivant must be absolutely other, other than the one I expect not to expect, that I do not expect, an expectation constituted by nonexpectation, without what in philosophy is called a horizon of expectation, when a certain knowledge still anticipates and prepares in advance" (N 96). An "event" only takes place through an impossible and paradoxical relation between the calculable and predictable, on the one hand, and the absolutely other that exceeds the calculable system that it punctures:

> [I]f an event is only possible, in the classic sense of this word, if it fits in with conditions of possibility, if it only makes explicit, unveils, reveals, or accomplishes that which was already possible, then it is no longer an event. For an event to take place, for it to be possible, it has to be, as event, as invention, the coming of the impossible (PM 90).

For Derrida, "ethics" is only possible owing to this logic of the event: the possibility for any "ethics," like the possibility of any sign of life, requires alterity. As Derrida suggests in *The Beast*

and The Sovereign, for example, "the same" cannot operate as the basis of ethical responsibility, but is at best merely calculated response, "a dogmatic slumber" (BSi 155). For any "ethical" judgment or belief to happen, this is only on account of those conditions that make any moment of life possible: "the other." As Derrida writes: "The unrecognizable ... is the beginning of ethics, of the Law, and not of the human. So long as there is recognisability and fellow, ethics is dormant ... So long as it remains human, among men, ethics remains dogmatic, narcissistic, and not yet thinking" (BSi 155). Accordingly, it is the unrecognizable and un-appropriable otherness of the other that is the basis of ethical responsibility to the extent that this can be said to exist: "the 'unrecognizable' is the awakening. It is what awakens, the very experience of being awake" (BSi 155).

I have argued that the view that deconstruction inclines us towards a more sympathetic and inclusive future presupposes what one will find there. Yet Derrida is quite explicit that "the other" is precisely what cannot be known, and might arrive as the opposite of what one presently anticipates, hopes for, or desires. However, this is not to say that Derrida does not, in a certain sense, value "difference"; it is only that his reasons for valuing it are highly specific: "the other" is necessary for any future to arrive even while its arrival might lead to the utter destruction of life itself. Indeed, for Derrida, this threat is irreducible: if the other is, like death, unknown and utterly unpredictable, there is no certainty that it will not bring death with it. The view that the "other" is desirable, then, can only be the case in the limited sense that it possibilizes any event (ethical or otherwise). This is not to say that we do not "invite," in some sense, "the other"; such an invitation is essential for any event of experience, and takes place in a way prior to any conscious agency. But as Derrida also makes clear, this address is to the other whose identity is necessarily unknown:

> 'Come' is said to the other, to others who are not yet defined as persons, subjects, or equals (at least in the sense of calculable equality). Only if there is this 'come' can there be an

> experience of the coming, of the event, of what arrives and therefore of what, because it comes from the other, cannot be anticipated. And there is no horizon of expectation for this messianic prior to messianism. If there were a horizon of expectation, of anticipation, of programmation, there would be neither event nor history (N 94).

For Derrida, then, we always and at all times are receptive to and anticipate the future–say yes to it–but paradoxically anticipate it as what is completely unanticipatable. In order for an event to come to pass, there must be a "'coming,' the venire, the event of a novelty that must surprise, because at the moment when it comes about, there could be no statute, no status, ready and waiting to reduce it to the same" (Pi 24). Indeed, as early as *Of Grammatology*, Derrida stresses this threatening aspect of the future as what potentially might frustrate one's hopes to sustain what one presently is: "The future can only be anticipated in the form of an absolute danger. It is that which breaks absolutely with constituted normality and can only be proclaimed, presented, as a sort of monstrosity" (OG 5). The future, as other, is what offers the chance for the event to occur, while also threatening its continued existence.

§ 5.2.1 "Justice" and Deconstruction

With this notion of "the other" in mind, we can understand the sometimes misunderstood claim that deconstruction is "justice." This claim is made most emphatically in "Force of Law," though Derrida treats "justice" in a number of different works.[31] Famously, Derrida writes that the "deconstructible structure of law … insures the possibility of deconstruction. Justice in itself, if such a thing exists, outside or beyond the law, is not deconstructible. No more than deconstruction itself, if such a thing exists. Deconstruction is justice" (FL 945). He further states: "Deconstruction, while seeming not to 'address' the problem of justice, has done nothing but address it" (FL 945). Claims such as these understandably give rise to the impression that there is an "ethical" force at work in deconstruction, one that perhaps inclines us towards a certain future, a point that goes

contrary to the account I have developed. Yet as is also the case with "the messianic," this is not Derrida's claim. His point is not simply that "justice" does not involve the judicious application of pre-established rules, though this is also the case. As is well known, Derrida argues that justice effaces justice itself, as there is no moment of judgment or decision to confirm that a ruling is in fact just. As he also writes in *Typewriter Ribbon*, justice is precisely what upsets the law, and is in this sense "perjury" and an "unjust justice" (TR 125). Yet the broader conception of justice that Derrida develops suggests that it is a condition for the possibility of "life" as survival; more exactly, justice is what permits the "coming of the other."

Derrida describes deconstruction in connection to the "law" whose institution is necessarily violent. As he was aware, the Proto-Indo-European etymology of "law" and the French "loi" is *leg*, "to lie, to be at rest" (in English, "law" derives more immediately from the Old Norse *lag*, that is, a thing that is fixed or laid down). In this connection, Derrida writes in "Envois" that "the law" is itself produced through differance, which forever renders it unstable: "The law has often been considered as that which poses, posits itself, and gathers itself up in composition" (PI 128). It is also in this connection that Derrida writes that the "[i]njustice of this justice can concentrate its violence in the very constitution of the *One* and of the *Unique*. … The Gathering into itself of the One is never without violence, nor is the self-affirmation of the Unique, the law of the archontic" (AF 77). As this passage suggests, for any apparently unified moment to arrive, there must be "justice" understood as the interruption and destabilization of the law through "the other." For this reason, Derrida describes justice as irreducible and non-deconstructable:

> A deconstructive thinking, the one that matters to me here, has always pointed out … the undeconstructibility of a certain idea of justice (dissociated here from laws). Such a thinking cannot operate without justifying the principle of a radical and interminable, infinite (both theoretical and practical, as one used to say) critique. This critique belongs to the movement of an experience open to the absolute future of what is coming, that is to

> say, a necessarily indeterminate, abstract, desert-like experience that is confided, exposed, given up to its waiting for the other and for the event (SM 112).

The account that Derrida develops over the course of "Force of Law" posits justice as an "urgent" force–a "moment of urgency and precipitation" (FL 969)–on account of which any encounter with "the other" can take place. Yet this should not be interpreted necessarily as a moment of "ethical" urgency, but as the explosive and, for Derrida, "impossible"[32] happening of any event. Justice for Derrida is what allows an opening to the other in a way that upsets the "law" understood as any fixed, undifferentiated framework. Yet the belief that justice is any more (or less) involved in "ethical" decision-making as it is in any other moment of experience misunderstands the general involvement of "justice" anywhere where an event occurs. Justice, which Derrida claims is identical to deconstruction and is involved in the coming of any future, allows the other passage in such a way that an "event" might occur. In this sense, it is allied to the themes the "messianic" and the "arrivant," as well as "double-affirmation" and the "yes" explicated in chapter 2. As Derrida writes: "In the end, where will deconstruction find its force, its movement or its motivation if not in this always unsatisfied appeal, beyond the given determinations of what we call, in determined contexts, justice, the possibility of justice?" (FL 957).

Hence, neither deconstruction nor "justice" are, for Derrida, "ethical" except in the sense that they render any moment of "life" possible. When, for example, Derrida asks "to whom we should act justly" in *Specters of Marx*, he is not simply saying that we must show justice to present or future human beings, but to a future that has not yet arrived–that is, a future that remains nebulous and whose boundaries are forever undetermined. If life only carries forward through differentiation and deferral, then "justice" (or deconstruction) allows for this possibility, even while what arrives cannot be known in principle. Wherever "justice" is absent, life understood as survival expires. This explains Derrida's somewhat enigmatic claim that every moment of one's

life involves "a justice which, beyond right or law, rises up in the very respect owed to whoever is not, no longer or not yet, living, presently living" (SM 121). It follows, then, that justice is tied to Derrida's thinking of the "event," which, as we have seen, renders problematic the notion of a perfectly autonomous subject beyond death, alterity, and non-presence. With this understanding of justice in mind, he proceeds through *Spectres of Marx* to show its involvement in futurity and the messianic promise. As Derrida writes, this "different thinking of the just" (OT 57) produces *any* event, including those that are unimaginably violent, cruel, or savage.

Justice, then, is a requirement for the possibility of any future whatever that future might be. Yet if this is the case, then the view that "justice" is for Derrida an ethical notion mistakes how he uses this term: "justice" is ethical only to the extent that it is the possibility of any event or sign of life. Yet as I stressed in the previous subsection, deconstruction or "justice" is both a "threat" and a "chance": whereas it is the minimal condition for life to carry on, there is no way to determine what will occur. "The other" is at once what allows something to emerge and what potentially threatens it with extinction and death.

Conclusion

I have argued that deconstruction can be construed as an ethics only in a very specific sense. Whereas deconstruction (or "justice") interrupts "the same" in such a way that "the event" might happen, it provides no grounds for claiming that any *particular* event is better or worse than any other. It is rather what allows life, understood as survival, to *perhaps* carry on: "If deconstruction were a destruction, nothing would be possible any longer. The least desire, the least language would be impossible" (N 16). As we have seen, Derrida's approach has always been to show how contamination and difference are necessary for any "life" to survive into the future:

"Without contamination we would have no opening or chance. Contamination is not only to be assumed or affirmed: it is the very possibility of affirmation in the first place" (N 248). Indeed, as early as *Of Grammatology*, Derrida claims that the condition for *anything* to appear frustrates its full and complete manifestation in the present:

> Something promises itself as it escapes, gives itself as it moves away, and strictly speaking it cannot even be called presence. Such is the constraint of the supplement, such, exceeding all the language of metaphysics, is this structure 'almost inconceivable to reason.' Almost inconceivable: simple irrationality, the opposite of reason, are less irritating and waylaying for classical logic. The supplement is maddening because it is neither presence nor absence (OG 154).

As I have argued, virtually everything that Derrida has written, including his various writings on "the animal," unveil the conditions that allow life to emerge: with each of the texts and themes that Derrida deconstructs, he shows how corruptibility, contamination, and radical finitude are required for anything to live-on. Yet inasmuch as this constitutes an "ethics," it is not one that compels or inclines us toward any future. It follows, therefore, that whereas Derrida's writings on animality reveal exciting and productive insights about human/animal difference, we cannot look to deconstruction to support any particular vision of non-human ethics. "Justice" or deconstruction is required for any sign of life, and *a fortiori* for any "ethical" vision or decision; it is simultaneously what threatens both.

Conclusion

The principal questions that this dissertation answers are quite simple: why does Derrida dwell on "the animal" throughout his many writings? Can his deconstruction of this theme be explained in connection to his overall philosophical project? If so, how might this complicate the view that Derrida's thought promotes a vision of non-human ethics? These questions can only be answered comprehensively if we are first clear about the role that human/animal difference plays in Derrida's reading of the philosophical tradition. Whereas it is undoubtedly the case that Derrida is sensitive to the suffering of non-human lives, and whereas this might partially explain his interest in the human/animal distinction, there are complex reasons for why he focuses on animal life that can only be understood in terms of his overall project. Furthermore, it is only by understanding how "the animal" functions in Derrida's writings that we can properly assess the ethical implications of his deconstruction of human/animal difference. While Derrida does undermine the long-held belief that essential differences distinguish humans and animals, I have argued that the reasons for *why* this is the case complicates the view that his philosophy is aligned with a non-human ethics.

In answering these questions, I have argued that the core of Derrida's thought is to expose how the conditions that allow any creature to live undermine longstanding assumptions about human subjectivity. Since his earliest writings, Derrida deconstructs a specific, "metaphysical" imagining of human consciousness as "living presence"–the view that experience happens presently to beings who are present to themselves. For Derrida, maintaining this understanding of human subjectivity has motivated philosophy since Plato, though it is only ever sustained in ways that are strained and deconstructable. This is so because the very things that are thought to be foreign to human subjective life–in particular, non-presence, technicity, passivity, and death–are

required for experience to carry on happening. Importantly, the fact that philosophers repeatedly describe human consciousness in terms of presence is not simply an error. It is rather an effort to preserve the living present against the threat that everything opposed to presence plays in its very possibility.

Having shown why living presence is deconstructable, I have tried to describe a vision of "life" that is consistent with Derrida's thought. Following his work on Blanchot, I have termed this "survival." Contrary to the view that consciousness happens presently for self-identical agents, Derrida recasts experience as events of differential repetition. As a consequence, experience is undeniably, though not *irreducibly*, passive, mechanical, and temporally non-present. To the extent that "we" are not irreducibly these things, this is not owing to some vital agency that underlies and governs the goings-on of experience. It is rather due to "the other": for Derrida, no living moment happens as the seamless, unaffected repetition of past events; rather, experience happens as *differential* repetition. This places into question just what "the self" for whom experience happens is. For Derrida, while one only exists as the repetition of iterable marks, no sign emerges in a temporal present, and every sign must be negotiated anew in a way that is severed from any animating intention. From this emerges a vision of "the self" that is profoundly, radically finite: whereas one *is* only as the citation of iterable marks, those marks are ceaselessly being arrested from "us" without however having truly belonged.

The animal's role in Derrida's work has to be understood in terms of his deconstruction of living presence. It is indisputable that philosophers have traditionally maintained that "animals" are inferior to human beings. Yet Derrida's account for *why* human/animal difference is so often affirmed, *why* it proves deconstructable, and *how* it is affirmed *despite* being deconstructable is quite complex. As I have argued, the importance of the human/animal distinction in Derrida's

thought is not simply that it upholds the relative superiority of human beings. It rather sustains a specific, metaphysical imagining of human subjectivity, one that Derrida interrogates in virtually all of his writings. For Derrida, "the animal"–more exactly, what this figure has been made to represent–upholds a conceptuality that casts humans as self-present subjects. In contrast to human beings, animals are utterly instinctual, reactional beings who cannot authentically apprehend their world. Yet while "the animal" has been crucial for sustaining the living present proper to human life, "the animal" has always been deconstructable. While the drive to affirm human/animal difference emerges from what I have described as a passion to preserve presence, this is done by externalizing those very features without which no life could carry on.

The purpose of Derrida's treatment of "the animal" in his later works is therefore not only to conflate the boundaries between human and non-human creatures. His analyses certainly have this effect, in particular through his questioning of the supposed purity of uniquely "human" characteristic. Yet taken alone, this conclusion perhaps misunderstands what ultimately determines the human/animal distinction. Derrida's claim is not that humans are more animalistic, or that animals are more human, than has previously been acknowledged by philosophers. It is rather that the deconstruction of this distinction gives way to a revised understanding of life as survival, one that recasts organic life as undeniably, though not irreducibly, passive, mechanical, and non-present.

If correct, this reading of Derrida's work is a significant contribution to how we should think about his philosophy. At the very least, it frames Derrida's thinking about "the animal" and human/animal difference in a way that does justice to the complexities of his thought. Beyond this, it reimagines Derrida's philosophy as a philosophy of "life," though one that undermines traditional notions concerning what this enigmatic word means. Yet as I mentioned in my

introduction, my primary aim when first developing this project was to assess the ethical potential that Derrida's thought has for non-human ethics. On a personal note, the shocking suffering that non-human lives are made to endure, as well as the environmental impact of meat and dairy consumption, remain issues that deeply trouble me; indeed, these concerns were what initially led me to develop this dissertation. Yet far from being aligned with the hopes and aspirations that I had when beginning this project, the reading that I have developed of Derrida's thought has led me to conclude that it cannot consistently be used to promote a non-human ethics. While I, like many others, regarded Derrida's later writings as a source of inspiration for reimagining non-human ethics, it became apparent that the reasons why human/animal difference is deconstructable also undermines the claim that Derrida's thought promotes a post-human ethics.

Hence, whereas I believe that I have outlined a novel and compelling critique of the possibility of a Derridean ethics of non-human life, developing this critique was not my initial objective–far from it. Nevertheless, it is difficult to see how the conclusions that I have arrived at can be avoided. As I have argued, the common view that Derrida's thought is aligned with a post-human ethics rests on a broadly Levinasean reading of his work. On this view, Derrida undermines Levinas' anthropocentrism while retaining the core of his ethics. Yet the account of survival that I have developed poses considerable problems to the claim that we, or any creature, is *responsive* in the way that grounds Levinas' ethics. If, as I maintain, one does not live, but survives, this challenges both the claim that any creature is a "singularity," as well as the proposition that *any* other can be encountered in the transcendent, epiphanic sense that Levinas claims we do. In the end, I have argued that to the extent that we can derive an "ethics" that is consistent with Derrida's philosophy, this is so only in the sense that deconstruction promotes "life" understood as differential repetition. However, this does not mean that deconstruction promotes more sensitive,

concerned relationships among creatures. It is possible that it *might* do so, though it might inaugurate a future that is more hostile and violent. Accordingly, I maintain that if we are being consistent, it is misguided to claim that Derrida's thought promotes a post-human ethics.

Notes

[1] The extent to which he treats this distinction is startling: speech/writing features prominently in "Force and Signification," *Monolingualism of the Other*, *Resistances to Psychoanalysis, Of Grammatology, Limited Inc*, "Plato's Pharmacy," each of the essays in *Parages, Speech and Phenomena*, "The Pit and the Pyramid," *Memoires for Paul de Man, The Archeology of the Frivolous*, and many others.

[2] As Derrida writes in "The Deconstruction of Actuality": "The arrivant must be absolutely other, other than the one I expect not to expect, that I do not expect, an expectation constituted by nonexpectation, without what in philosophy is called a horizon of expectation, when a certain knowledge still anticipates and prepares in advance" (N 96). Elsewhere, Derrida writes that an "event" of experience only takes place on the basis an impossible and paradoxical relation between the calculable and predictable, on the one hand, and the absolutely "other" that exceeds the calculable system that it punctures:

> [I]f an event is only possible, in the classic sense of this word, if it fits in with conditions of possibility, if it only makes explicit, unveils, reveals, or accomplishes that which was already possible, then it is no longer an event. For an event to take place, for it to be possible, it has to be, as event, as invention, the coming of the impossible (PM 90).

Derrida makes a similar claim when discussing the theme "invention" as the inauguration or coming into being of the "new." As he writes in "Phyche: Invention of the Other," an invention cannot be beyond the general context within which it is created. To this extent, every invention is subject to the general law of repetition: it cannot be brought into being except through existing iterable marks. In addition, for any invention to continue to exist, it must be accessible – i.e. repeatable – within that same context. Accordingly, an invention is invented ...

> … only if repetition, generality, common availability, and thus publicity are introduced and promised in the structure of the first time. … We must be able to recount [an invention] and to render an account of it in accord with the principle of reason. This iterability is marked, and thus remarked, at the origin of the inventive foundation; it constitutes it" (Pi 34).

[3] In another of his treatments of psychoanalysis, Derrida discusses "the archive" in *Resistances to Psychoanalysis*, as well as in *Eyes of the University: Right to Philosophy*, *Typewriter Ribbon*, and less extensively in a wide number of other texts.

[4] In an article on Cowbird parasitism, Spencer Sealy observes that Brown-headed Cowbirds will often remove the eggs from the nests of Yellow Warblers and replace them with their own. The Warbler will then care for those eggs without knowing that they are not theirs. Blue Jays, meanwhile, have a particular scream that resembles the screams of Red-shouldered Hawks so closely that "one cannot be sure of the identity of these two birds by the voice alone" (Townsend 1924). This is done in order to drive other creatures away from feeders. Furthermore, male Cuttlefish have been observed concealing themselves as female in order to surreptitiously fertilize eggs. As Mark Norman writes: "while investigating male mate-guarding behaviour during spawning, we repeatedly observed male-female pairs being shadowed at close proximity by what appeared to be a second female. … However, on occasions when the large male of the pair was engaged in display or physical combat with other large males, the satellite individual frequently moved towards the female and attempted to mate with her, often with success" (Norman et al., 1348).

[5] In her 1995 *Reflections of Eden*, Birutė Galdikas makes the following observation about TP, a male orangutan: "The object of TP's adoration was Priscilla … I thought that TP would have chosen a more comely female. But … TP was smitten with her. He couldn't take his eyes off her. He didn't even bother to eat, so enthralled was he by her balding charms" (Galdikas 1995). Describing the apparent romantic intimacy between two right whales, Marc Bekoff writes: "Soon Butch and Aphro were slowly caressing. Then they rolled together and embraced, locking flippers, before rolling back again. For perhaps three minutes, the two southern right whales lay side-by-side, ejecting water through their blow holes. The cetaceans then swam off, touching, surfacing and diving in unison" (Bekoff 2009).

[6] As early as 1741, Georg Stellar observed how a now extinct type of sirenian (or sea cow) were monogamous (Marsh 2011). As Devra Kleiman notes, while monogamy is rather rare among mammals, it is far more common among birds: "Whereas more than 90 per cent of all bird species are monogamous" (Lack, 1968), the re-verse appears to be true for mammals, less than 3 per cent of mammalian species having been reported as monogamous" (Kleiman 40).

[7] As Mark Bekoff writes in *Animal Emotions*: "Animals seek play out relentlessly and when a potential partner does not respond to a play invitation they often turn to another individual … If all potential partners refuse their invitation, individual animals will play with objects or chase their own tails. The play mood is also contagious; just seeing animals playing can stimulate play in others. Consider my field notes of two dogs playing" (Bekoff 2000).

[8] Masson and McCarthy note a case of two Pacific Dolphins, Kiko and Hoku, who "were devoted to each other for years, often making a point to touch one another with a fin while swimming around in their tank. When Kiko suddenly died, Hoku refused to eat. he swam slowly in circles, with his eyes clenched shut" (Masson 101). These authors also tell a touching story of…

> …a band of African elephants surrounding a dying matriarch as she swayed and fell. The other elephants clustered around her and tried mightily to get her up. A young male tried to raise her with his tusks, put food into her mouth, and even tried sexually mounting her, all in vain. The other elephants stroked her with their trunks; one calf knelt and tried to suckle. At last the group moved off, but one female and her calf stayed behind. The female stood with her back to the dead matriarch, now and then reaching back to touch her with one foot. The other elephants called to her. Finally, she walked slowly away" (Masson 102).

In Jane Goodall's *Through a Window*, the author describes how an adult chimpanzee stopped eating, withdrew from his troop, and eventually died after the death of his mother. Mark Bekoff, in his essay in *The Smile of a Dolphin*, writes about how female sea lions "squeal eerily and wail pitifully" as their young are devoured by killer whales.

[9] Perhaps the most impressive of these is Oxana Timofeeva's *The History of Animals: a Philosophy*.

[10] Derrida frequently returns to discuss the second chapter of *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics* in several of his writings. The most interesting such discussion occurs in chapter 6 of *Of Spirit*, where he examines the logic at work in Heidegger's claim that the essential difference between humans and animals is non-hierarchical, indeed without grounds for comparison. This essential difference is premised on an account of animality that tries to break from naturalism and historical anthropocentrism. As is well known, in *Being and Time*, Heidegger argues that regional ontologies that presuppose naturalism have not secured proper access to their subjects of inquiry, which first requires a fundamental ontology. As such, those disciplines that treat "life," such as biology or zoology, presuppose a vision of the "essence" of animal life without clarifying the grounds for holding that view. Heidegger believes that he offers at least the beginnings of a more enlightened account in *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics*: while "captivated" by instinct, animals are nevertheless "alive" in a way that is not reducible to naturalism. Yet despite having few logical grounds for doing so, Heidegger repeatedly characterizes animal life as inferior to human existence. This gives rise to a tension, one that is exposed in Heidegger's use of the evaluative term "poor" to describe how animals relate to their environments. In *Of Spirit*, Derrida deconstructs a double logic at play in Heidegger's work, one that involves "two values incompatible in their 'logic'": on the one hand, lack or deficiency, and on the other hand, alterity and absolute difference. While I would like to have provided a more expanded treatment of Heidegger in this work, briefly put, for Derrida, the contamination between these lack and alterity betrays an anxiety in Heidegger's thought, one that arises out of a desire not only to retrace the Cartesian distinction between humans and animals, but to maintain the integrity a broadly metaphysical understanding of what human beings most essentially are.

[11] In *The Animal That Therefore I* Am, Derrida makes this connection between Socrates' appraisal of "writing" developed in "Plato's Pharmacy" and "the animal," stating: "What is terrible about writing, Socrates says, is the fact that, like painting, the things it engenders, although similar to living things, do not respond. No matter what question one asks them, writings remain silent, keeping a most majestic silence or else always replying in the same terms, which means not replying" (AT 52).

[12] Emphatically, these are not outliers. As interestingly, the overwhelming tendency in studies that assess similarities between human and animal communication is to posit a threshold, where a creature's vocalizations are said to resemble human language use when it is not irreducible mechanical. For example, Michael Corballis refutes the claim that starling communication involves recursion. Whereas Starlings, like all animals, can "discriminate" between different linguistic sequences, such "discrimination is more likely to be based on a counting or subitizing mechanism" (Corballis 702). In a 2009 article, Matsuzawa records how despite that working memory is better among young chimpanzees as compared to human adults, the former cannot perform additional cognitive tasks that would allow them to "represent" symbols at an "abstract level." Similarly, Gardner et al. suggests that whereas certain innate laws determine song development among canaries, they are nevertheless capable of accurately imitating "abnormal synthetic" songs when

young. Yet the apparent "freedom" that starlings have to imitate non-conspecific vocalizations is not characterized by the authors as the "freedom" traditionally associated with humans alone. To consider one final example, in their article "Songs of Humpback Whales" for *Science*, Payne and McVay document, in considerable detail, the length and variety of the "songs" produced by humpback whales. Whereas these songs are highly specific to each individual, the authors do not propose that whale "communication" indicates a unique "inner life" that is suggestive of consciousness.

[13] In his excellent book *Cartesian Linguistics*, Chomsky argues that many of his ground-breaking insights in the field of linguistics–including his claim that language affords humans infinite expressive potential, and therefore possibilizes a certain conception of human freedom–has a long though largely neglected history. In addition to Descartes and Humboldt, Chomsky also treats Antoine Arnauld and Claude Lancelot, authors of the *Port-Royal Grammar*.

[14] For example, and as Derrida writes, animals have both technique and culture, "have a history and techniques, and thus a culture in the most rigorous sense of the term, i.e. precisely, the transmission and accumulation of knowledge and acquired capacities. And where there is transgenerational transmission, there is law, and therefore crime" (BSi 106).

[15] Among Derrida's most focused treatments of "the animal" in political theory happens in his treatment of *Leviathan* in the first volume of *The Beast and the Sovereign*. Briefly, Derrida identifies a paradox in Hobbes' thought, which he terms "the paradox of the mortal immortality of sovereignty" (BSi 43): sovereignty is itself immortal - the unquestioned and immortal ruling principle - only insofar as human beings are mortal - as they have fear for their fragile and finite lives: "Sovereignty - the soul, and therefore the life of the state, the artificial respiration of the state - is posited, instituted, promised, contracted, *artificially, as immortal* only because it is *naturally mortal*" (BSi 43). Hobbes writes: "though Sovereignty, in the intention of them that make it, be Immortall, yet is it in its own nature, not only subject to violent death, by forreign war; but also through the ignorance and passions of men" (Hobbes 136). In this sense, the immortality of the sovereign is maintained by the natural, finite constitution of human beings who, living in fear, "produce" the sovereign as a result of their own natural impulses. This, in turn, renders the apparent "artificial protesis" of the state untenable. The question, then, is how the state (as well as all social institutions) can be maintained as artificial. This seems to rest on Hobbes's assumption that the human is itself sovereign, which, by analogy with God, is essentially distinct from both nature and that which it produces. Yet those very creatures who he maintains are governed by a sovereign soul turn out to be motivated by those same pre-rational, non-sovereign impulses that are foreign to sovereignty. The artificial and the natural seem to be allied with Hobbes's conception not only of the state, but of the human, both of which are simultaneously artificial and natural. Indeed, the state, which is formed out of the natural impulses and fears of man, actually resembles the operation of an organic body, which means that…

> paradoxically, this political discourse of Hobbes's is vitalist, organicist, finalist, *and* mechanical … This systematics of Hobbes is inconceivable without this prosthstatics (at once zoologistic, biologistic, and techno-mechanist) of sovereignty, of sovereignty as animal machine, living machine. and death machine" (BSi 29).

As Derrida argues, there is an implicit contamination between all of these values that Hobbes would like to keep strictly separate, where both human beings, and the state that it produces, is contaminated by the "mechanical animal."

[16] Along with hermit crabs, decorator crabs "attach materials from the environment to specialised hooked setae on their body" (Hultgren and Stachowicz 2011). Cuttlefish, meanwhile, not only use their patterning for protection, but for a complex variety of purposes, "both interspecifically (warning or 'deimatic' displays) and intraspecifically (sexual signalling)" (Hanlon and Messenger 1988), as well as to dissimulate their sex. Caddisfly build protective cases made of detritus and other material (Wiggins 2015); According to Tony Barthel, elephants throw a protective layer of mud and dust on the backs of themselves and their young to conceal their skin from the sun (Gambino 2011).

[17] Gerald L. Lebrun sets forth this interpretation in his essay "Derrida's Cat (Who Am I?)."

[18] In the first volume of *The Beast and The Sovereign*, for example, Derrida writes that he wishes to think the "enigma of the place of man, […] what is proper to man" (BSi 142). By deconstructing the many features that distinguish human beings in the many philosophical and literary texts that he treats, Derrida destabilizes the grounds for maintaining any sharp or essential distinction between humans and animals.

[19] Regan, by far the most influential of these theorists, posits that animals have inherent value. This entitles them to have that value be respected, which entails a general prohibition against harm to their "experiential welfare." To the extent that this value is validated by a correct moral principle, non-human creatures have definite *prima facie* moral rights (for example, not to be harmed). Other scholars (most recently Mark Rowlands in his *Animal Rights, Moral Theory and Practice*) have questioned the cogency and value of the notion of "inherent value" for legitimating animal rights, claiming that the rights of animals can best be legitimated through a modified contactarian moral theory: to the extent that some things have inherent moral value, and if included in this class of things are non-human animals, then animals possess certain moral rights.

[20]Singer supports this claim by stating that there is no compelling reason to consider any uniquely human attribute or ability as the basis for moral worth: "the claim to equality does not depend on intelligence, moral capacity, physical strength, or similar matters of fact. Equality is a moral ideal, not a simple assertion of fact. There is no logically compelling reason for assuming that a factual difference in ability between two people justifies any difference in the amount of consideration we give" (Singer 3).

[21] For example, Peter Carruthers argues in *The Animals Issue: Moral Theory in Practice* that while suffering might be a correct criterion for judging whether a creature deserves ethical respect, the mental lives of animals are unconscious, which is a necessary condition for being able to suffer to begin with. Carruthers writes: "Only conscious experiences have a distinctive phenomenology, a distinctive feel ... The fact that a creature has sense-organs, and can be observed to display in its behaviour sensitivity to the salient features of its surrounding environment, is insufficient to establish that it feels like anything to be that thing" (Carruthers 171). Because animals are incapable of a conscious mental life at any level, and because "non-conscious mental states are not appropriate objects of moral concern," (Carruthers 192) it follows that non-human creatures make no moral claim on us. In a similar vein, in his Rational Animals (an influential work that is not explicitly critical of animal ethics as such, but which has nevertheless been used for this end). Donald Davidson argues that because propositional attitudes, "no matter how confused, contradictory, absurd, unjustified or erroneous those attitudes may be," (Davidson 318) are required for thought to take place, and because no non-human creature has any such rich network of rationally connected beliefs through which thought can emerge (do not, in other words, have language), it follows that animals do not think. Davidson writes: "In order to be a thinking, rational creature, the creature must be able to express many thoughts, and above all, be able to interpret the speech and thoughts of others" (Davidson 322-323). If such is correct, then it can reasonably be argued that we have no necessary moral commitments to non-human creatures.

[22] To be sure, a number of thinkers judge this approach to be deeply problematic, and not only those influenced by Derrida's work. Cora Diamond, in her article "Eating Meat and Eating People," argues that we do not respond ethically to others – human or non-human – because we consciously recognize them as possessing ethically salient features that render them ethically inviolable. Rather, she points out that we do so when we consider animals as fellow creatures, which itself requires some degree of anthropomorphism: "The response to animals as our fellows in mortality, in life on this earth ..., depends on a conception of human life. It is an extension of a nonbiological notion of what human life is. You can call it anthropomorphic, but only if you want to create confusion" (Diamond 101). Diamond stresses that to the degree that we respond "ethically" to animals, we do so because we develop particular relationships with them that renders them unfit to eat or to be violently treated: "Animals—these objects we are acting upon—are not given for our thought independently of such a mass of ways of thinking about and responding to them" (Diamond 102). If Diamond is correct, then responding ethically to any animal or groups of animals requires that we think of them not merely as agents, but in terms of the far more elusive notion of "fellow," a term that at the very least suggests fondness, affection, and warmth and that exceeds the normative designation of moral agency or of the moral patient. Yet for thinkers influenced by Derrida's work, Diamond fails to challenge what they regard as the most problematic issue facing animal ethics: namely, seeking ways to alter the humanist bias in ethics that Diamond regards as fundamental.

[23] This is so even while certain interpreters of Derrida, such as Leonard Lawlor, have detected strong similarities between his thought and those of Peter Singer.

[24] Yet there are reasons to be suspicious of this view. There are, for example, a number of ethological studies that suggest that animals possess altruism.

[25] For example, we might suggest that only higher animals, such as certain primate and whale species, are sentient in Levinas' sense of being absolutely singular. We might also determine that only vertebrates are sentient, or, following

Levinas, we might privilege those highly social animals who appear to strongly confirm our own self-understanding through their behaviour as sentient, such as companion animals and certain primates.

[26] It is for this reason that one never murders the face, as murdering the other would imply the reduction of *precisely* what resists identification and reduction.

[27] If, for example, every time I encounter animals I judge them to be inhuman or inferior, this understanding of the animal must ceaselessly be reaffirmed with every new encounter.

[28] As when he writes that the obligation that one has for the other is one that "goes beyond what I may or may not have done to the Other or whatever acts I may or may not have committed, as if I were devoted to the other *man* [my emphasis] before being devoted to myself" (*Levinas Reader*, 83).

[29] What Levinas calls "responsibility that goes beyond what I may or may not have done to the Other or whatever acts I may or may not have committed, as if I were devoted to the other man before being devoted to myself" (*Ethics as First Philosophy* 360).

[30] Such a reading is argued for by Leonard Lawlor in his book *This is Not Sufficient*, where the author writes that while Derrida does not provide a normative ethical framework, his thinking of the aporia that structures these notions suggests that we are negatively inclined towards a more inclusive future in order to avoid "the worst." This theme of "the worst" is taken up in a wide number of Derrida's texts. In addition to his writings on Levinas, it figures prominently in "Faith and Knowledge," *The Politics of Friendship*, *For What Tomorrow…*, among others.

[31] For example in "Faith and Knowledge," *Archive Fever*, *Adieu*, *The Politics of Friendship, On Touching – Jean-Luc Nancy*, among other works.

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