

Working Notes from 9 July 2009 for...

The Beast and the Sovereign II

Session 4: 29 January 2003

We began on Monday talking about the rhythm of this seminar, which at once *defers* themes that Derrida plans to treat but does not always get to and *returns* to themes Derrida has already treated in the past—and sometimes in the quite distant past. In other words, Derrida—like Robinson Crusoe—keeps on retracing his steps, returning to his “own tracks,” his “own footprints,” with all the strange familiarity or “uncanniness” this involves. That is certainly the case of this session. Derrida introduces at the outset of this session three themes that he will follow, three promises he will try to keep, and thirty pages later we can see that he has treated one of them pretty completely, touched on another, and deferred yet another almost completely to session 5.

The session is almost entirely devoted to Heidegger, and especially to Heidegger’s treatment of the animal and, again, of *Walten*, with a brief but fascinating excursion through the notion of drive or *Trieb* in Freud. We will want to spend a good deal of time on these couple of pages where Derrida brings *Trieb* into communication with Heidegger’s notion of *Walten*, leading up to a passing identification with his own notion of *différance* in session 5, and, though I do not think the word is uttered here in exactly this context, with his thinking of autoimmunity.

But let’s look closely at how Derrida begins the session. The first line tells us that he will be returning to themes he has treated before, that is, before in this seminar but also in his corpus; it tells us that he will be returning to his own steps or traces. It is hard not to recall throughout the seminar but especially here Derrida’s line in *Aporias*, “*il y va d’un certain pas*”—it is matter of a certain step, a certain negation (in relation, of course, to death), but also “he goes at a certain pace.” Sam recalled on Monday Derrida’s treatment of many of these same issues in *Aporias* more than a decade earlier. This opening brings us right back to the very same issues of *Aporias*—the possibility of an experience of death “as such,” the difference between human Dasein and the animal on

this and other questions, and, of course, the question of the trace in relation to death and the pace at which we approach it or it approaches us.

Derrida begins: “Is death merely the end of life? Death as such? Is there ever, moreover, death *as such*?” We know just from this opening line that Derrida will no doubt be returning both to the problematic of *Aporias* and, because of things announced earlier in the seminar regarding the 1929-1930 seminar in which stone, animal, and man are distinguished on the basis of their relation to world, to the question of the animal’s relation to death, whether it ever has a relation to *death itself*, and thus to the question of whether man ever does, things treated in *The Animal that Therefore I Am* and in *The Beast and the Sovereign I*. We will want to return to these questions at the end of our session this morning.

Now, one of the points of interest for scholars of Derrida will surely be the differences in tone, style, approach, and so forth, between published works, conference presentations, improvised discussions, and these seminars. Because different “discursive contexts” necessitated, Derrida seemed to believe, different “textual strategies,” readers of Derrida—and especially readers of the seminars—will want to bear in mind all these differences in theme, tone, style of presentation, and so forth. Take, for example, the Cerisy conferences, which almost became a genre in and of themselves. They apparently became prime occasions for Derrida to re-read himself on a particular theme (on Heidegger’s notion of being-toward-death in *Aporias*, on the animal in “The Autobiographical Animal,” and on the democracy-to-come in *Rogues*) and then push his thinking in new directions. The seminars, on the contrary, were usually places for him to forge more or less new trails or paths, even if, as we see, it was often by returning to material he had treated under a different light in earlier works. I wonder, then, whether this volume will prove to be somewhat unique in the way it returns so insistently to previously treated themes, and, of course, to the very theme of return. If each of the Cerisy conferences I mentioned rereads one aspect or theme of Derrida’s work—the ends of man, man’s relationship to death, the relationship between man and “the animal,” and, finally, the relationship between the animal and sovereignty—it seems as if *this seminar* actually returns to *all* these themes, bringing them into proximity to one another and

binding them to one another. Derrida is very clear about this theme of return. He says in the first line of the second paragraph of our session for today: “Every week, as you’ve noticed, and every year, we return.”

(The next line of this same paragraph suggests that Derrida may return—something he ultimately does not do for lack of time—to the very interesting idea from *Robinson Crusoe* of “dying a living death” or being “swallow’d alive,” a kind of desire or drive, terror or fantasy, that will structure the various fantasies in our culture around being incinerated versus being buried upon our deaths. Though he does little more than introduce this idea here, he will return to it repeatedly in the sessions that follow.)

All this, then, is in the first paragraph and the first line of the second. Derrida then recalls the three promises he has made and the three paths he would like to follow.

1. This notion of a living death, being swallowed alive, in *Robinson Crusoe*, something, as I said, he will touch on briefly but not develop.
2. The figure of the circle in Heidegger, the hermeneutic circle, of course, that is, the possibility of escaping a pre-understanding of something in order to interpret that something, but even more importantly the circle as what characterizes the animal, the animal that is enclosed, self-enclosed, benumbed, and so does not have a world or is poor in world. Derrida will turn to these themes in Heidegger near the end of the session, but this will not prove to be the central focus of the session.

(Recall, in this respect, the passage regarding world on 96/88-89 that Peggy developed in detail yesterday. If we have time I would like to return to this passage. What does it mean to say that the wheel is in the world? Does it mean that ipseity—the ipseity that is characterized as returning to itself like a wheel—always requires a circuit or passage through the technology and techniques of one’s epoch? This would have important repercussions for how we are to think the very historicity of deconstruction, which is also, if we can put it this way, always “in the world.”)

3. Finally, Derrida says he will return to the question of *Walten* in *The Introduction to Metaphysics*, something he will indeed do, but not before a long digression / clarification of the notion of *Trieb*. This is, to my eyes, the most exciting and provocative part of the session, and both Elizabeth and I will spend some time on these passages. Both of us will want to ask about the way Heidegger takes this thinking of *Trieb* or drive in the direction

of *Walten* and, again, though I don't think the word is mentioned here, in the direction of autoimmunity.

Derrida says all three promises “are questions of the path between life and death, or beyond the opposition of life and death.” He then continues: “Now, how are we going to try to keep these promises, and especially keep them together, bind them together in their proper tenor, or recognize their essential liaison or articulation? Let's see.”

Now, I believe that at this point in his preparation Derrida probably *did not* know where he was going here; I don't think he had an outline in front of him that he was going to follow. The development will thus not feel like that of the good Normalien who takes every question or theme, divides it in three, first giving the history or background of the question or theme, then proposing different answers to the question, and then opting for the best among them.... Derrida does not proceed in this way, and he certainly does not feel obliged to follow these three promises in the order in which they were announced or even explicitly as they are announced. He is, I think we can feel here, thinking as he is writing, thinking as he clears a path, on the lookout throughout for the best way to go. You recall Derrida's remarks, I believe to Jean Hypolitte at or after the Johns Hopkins conference in 1966, “if I knew where I were going I wouldn't bother to take a single step forward.”

So, we skip a line and see that Derrida has found an opening, what seems to him the best possible point of approach. We skip a line and all of a sudden we are back to the notion of *Heimweh*, nostalgia, and the notion of return or of *nostos*. *Heimweh*, the term used by Novalis, had come up through Heidegger, we recall, in the line that “Philosophy is properly nostalgia, a drive to be everywhere at home.” The *nostoi*, we should also recall, were a series of poems written about the Greek heroes returning from the Trojan War. The most famous of these is, of course, *The Odyssey*, our first great tale in the West of navigation, of being ship wrecked (like Robinson Crusoe), and of delayed return. Derrida thus recalls Odysseus' return to Ithaca, and then he himself returns—and talk about a return!—all the way back to 1963 and his own treatment in “Violence and Metaphysics” of Levinas's opposition between Odyssean adventure and return and Abrahamic exile and non-return. Derrida returns by doing here exactly what he did in

“Violence and Metaphysics” some forty years before; he is going to find something in Heidegger that questions Levinas’s critique of Heidegger and that suggests that on certain issues Heidegger is much closer to Levinas than Levinas would have ever admitted.

(And let say in passing that this brief return to the concerns of “Violence and Metaphysics” could provide us with an entire protocol for rereading Levinas in the light of the themes of this seminar, themes such as the circle, *Heimweh*, return, nostalgia, and so forth. One might think, for example, of the sphere of “totality” (in *Totality and Infinity* and elsewhere) in relation to ipseity and a circular return to self, as if one were on an island or as if one were an island, while the interruption of the self through the infinity of the idea would represent the movement away from or out of the island that is the self. Totality is indeed always understood as a kind of circle, a going out into the world to enjoy it, “*jouir de*” as the French has it, and then returning to the self and the home from that world—like Odysseus to Ithaca. (Recall also, for this image of the circle, that Levinas wants to break with the Parmenidean notion of Being as a single sphere.) A certain economy of investment and recuperation is thus involved. Infinity involves a breaking of this circle and this economy.) (Notice also, in the middle of 106, a brief but poignant political reminder of the stakes of this return as Derrida speaks of “this drive or this law of return” in the case of Jews and Palestinians who both claim the right to return to the *same* land. This is a gesture we will find, for example, in “Faith and Knowledge,” where Derrida evokes—seemingly in passing—the massacre of Muslims in a mosque in Hebron in 1994, and where he concludes—again seemingly in passing—by citing the volume *Genet à Chatila*, a volume that recalls Genet’s involvement with the Palestinians and his account of the massacre of Palestinian refugees in Chatila in 1982.)

Now, Heidegger claims that modern man does not know how to return, that he has lost his capacity to return. This does indeed make Heidegger look like a thinker of return, a thinker of the lost origin, someone who *values* return even when, perhaps especially when, it is threatened or lost. But Derrida recalls that Heidegger was also a great thinker of errancy, and so on page 106-107/97-98 he is going to find something in Heidegger that looks or sounds a lot like *Levinas* criticizing Heidegger. In the long quote on 107/98, Heidegger says—in words that recall the movement of the soul toward the ideas in the

Phaedrus—“philosophy can only be such an urge if we who philosophize are *not* at home everywhere.” This argument comes to a powerful and poignant conclusion when Derrida writes at the top of 108, “Rather like Abraham, isn’t it?” (This line has the concise bite of that little line in *The Animal That Therefore I Am* that cuts to the quick of all those discourses that want to find resources in Levinas for thinking that the animal has a face. Recall that line, “Bobby the dog is anything but Kantian.”) Hence Derrida, returning to the strategy he deployed in “Violence and Metaphysics” with regard to Levinas’ reading of Heidegger, finds a claim in Heidegger that reminds him not of Odysseus but of Abraham, who does not and cannot return. (One is tempted to say by citing the same Joyce that Derrida cites in “Violence and Metaphysics,” “Jew-Greek is Greek-Jew, extremes meets.”)

(Note also at the top of 107 the reference to poetry and philosophy as sisters in Heidegger, and the problematic of the sister in general in Heidegger (and Trakl), something Derrida would have developed in his unpublished essay, *Geschlecht III*. Notice also the way Heidegger speaks in the same passage on 107 of a “community of questioning”—almost the same language Derrida himself used at very beginning of—once again—“Violence and Metaphysics.” These are just some of the innumerable echoes of other texts...)

These questions of nostalgia and return lead to the question of the “drive” to be at home everywhere. In what follows Derrida takes up Heidegger again on the question of the world, what the world is, and on the question of access to the world or the possibility of a path to the world. We are, says Heidegger (see 109), the path, the *Weg*, toward the world. But Derrida—via Heidegger—will want to think the world as a certain totality in relation to what Novalis calls the “everywhere”; philosophy would thus be the urge to be at home “everywhere.” Hence we have a kind of nostalgia drive, a nostalgia fever, that pushes (us) not to return to some one place but to be everywhere at once. It is what pushes (us) toward the world as the totality of beings—toward that which we can never inhabit but toward which we are the path. There seems to be a contrast here, then, between a desire for a particular thing, perhaps a desire to appropriate or domesticate certain things, a certain place, and the push or drive, *Trieb*, that is not aimed at any particular object and even seems not to emanate from any particular subject. Derrida

relates this drive (*Trieb*) to *Walten* and thus to force (112). (It is here that we would have to recall Derrida's early distinction between force and signification, force being what drives, if you will, toward signification but also what also undoes it.)

(I am reminded here—in this notion of a drive that is not merely psychological and does not belong to any subject—of a famous Heraclitus fragment that Heidegger and Fink speak of at some length in their 1966-1967 Seminar. The fragment runs, τὸ δ' πᾶντα οὐκ ἀκροῖται κεραυνῶ, and can it be translated as “the lightning bolt guides, drives, or tillers all things.” Now, unless one takes κεραυνῶ, thunder or the lightning bolt, as a mere synecdoche for Zeus, for the power and authority of Zeus who guides all things—an interpretation that Heidegger and Fink strongly and convincingly resist—we have a sort of anonymous drive that intermittently (like thunder and lightning) drives or guides or illuminates all things before quickly withdrawing, an anonymous drive that at once creates and destroys...)

On 113 Derrida goes through all the uses of *Trieb* in Freud—drive to ipseity, life drive, ego drive, sexual drive, self-preservation drive, and, finally, destruction drive, which is why I spoke of autoimmunity earlier. *Trieb* in Freud precedes the distinction between the body and the soul. The drive to self-preservation, the drive to bolster and sustain and immunize the self, is thus perhaps indistinguishable from or inextricably linked to the self-destruction drive—and that's autoimmunity. Hence *Trieb* in Freud has about as wide a scope as it does in Heidegger, where it is related to the Greek *phuein*, to the growth or growing or springing up of what is in its totality. As for Derrida, he relates *Trieb* to Force in the widest sense, and thus to Heideggerian *Walten*. (And since Derrida in session 5, p. 138, will relate *physis* to *différance*, we are invited to think *Walten* and *Trieb* in relation to *différance*.)

Two pages later, therefore (on 115), Derrida relates the Heideggerian notion of *not* being at home in the world, of being driven *toward* the world but not dwelling *in* the world, to the Celan line he reads in both *Rams* and in the preface to *Chaque fois unique, la fin du monde*. Once again Derrida is returning, more or less explicitly here in the seminar, to other texts of the relatively recent past. Derrida rereads this notion of the world being far from me, the world being gone (*Die Welt ist fort*), in terms of either the death *or the birth* of the other whom I must bear (*Ich muss dich tragen*). The death of the

other signals an end of the world, *the end of the world*, since the unique opening to the world that the other is is now gone, and the *birth of the other*, I take it, a coming into being of *the world*, an origin of the world to which I have no access (a theme that runs as far back in Derrida as his treatment or interpretation of Husserl's fifth *Cartesian Meditation* where the subject has access to the alter-ego only in analogical *appresentation*.) In every birth and every death, then, the world is far away, and, for Derrida, that is where responsibility begins.

On 116 we return to the question of the relationship between man and animal. How does this material relate to *The Animal That Therefore I Am*, some of which was presented at Cerisy in 1997 and started to be published as early as 1999 before being published in book form in 2006? Perhaps it is worth recalling Derrida's strategy in the first volume of *The Beast and the Sovereign* and in the volume published as *The Animal that Therefore I Am* in order to help understand why Derrida brings together questions of whether the animal—or man—can have an experience of death as such.

Recall the procedure Derrida follows in these other works: he typically begins by looking at a philosophical discourse that grants man and denies the animal some attribute—language, technology, culture, mourning, a relationship to death or to death as such, or a relation to beings as such, and so on. His second move is usually then to suggest, briefly and by means sometimes of the support of ethology (the science of animal behavior), primatology, or zoology, that perhaps a particular animal *does* have a certain relationship to these things. Derrida might thus refer to certain well-known studies in the literature that suggest that animals perhaps *do* respond and not just react, or mourn, or have a culture, and so on. But what Derrida ultimately finds questionable is the *confidence* with which the human animal attributes such abilities to himself and denies them to “the animal.” Certain studies in primatology or ethology should cause one to question this confidence, though, among philosophers, this rarely happens. But because Derrida does not want to argue on the terrain of primatology or ethology (even though Derrida had, Peggy reminded us last year, a sort of “concentration” or “minor” in this latter subject when he was a student), Derrida almost always, indeed pretty much systematically, turns quickly to the question of whether *man* can really be said fully to

possess any of these things—that is, language as opposed to a mere code or leaving of traces, a spontaneous and meaningful response versus a mere mechanical reaction, or, indeed, in the work we are looking at, a relationship to death *as such* as opposed to a relationship to death through other things. By questioning whether *man* really has such a relation to death in the full sense of the term, one displaces the problematic and begins to frame the question differently.

This is precisely the itinerary Derrida follows here beginning around page 120 by questioning Heidegger's claim and confidence that animals do not have access to the *as such* of beings. He begins by questioning Heidegger's too rapid dismissal of scientific discourses on the animal, even though Heidegger is, says Derrida, much more sympathetic than most philosophers to such studies (120). But what Derrida is most intent in questioning is, again, the confidence with which Heidegger is able to dismiss such studies and so deny a certain ability to the animal (a relationship to being *as such*) and then, and especially, Heidegger's confidence in attributing some ability to man.

On 123 we have a short list of some of the things traditionally attributed to man and denied the animal: what would be proper to man is freedom, creativity, nostalgia, melancholy, mourning, a relationship to death, and so on. Derrida then follows closely Heidegger's ambiguity with regard to the animal on this question of the relationship to death. At one point in Heidegger's corpus it looks as if the animal actually *can* die because it has life, but in another place in Heidegger it appears that the animal cannot die but merely comes to an end because it does not have a full relationship to the world. We now understand why Derrida has been focusing so much on the question of the world in Heidegger. It is no coincidence, Derrida seems to be suggesting, that Heidegger in 1929-1930 does not come at the question of the animal via the question of life—since, from this point of view, it would seem that that which has life can die—but via the question of world, allowing Heidegger to define the stone as worldless, the human as world-building, and the animal as poor in world and, thus, incapable of having a relationship to death as such. (And notice that one of the symptoms of this displacement from life to world is Heidegger's resounding silence regarding “plant life.”) Once again, Derrida singles out the *confidence* Heidegger has in making such a distinction:

What seems more problematic still to my eyes is the confidence with which Heidegger attributes dying properly speaking to human *Dasein*, access to death properly speaking and to dying as such. (127)

What Derrida questions most is the human confidence exhibited with regard to the privilege of the human. Hence Derrida asks on 128—just as did in 1992 in Cerisy, in *Aporias*—whether human beings really do have access to the *as such* of beings or to the *as such* of death, an access that would depend upon the ontological difference (which itself springs from a certain *Walten*).

These are, as I read it, the primary themes and arguments of this session. Just a couple more notes, then, on the session, even more randomly presented than the above. First, I would simply like to note Derrida's curious discussion of Heidegger's citing of Aristotle on the *melancholy* of all creative men. Let me recall in this regard that Derrida claims in one of the eulogies or funeral orations gathered in *The Work of Mourning*—the one devoted to Lyotard—that he himself was the most “melancholic” of all the other thinkers with whom he was often associated. He speaks of what has “been identified as a ‘generation’—of which I am the last born, and, no doubt, the most melancholic of the group (they were all more joyful than I).”

Finally, Derrida ends the session by speaking of the phantasm of imaging one's own death, of what happens to one *after* death, the phantasm, then, of living one's death, of dying a living death—a theme he will return to in much greater detail in the following sessions. And he ends the session by speaking briefly of what is, to his eyes, a very interesting hesitation in our culture between wanting to be buried and wanting to be incinerated, a hesitation that must be considered both as a hesitation and for the alternatives it offers. This gives to the seminar a very different cast, a very different tone or *Stimmung*. It is *as if*, though the fiction is less hypothetical than ever, Derrida is asking at the end of the session—and he will continue to ask this in a more insistent and poignant way in the up-coming sessions—what will become of *his* body, who will decide to bury or incinerate *his* body, and what will become, of course, of his other traces, *his* archive . . . at IMEC or elsewhere. Derrida already gives us in these pages the principle of a response to all these questions: it will be the *other* who decides—that is, for the

moment, with regard to him, *us*. It is as if Derrida in this final seminar, this final autobiographical seminar, this final testimony or testament, were spinning himself his own cocoon, like a silkworm, burying himself alive in this, his final seminar, though he knows with all the knowledge in the world that he cannot know what will ultimately happen to this final habitation, to this archive, whether it will be buried alive—at IMEC or elsewhere—or incinerated, or else exposed in some way, taken apart—decorticated—and then put back together, even translated, as we are doing *here*.