

# The Animal That Therefore I Am (More to Follow)

Jacques Derrida

Translated by David Wills

To begin with, I would like to entrust myself to words that, were it possible, would be naked.

Naked in the first place—but this is in order to announce already that I plan to speak endlessly of nudity and of the nude in philosophy. Starting from Genesis. I would like to choose words that are, to begin with, naked, quite simply, words from the heart.

And to utter these words without repeating myself, without beginning again what I have already said here, more than once. It is said that one must avoid repeating oneself, in order not to give the appearance of training [*dressage*], already, of a habit or a convention that would in the long term program the very act of thanking.

This article represents the first part of a ten-hour address Derrida gave at the third Cerisy-la-Salle conference devoted to his work, in July 1997. The title of the conference was “L’Animal autobiographique”; see *L’Animal autobiographique: Autour de Jacques Derrida*, ed. Marie-Louise Mallet (Paris, 1999); Derrida’s essay appears on pp. 251–301. Later segments of the address dealt with Descartes, Kant, Heidegger, Lacan, and Lévinas, as note 4 explains and as other allusions made by Derrida suggest. The Lacan segment will appear in *Zoo-Ontologies: The Question of the Animal in Contemporary Theory and Culture*, ed. Cary Wolfe (Minneapolis, 2002).

The French title of Derrida’s article is “*L’Animal que donc je suis (à suivre)*.” An obvious play on Descartes’s definition of consciousness (of the thinking animal as human), it also takes advantage of the shared first-person singular present form of *être* (to be) and *suivre* (to follow) in order to suggest a displacement of that priority, also reading as “the animal that therefore I follow after.” Throughout the translation “I am” has, very often, to be read also as “I follow,” and vice versa. I have adopted the formula “I am (following),” except where the context, or demands of fluency, dictate a choice of one or the other possibility.—TRANS.

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Some of you, and the thought of it moves me to tears, were already here in 1980, or again in 1992, at the time of the previous two conferences. Some even, among my dearest and most faithful friends (Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe and Marie-Louise Mallet), had already inspired, conceived of, and brought to fruition those two occasions, with the smiling genius that Marie-Louise radiates once again. Jean-Luc Nancy promised us he would be here again. With Philippe he opened the 1980 conference. I think of him constantly, and he must know that his friends and admirers send him their very best wishes from here.

To those I have just named I owe so much that the language of gratitude is insufficient. What I owe them remains infinite and indelible.

Without forgetting that, I wish, if you'll forgive me, to go back in time, back to an earlier moment still, to a time before that time.

And to speak from that point in time, so long ago [*depuis le temps*] as one says,<sup>1</sup> a time that for me becomes fabulous or mythical.

Some of you here, Maurice de Gandillac first of all, whom I wish to greet and thank in pride of place, know that about forty years ago, in 1959, our wonderful hosts here at Cerisy were already offering me their hospitality—and it was the moment of my very first lecture, in fact the first time I spoke in public. If already I were to give in to what others might call the instinct of the autobiographical animal, I might recall that in 1959, as today, the theme was, in short, Genesis. The title of the conference was “Structure and Genesis,” and it was my first ten-day Cerisy

1. The adverbial fragment *depuis le temps*, which is not usually used as such in French, is repeated throughout the text. The relative form, *depuis le temps que*, has the sense of “for so long now.” Below, I have used either that formulation or “since so long ago” except where Derrida’s repetitions allow for the contrived phrase “since time.” In all cases the reader should bear in mind Derrida’s reference to the mythological and philosophical “prehistory” of conceptualizations of the animal that he is calling into question.—TRANS.

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event. Following that I have greatly enjoyed returning for “Nietzsche” in 1972, “Ponge” in 1974, “Lyotard” in 1982. I don’t have to say any more about that for you to be able, not so much to measure, for it is immeasurable, but rather to sense the immensity of my gratitude.

Everything I will venture to say today will be, once more, in order to express my thanks, in order to say, “thanks to this place, to those who greet us here and to you.” I experience my returns to Cerisy as a wonderful and intense story that has marked out almost my whole adult life, everything I have managed to think about it out loud. If ever the animal that I am were to take it upon itself to write an autobiography (whether intellectual or emotional), it would have to name Cerisy again and again, more than once and in more than one way—in the renown of the proper name and of metonymy.

As for this conference, the third in something like a series, it seemed to me unimaginable, even excluded in advance. Last time, in 1992, when Didier Cahen alluded to its possibility in the attic on the last evening, asking me what the theme of a third conference would be, I still remember dismissing such a hypothesis: “This guy is crazy,” I exclaimed. He wasn’t so crazy, but the whole idea remains, like everything that happens, and such is the condition for something to be able to happen, impossible to anticipate. It is only after the event, reading the titles of these three meetings (“Les Fins de l’homme,” “Le Passage des frontières,” “L’Animal autobiographique”) with a feeling of uncanniness, that I perceived a sort of prescriptive arrangement, a preestablished if not harmonious order, a providential machine as Kant would say precisely concerning the animal, “als eine Maschine der Vorsehung,” an obscure foresight, the process of a blind but sure prefiguration in the configuration: one and the same movement being outlined and seeking its end. “Les Fins de l’homme” (title chosen by Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe and Jean-Luc Nancy without asking for my input, and I didn’t ask to give it, although the title was also that of one of my texts), “Le Passage des frontières” and “L’Animal autobiographique” (titles that I myself proposed to Marie-Louise and to our hosts at Cerisy): later I began to hear in them, in these three kick-offs, what no one, least of all myself, had ever calculated, and what no one would be able to reappropriate, namely the outline or the temptation of a single phrase, a phrase offering more to follow [*qui se donnerait à suivre*].

It follows, itself; it follows itself. It could say “I am,” “I follow,” “I follow myself,” “I am (in following) myself.” In being pursued this way, consequentially, three times or in three rhythms, it would describe something like the course of a three-act play or the three movements of a syllogistic concerto, a displacement that becomes a *suite*, a result in a single word.

If I am to follow this suite [*si je suis cette suite*], and 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*,” if I am to follow this suite then, I move from “the ends of man,” that is the confines of man, to “the crossing of borders” between man and animal. Crossing borders or the ends of man I come or surrender to the animal—to the animal in itself, to the animal in me and the animal at unease with itself, to the man about which Nietzsche said (I no longer remember where) something to the effect that it was an as yet undetermined animal, an animal lacking in itself. Nietzsche also said, at the very beginning of the second treatise of *The Genealogy of Morals*, that man is a promising animal, by which he meant, underlining those words, an animal that is permitted to make promises (*das versprechen darf*). Nature is said to have given itself the task of raising, bringing up, domesticating and “disciplining” (*heranzüchten*) this animal that promises.

Since time, since so long ago, hence since all of time and for what remains of it to come we would therefore be in passage toward surrendering to the promise of that animal at unease with itself.

Since time, therefore.

Since so long ago, can we say that the animal has been looking at us?<sup>2</sup>  
What animal? The other.

I often ask myself, just to see, *who I am*—and who I am (following) at the moment when, caught naked, in silence, by the gaze of an animal, for example the eyes of a cat, I have trouble, yes, a bad time<sup>3</sup> overcoming my embarrassment.

Whence this malaise?

I have trouble repressing a reflex dictated by immodesty. Trouble keeping silent within me a protest against the indecency. Against the impropriety that comes of finding oneself naked, one’s sex exposed, stark naked before a cat that looks at you without moving, just to see. The impropriety [*malséance*] of a certain animal nude before the other animal, from that point on one might call it a kind of *animalséance*: 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. The gaze of a seer, visionary, or extra-lucid blind person. It is as if I were ashamed, therefore, naked in front of this cat, but also ashamed for being ashamed.

2. “Que l’animal nous regarde”: also “that the animal has been our concern.”—TRANS.

3. “J’ai du mal”: this colloquial expression also evokes the sense of evil or a curse. Here and below Derrida implies a recasting of the Genesis myth whereby it is an animal that brings man to consciousness of his nakedness and of good and evil rather than being the cause (via woman) of his fall.—TRANS.

A reflected shame, the mirror of a shame ashamed of itself, a shame that is at the same time specular, unjustifiable, and unable to be admitted to. At the optical center of this reflection would appear this thing—and in my eyes the focus of this incomparable experience—that is called nudity. And about which it is believed that it is proper to man, that is to say foreign to animals, naked as they are, or so it is thought, without the slightest inkling of being so.

Ashamed of what and naked before whom? Why let oneself be overcome with shame? And why this shame that blushes for being ashamed? Especially, I should make clear, if the cat observes me frontally naked, face to face, and if I am naked faced with the cat's eyes looking at me as it were from head to toe, just *to see*, not hesitating to concentrate its vision—in order to see, with a view to seeing—in the direction of my sex. *To see*, without going to see, without touching yet, and without biting, although that threat remains on its lips or on the tip of the tongue. Something happens there that shouldn't take place—like everything that happens in the end, a lapsus, a fall, a failure, a fault, a symptom (and *symptom*, as you know, also means “fall”: case, unfortunate event, coincidence, what falls due [*échéance*], mishap). It is as if, at that instant, I had said or were going to say the forbidden, something that shouldn't be said. As if I were to admit what cannot be admitted in a symptom and, as one says, wanted to bite my tongue.

Ashamed of what and before whom? Ashamed of being as naked as an animal [*bête*]. It is generally thought, although none of the philosophers I am about to examine actually mention it,<sup>4</sup> that the property unique to animals and what in the final analysis distinguishes them from man, is their being naked without knowing it. Not being naked therefore, not having knowledge of their nudity, in short without consciousness of good and evil.

From that point on, naked without knowing it, animals would not, in truth, be naked.

They wouldn't be naked because they are naked. In principle, with the exception of man, no animal has ever thought to dress itself. Clothing would be proper to man, one of the “properties” of man. Dressing oneself would be inseparable from all the other forms of what is proper to man, even if one talks about it less than speech or reason, the *logos*, history, laughing, mourning, burial, the gift, and so on. (The list of properties unique to man always forms a configuration, from the first moment. For that reason, it can never be limited to a single trait and it is never closed;

4. Later the same day, and on the next day, this introduction was followed by four sessions during which I proposed readings of Descartes, Kant, Heidegger, Lévinas, and Lacan. Those interpretations, as close and patient as possible, were designed to test the working hypotheses that I am outlining here, on the threshold of a work in progress.

structurally speaking it can attract a nonfinite number of other concepts, beginning with the concept of a concept.)

The animal, therefore, is not naked because it is naked. It doesn't feel its own nudity. There is no nudity "in nature." There is only the sentiment, the affect, the (conscious or unconscious) experience of existing in nakedness. Because it *is* naked, without *existing* in nakedness, the animal neither feels nor sees itself naked. And it therefore is not naked. At least that is what is thought. For man it would be the opposite, and clothing derives from technics. We would therefore have to think shame and technicity together, as the same "subject." And evil and history, and work, and so many other things that go along with it. Man would be the only one to have invented a garment to cover his sex. He would only be a man 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. And knowing *himself* would mean knowing himself to be ashamed. On the other hand, because the animal is naked without consciousness of being naked, modesty would remain as foreign to it as would immodesty. As would the knowledge of self that is involved in that.

What is shame if one can be modest only by remaining immodest, and vice versa. Man could never become naked again because he has the sense of nakedness, that is to say of modesty or shame. The animal would be *in* nonnudity 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 *contre-temps* between two *nudities without nudity*. This *contretemps* has only just begun doing us harm [*mal*], in the area of the science of good and evil.

Before the cat that looks at me naked, would I be ashamed *like* an animal that no longer has the sense of nudity? Or on the contrary, *like* a man who retains the sense of his nudity? Who am I therefore? Who is it that I am (following)? Whom should this be asked of if not of the other? And perhaps of the cat itself?

I must make it clear from the start, the cat I am talking about is a real cat, truly, believe me, *a little cat*. It isn't the *figure* of a cat. It doesn't silently enter the room as an allegory for all the cats on the earth, the felines that traverse myths and religions, literature and fables. There are so many of them. The cat I am talking about does not belong to Kafka's vast zoopoetics, something that nevertheless solicits attention, endlessly and from a novel perspective. Nor is the cat that looks at me, and to which I seem—but don't count on it—to be dedicating a negative zootheology, Hoffmann's or Kofman's cat Murr, although along with me it uses this occasion to salute the magnificent and inexhaustible book that Sarah Kofman devotes to it, namely *Autobiogriffures*, whose title resonates so well with that of this conference. That book keeps vigil over this conference and asks to be continually quoted or reread.

An animal looks at me. What should I think of this sentence? The

cat that looks at me naked and that is *truly a little cat*, this cat I am talking about, which is also a female, isn't Montaigne's cat either, the one he nevertheless calls "my [pussy]cat" [*ma chatte*] in his *Apology for Raymond Sebond*.<sup>5</sup> You will recognize that as one of the greatest pre- or anti-Cartesian texts on the animal. Later we will pay attention to a certain evolution from Montaigne to Descartes, an event that is obscure and difficult to assign a date to, to identify even, between two configurations for which these proper names are metonymies. Montaigne makes fun of "man's impudence with regard to the beasts," of the "presumption" and "imagination" shown by man when he claims to assign them or refuse them certain faculties (*A*, pp. 331, 330). Contrary to that he deems it necessary to recognize in animals a "facility" in forming letters and syllables. This capacity, Montaigne confidently assures us, "testifies that they have an inward power of reason which makes them so teachable and determined to learn" (*A*, p. 340). Taking man to task for "carv[ing] out their shares to his fellows and companions the animals, and distribut[ing] among them such portions of faculties and powers as he sees fit," he asks, and the question refers from here on not to the animal but to the naive assurance of man:

How does he know, by the force of his intelligence, the secret internal stirrings of animals? By what comparison between them and us does he infer the stupidity that he attributes to them?

When I play with my cat [*ma chatte*], who knows if I am not a pastime to her more than she is to me? . . .

The 1595 edition adds: "We entertain each other with reciprocal monkey tricks. If I have my time to begin or to refuse, so has she hers." [*A*, p. 331]

5. Michel de Montaigne, *Apology for Raymond Sebond*, in *Essays*, in *The Complete Works of Montaigne*, trans. Donald M. Frame (Stanford, Calif., 1957), bk. 2, chap. 12, p. 331; hereafter abbreviated *A*. The *Apology* needs to be examined very closely, especially to the extent that Montaigne doesn't just revive, in its luxuriant richness, a tradition that attributes much to the animal, beginning with a type of language. Most pertinent in this respect, marking a difference from the modern (Cartesian or post-Cartesian) form of a hegemonic tradition is the moment where Montaigne recognizes in the animal more than a right to communication, to the sign, to language as sign (something Descartes will not deny), namely, *a capacity to respond*. For example:

It is not credible that Nature has denied us this resource that she has given to many other animals: for what is it but speech, this faculty we see in them of complaining, rejoicing, calling to each other for help, inviting each other to love, as they do by the use of their voice? How could they not speak to one another? They certainly speak to us, and we to them. In how many ways do we not speak to our dogs? *And they answer us*. We talk to them in another language, with other names, than to birds, hogs, oxen, horses; and we change the idiom according to the species.

And following a quotation from Dante concerning the ant: "It seems that Lactantius attributes to beasts not only speech but also laughter" (*A*, p. 335; my italics).

Nor does the cat that looks at me naked, she and no other, the one *I am talking about here*, belong, although we are getting warmer, to Baudelaire's family of cats,<sup>6</sup> or Rilke's,<sup>7</sup> or Buber's.<sup>8</sup> Literally speaking at least, these poets' and philosophers' cats don't speak. "My" pussycat (but a pussycat never belongs) is not even the one *who speaks* in *Alice in Wonderland*. Of course, if you insist at all costs on suspecting me of perversity—always a possibility—you are free to understand or receive the emphasis I just made regarding "really a little cat" as a quote from chapter 11 of *Through the Looking Glass*. Entitled "Waking," this penultimate chapter consists of a single sentence: "—and it really *was* a kitten, after all"; or as one French translation has it: "and, after all, it really was a little black pussy cat" ["et, finalement, c'était bel et bien une petite chatte noire"].<sup>9</sup>

Although time prevents it, I would of course have liked to inscribe my whole talk within a reading of Lewis Carroll. In fact you can't be certain that I am not doing that, for better or for worse, silently, unconsciously, or without your knowing. You can't be certain that I didn't al-

6. *The Cat* is, as we well know, the title of two poems, but only the first of those directly addresses its subject in the singular, familiar form ("Viens, mon beau chat"), before recognizing in it the figure of "the woman I love" [*ma femme*]. Baudelaire even names the cat's gaze ("the image of the woman I love rises before me: her gaze, like yours, dear creature" ("Je vois ma femme en esprit. Son regard, / Comme le tien, aimable bête") and "When my eyes are drawn . . . towards my beloved cat . . . and find I am looking into myself" ("Quand mes yeux, vers ce chat que j'aime / . . . Et que je regarde en moi-même); and its voice ("To utter the longest of sentences it has no need of words" ("Pour dire les plus longues phrases, / Elle n'a pas besoin de mots") (Charles Baudelaire, "Le Chat" and "Le Chat," *Les Fleurs du mal*, in *The Complete Verse of Baudelaire*, trans. and ed. Francis Scarfe, 2 vols. [London, 1986], 1:98, 122, 121).

7. See Rainer Maria Rilke, "Schwarze Katze," in *Neue Gedichte / New Poems*, trans. Stephen Cohn (Manchester, 1992), pp. 202–3. On another occasion I will have to try to read this poem that I have rediscovered thanks to Werner Hamacher). The poem is dedicated, if that is the word, to "your gaze" ("dein Blick") and to a specter ("ein Gespenst")—those are its first words; one could set it into play with the poem he signs concerning "The Panther"; see pp. 60–61 (which again begins by naming the gaze [his gaze this time: "Sein Blick" are the first words])—rediscovered thanks to Richard Macksey, who has also translated it into English. Since the conference at Cerisy, cat lovers and friends the world over have been giving me cats like this. This would also be the moment to salute Jean-Claude Lebensztejn's forthcoming masterpiece entitled *Miaulique (Fantaisie Chromatique)*.

A propos, why does one say in French "has the cat got your tongue" ("donner sa langue au chat") to mean that one has thrown in the towel?

8. "An animal's eyes have the power to speak a great language. . . . Sometimes I look into a cat's eyes" (Martin Buber, *I and Thou*, trans. Ronald Gregor Smith [New York, 1958], pp. 96–97). Buber also speaks of "the capacity to turn its glance to us." "The beginning of this cat's glance, lighting up under the touch of my glance, indisputably questioned me: 'Is it possible that you think of me? . . . Do I really exist?' . . ." ('T here is a transcription for a word, that we do not have, denoting self without the ego)" (p. 97).

9. Lewis Carroll, *Through the Looking Glass*, in *The Complete Works of Lewis Carroll* (New York, 1936), p. 268. Derrida used Lewis Carroll, "*Les Aventures d'Alice au pays des merveilles*" et "*Ce qu'Alice trouva de l'autre côté du miroir*," trans. Jacques Papy, ed. Jean Gattegno (Paris, 1994).—TRANS.



ready do it one day when, ten years ago, I let speak or let pass a little hedgehog, a suckling hedgehog [*un nourrisson hérisson*] perhaps, before the question “What Is Poetry?” For thinking concerning the animal, if there is such a thing, derives from poetry. There you have a hypothesis: it is what philosophy has, essentially, had to deprive itself of. That is the difference between philosophical knowledge and poetic thinking. The hedgehog of “What Is Poetry?” not only inherited a piece of my name, it also responded, in its own way, to the appeal of Alice’s hedgehog. Remember the croquet ground where the “balls were live hedgehogs” (“The Queen’s Croquet-Ground”). Alice wanted to give the hedgehog a blow with the head of the flamingo she held under her arm, and “it *would* twist itself round and look up in her face,” until she burst out laughing.<sup>10</sup>

How can an animal look you in the face? That will be one of our concerns. Alice noticed next that “the hedgehog had unrolled itself, and was in the act of crawling away: besides all this, there was generally a ridge or a furrow in the way wherever she wanted to send the hedgehog to” (*AW*, p. 90). It was a field on which “the players all played at once, without waiting for turns, quarreling all the while, and fighting for the hedgehogs” (*AW*, p. 91).

We will be all the more silently attracted to *Through the Looking Glass* given that we will have to deal with a type of *mirror stage*—and to ask certain questions of it, from the point of view of the animal, precisely.

But if my real cat is not Alice’s little cat (certain translations say *le petit chat* for “kitten,” or *une petite chatte noire*), it is certainly not because I am going to hurriedly conclude upon wakening, as Alice did, that one cannot speak with a cat on the pretext that it doesn’t reply or that it always replies the same thing. For everything that I am about to confide to you no doubt comes back to asking you to *respond* to me, you, to me, reply to me concerning what it is to *respond*. If you can. The said question of the said animal in its entirety comes down to knowing not whether the animal speaks but whether one can know what *respond* means. And how to distinguish a response from a reaction. In this respect we must keep in mind Alice’s very Cartesian statement at the end:

It is a very inconvenient habit of kittens (Alice had once made the remark) that, whatever you say to them, they *always* purr. “If they would only purr for ‘yes,’ and mew for ‘no,’ or any rule of that sort,” she had said, “so that one could keep up a conversation! But how *can* you talk with a person if they *always* say the same thing?”

On this occasion the kitten only purred: and it was impossible to guess whether it meant “yes” or “no.”<sup>11</sup>

10. Carroll, *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland*, in *The Complete Works of Lewis Carroll*, pp. 89, 90; hereafter abbreviated *AW*.—TRANS.

11. Carroll, *Through the Looking Glass*, p. 269.—TRANS.

You can speak to an animal, to the cat said to be *real* inasmuch as it is an animal, but it doesn't reply, not really, not ever, that is what Alice concludes. Exactly like Descartes as we shall later observe.

The letter counts, as does the *question* of the animal. The question of the animal response often has as its stakes the letter, the literality of a word, sometimes what the word *word* means literally. For example, if the word *respond* appears twice in all the translations of Carroll that I consulted, it doesn't correspond to any word as such in the English original. It is probably implied without being stated and this is surely a matter of economy. Where the translation says, without underlining the "always," *quoiqu'on leur dise, elles ronronnent toujours pour vous répondre*, the original simply says "whatever you say to them, they *always* purr." And where the translation says, without underlining the allusion to *pouvoir* ("can"), *Mais comment peut-on parler avec quelqu'un qui répond toujours pareil?* Carroll himself writes, "But how *can* you talk with a person if they *always* say the same thing?"

That said, the sense of *response* seems to be implicit here; one can always maintain that the difference between the presence and absence of the word *response* doesn't count. Perhaps. Perhaps, on the contrary, one should take the matter very seriously, but we will come to that.

In any case, isn't Alice's incredulity rather incredible? She seems, at this moment at least, to believe that one can in fact discern and decide between a human "yes" and "no." She seems confident that when it comes to man it is possible to guess whether yes or no. Let us not forget that the Cheshire Cat had told her, in the course of a scene that deserves a long meditation: "We're all mad here. I'm mad. You're mad" (*AW*, p. 72). After that he undertakes to demonstrate to her this collective folly. It is the moment of a simulacrum of discussion, but which comes to grief as they are unable to agree on the sense of the words, on what a *word* means, and in the end no doubt, on what *word*, what the term *word* could ever mean. "Call it what you like," the Cat ends up saying concerning the difference between growling and purring, before announcing that he will be present at the Queen's croquet game, where my poor hedgehogs will be badly treated [*mis à mal*] (*AW*, p. 72).

No, no, my cat, the cat that looks at me in my bedroom or in the bathroom, this cat that is perhaps not "my cat" or "my pussycat," does not appear here as representative, or ambassador, carrying 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, it 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 realm. It is true that I identify it as a male or female cat. But even before that identification, I see it as *this* irreplace-

able living being that one day enters my space, enters this place where it can encounter me, see me, even see me naked. Nothing can ever take away from me the certainty that what we have here is an existence that refuses to be conceptualized. And a mortal existence, for from the moment that it has a name, its name survives it. It signs its potential disappearance. Mine also, and this disappearance, from that moment to this, *fort/da*, is announced each time that, naked or not, one of us leaves the room.

But I must also accentuate the fact that this shame that is ashamed of itself is more intense when I am not alone with the cat in the room. For then I am no longer sure before whom I am so numbed with shame. In fact, is one ever alone with a cat? Or with anyone at all? Is this cat a third person? Or an other in a face-to-face duel? We will return to these questions later. In such moments, on the edge of the thing, in the imminence of the best or the worst, when anything can happen, where I can die with shame or pleasure, I no longer know in whose or in what direction to throw myself. 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. One thought alone keeps me spellbound: dress myself, even a little, or, which amounts to the same thing, run away—as if I were chasing<sup>12</sup> myself out of the room—bite myself, bite my tongue for example at the very moment that I ask myself, Who? But, *Who* then? For I no longer know who I am (following) or who it is I am chasing, who is following me or hunting me. Who comes before and who is after whom? I no longer know where my head is. Madness: “We’re all mad here. I’m mad. You’re mad.” I no longer know how to respond, or even to respond to the question that impels me or asks me who I am (following) or after whom I am (following) and the way I am running.

*To follow* and *to be after* will not only be the question and the question of what we call the animal. We shall discover further along the question of the question, that which begins by wondering what *to respond* means, and whether an animal (but which one?) ever replies in its own name. And by wondering whether one can answer for what “I am (following)” means when that seems to necessitate an “I am inasmuch as I am *after* [*après*] the animal” or “I am inasmuch as I am *alongside* [*auprès*] the animal.”

Being *after*, being *alongside*, being *near* [*près*] would appear as different modes of being, indeed of *being-with*. With the animal. But, in spite of appearances, it isn’t certain that these modes of being come to modify a preestablished being, even less a primitive “I am.” In any case they express a certain order of the being-huddled-together [*être-serré*] (which is what the etymological root, *pressu*, indicates, whence are derived the

12. “Chasser”: also “to hunt.”—TRANS.

words *près, auprès, après*), the being-pressed, the being-with as being strictly attached, bound, enchained, being-under-pressure, compressed, impressed, repressed, pressed-against according to the stronger or weaker stricture of what always remains pressing. In what sense of the neighbor [*prochain*] (which is not necessarily that of a biblical or Greco-Latin tradition) should I say that I am close or near to the animal and that I am (following) it, and in what type or order of pressure? Being-with it in the sense of being-close-to-it? Being-alongside-it? Being-after-it? *Being-after-it* in the sense of the hunt, training, or taming, or *being-after-it* in the sense of a succession or inheritance? In all cases, if I am (following) *after* it, the animal therefore comes before me, earlier than me (*früher* is Kant's word regarding the animal, and Kant will later be called as a witness). The animal is there before me, there close 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. It surrounds me. And from the vantage of this being-there-before-me it can allow itself to be looked at, no doubt, but also—something that philosophy perhaps forgets, perhaps being this calculated forgetting itself—it can look at me. It has its point of view regarding me. The point of view of the absolute other, and nothing will have ever done more to make me think through this absolute alterity of the neighbor than these moments when I see myself seen naked under the gaze of a cat.

What stakes are raised by these questions? One doesn't need to be an expert to foresee that they involve thinking about what is meant by living, speaking, dying, being and world as in being-in-the-world or being towards the world, or being-with, being-before, being-behind, being-after, being and following, being followed or being following, there where *I am*, in one way or another, but unimpeachably, *near* what they call the animal. It is too late to deny it, it will have been there before me who is (following) after it. *After* and *near* what they call the animal and *with* it—whether we want it or not and whatever we do about it.

I must once more return to the malaise of this scene. I ask for your forbearance. I will do all I can to prevent its being presented as a primal scene: this deranged theatrics of the *wholly other that they call animal, for example, a cat*. Yes, the wholly other, more other than any other that *they* call an animal, for example a cat, when it looks at me naked, at the instant when I introduce myself, present myself to it—or, earlier, at that strange moment when, before the event, before even wanting it or knowing it myself, I am passively presented to it as naked, seen and seen naked, before even seeing *myself* seen by a cat. Before even seeing myself or knowing myself seen naked. I am presented to it before even introducing myself. Nudity is nothing other than that passivity, the involuntary exhibition of the self. Nudity gets stripped to bare necessity only in that frontal exhibition, in that face-to-face. Here, faced with a cat of one *or* the

other sex, or of one *and* the other sex. And faced with a cat that continues to see me, to watch me leave when I turn my back on it, a cat that, from that moment on, because I no longer see it seeing me still, from behind, I thus risk forgetting.

I have just attributed passivity to nudity. We could nickname this denuded passivity with a term that will come back more than once, from different places and in different registers, namely, *the passion of the animal*, *my passion of the animal*, *my passion of the animal other*: seeing oneself seen naked under a gaze that is vacant to the extent of being bottomless, at the same time innocent and cruel perhaps, perhaps sensitive and impassive, good and bad, uninterpretable, unreadable, undecidable, abyssal and secret. Wholly other, like the (every) other that is (every bit) other found in such intolerable proximity that I do not as yet feel I am justified or qualified to call it my fellow, even less my brother. For we shall have to ask ourselves, inevitably, what happens to the fraternity of brothers when an animal enters the scene. Or, conversely, what happens to the animal when one brother comes after the other, when Abel is *after* Cain who is *after* Abel. Or when a son is *after* his father. What happens to animals, surrogate or not, to the ass and ram on Mount Moriah?

What does this bottomless gaze offer to my sight [*donne à voir*]? What does it "say" to me, demonstrating quite simply the naked truth of every gaze, given that that truth *allows me to see and be seen* through the eyes of the other, in the *seeing* and not just *seen* eyes of the other? I am here thinking of those seeing eyes, those eyes of a seer whose color must at the same time be *seen and forgotten*. In looking at the gaze of the other, Lévinas says, one must forget the color of his eyes, in other words see the gaze, the face that gazes before seeing the visible eyes of the other. But when he reminds us that the "best way of meeting the Other is not even to notice the color of his eyes,"<sup>13</sup> he is speaking of man, of one's fellow as man, kindred, brother; he thinks of the other man and this, for us, will later be revealed as a matter for serious concern.

As with every bottomless gaze, as with the eyes of the other, the gaze called animal offers to my sight the abyssal limit of the human: the inhuman or the ahuman, the ends of man, that is to say the bordercrossing from which vantage man dares to announce himself to himself, thereby calling himself by the name that he believes he gives himself. And in these moments of nakedness, under the gaze of 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, I identify with it by running behind it, after it, after its whole zoo-logy. When the instant of extreme passion passes, and I find peace again, then I can relax

13. Emmanuel Lévinas, *Ethics and Infinity: Conversations with Philippe Nemo*, trans. Richard A. Cohen (1982; Pittsburgh, 1985), p. 85.

and speak of the beasts of the Apocalypse, visit them in the museum, see them in a painting (but for the Greeks zoography referred to the portraiture of the living in general and not just the painting of animals); I can visit them at the zoo, read about them in the Bible, or speak about them as in a book.

If I began by saying, “the wholly other they *call* the ‘animal,’ and for example a ‘cat,’” if I underlined the call [*appel*] and added quotation marks, it was to do more than announce a problem that will henceforth never leave us, that of appellation—and of the *response* to a call.

Before pursuing things in that direction, let me confide in you the hypothesis that crossed my mind the first time my gaze met that of a cat-pussycat that seemed to be imploring me, asking me clearly to open the door for it to go out, as she did, without waiting, as she often does, for example when she first follows me into the bathroom then immediately regrets her decision. It is moreover a scene that is repeated every morning. The cat follows me when I wake up, into the bathroom, asking for her breakfast, but she demands to be let out of that very room as soon as it (or she) sees me naked, ready for everything and resolved to make her wait. However, when I am found naked under the gaze of what they call the animal, a fictitious tableau is played out in my imagination, a sort of classification after Linnaeus, a taxonomy of the *point of view of animals*. Other than the difference mentioned earlier between poem and philosopheme, one can only find, at bottom, two types of discourse, two positions of knowledge, two grand forms of theoretical or philosophical treatise regarding the animal. What distinguishes them is obviously the place, indeed the body of their signatories, that is to say the trace that that signature leaves in a corpus and in a properly scientific, theoretical or philosophical thematics. In the first place there are those texts signed by people who have no doubt seen, observed, analyzed, reflected on the animal, but who have never been *seen seen* by the animal. Their gaze has never intersected with that of an animal directed at them (forget about their being naked). If, indeed, they did happen to be seen seen furtively by the animal one day, they took no (thematic, theoretical, or philosophical) account of it. They neither wanted nor had the capacity to draw any systematic consequence from the fact that an animal could, facing them, look at them, clothed or naked, and in a word, without a word, *address them*. They have taken no account of the fact that what they call animal could *look at* them and *address* them from down there, from a wholly other origin. That category of discourse, texts, and signatories (those who have never been seen seen by an animal that addressed them) is by far the most frequent. It is probably what brings together *all* philosophers and all theoreticians *as such*. At least those of a certain *epoch*, let's say from Descartes to the present, but I will say later why the word “epoch” and even this historicism leaves me quite uneasy or dissatisfied. Clearly all those (all those males but not all those females, and that difference is not

insignificant here) whom I will later situate in order to back up my thesis, arranging them within the same configuration, for example Descartes, Kant, Heidegger, Lacan and Lévinas, belong to this quasi-epochal category. Their discourses are sound and profound, but everything goes on as if they themselves had never been looked at, and especially not naked, by an animal that addressed them. At least everything goes on as though this troubling experience had not been theoretically registered, supposing that they had experienced it at all, at the precise moment when they made of the animal a *theorem*, something seen and not seeing. The experience of the seeing animal, of the animal that looks at them, has not been taken into account in the philosophical or theoretical architecture of their discourse. In sum they have denied it as much as misunderstood it. Henceforth we can do little more than turn around this immense disavowal whose logic traverses the whole history of humanity, and not only that of the quasi-epochal configuration I just mentioned. It is as if the men representing this configuration had seen without being seen, seen the animal without being seen by it, without being seen seen by it; without being seen seen naked by someone who, from the basis of a life called animal, and not only by means of the gaze, would have obliged them to recognize, at the moment of address, that this was their affair, their look-out [*que cela les regardait*].

But since I don't believe, at bottom, that it has never happened to them, or that it has not in some way been signified, figured, or metonymized, more or less secretly, in the gestures of their discourse, the symptom of this disavowal remains to be deciphered. This figure could not be the figure of just one disavowal among others. It 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.

As for the other category of discourse, found among those whose signatories are first and foremost poets or prophets, in the situation of poetry or prophecy, those men and women who admit taking upon themselves the address of an animal that addresses them, before even having the time or the power to take themselves off [*s'y dérober*], to take themselves off with clothes off or in a bathrobe, I know of no *statutory representative* of it, that is to say no subject who does so as theoretical, philosophical, or juridical man, or even as citizen. I have found no such representative, but it is in that very place that I find myself, here and now, in the process of searching.

That is the track I am following, the track I am ferreting out [*la piste que je dépiste*], following the traces of this "wholly other they call 'animal,' for example 'cat.'"

Why rename that appellation? Why say "the wholly other they call 'animal,' for example 'cat'?" In order to recall a scene of name-calling, beginning at the beginning, namely in Genesis—and at least a type of new beginning, a second beginning in what is distinguished in Bereshit

as the *second* narrative. For one must indeed specify that that story is a second “Heading” (“*Entête*” in Chouraqui’s translation).<sup>14</sup> The man who, in that rendering, calls the animals by name, is not only Adam, the man of the earth, the husbandman [*glébeux*]. He is also Ish preceding Ishah, man before woman. It is the man Ish, still alone, who gives names to the animals created before him: “The husbandman cried out the name of each beast,” one translation (Chouraqui) says; another (Dhormes): “Man called all the animals by their names” (Gen. 2:20).

Let me repeat: it is only recorded thus in the *second* narrative. If one believes what is called the *first* narrative, God creates man in his image but he brings male and female into the world at the same time. Naming will thus have been the fact of man as a couple, if it can be put that way. The original naming of the animals does not take place in the first version. It isn’t the man-woman of the first version but man *alone* and *before* woman who, in that second version, gives their names, his names, to the animals. On the other hand it is said in the first version that the husbandman, created as God’s replica, and created male-female, man-woman, immediately receives the order to subject the animals to him. In order to obey he is required to mark his ascendancy, his domination over them, indeed his power to tame them. Having created the living animals on the fifth day (the beasts, that is to say animals for domestication, birds, fish, reptiles and wild beasts), and having blessed them,

Elohim said: “Let us make man in our image, in our likeness! Let them [note the sudden move to the plural] *have authority* [my italics] over the fish of the sea and the birds of the heavens, over the cattle, over all the wild beasts and reptiles that crawl upon the earth!” Elohim therefore created man in his image, in the image of Elohim he created him. Male and female he created them. Elohim blessed them and said, “Be fruitful and multiply, fill the earth and subdue it, *have authority* [my italics again] over the fish of the sea and the birds of the heavens, over every living thing that moves on the earth.” [Gen. 1:26–28; trans. Dhormes]<sup>15</sup>

14. In this section Derrida consistently compares two authoritative French translations of Genesis (Bereshit), those by Chouraqui and Dhormes (Pléiade). My transliterations lose some of the subtleties. For comparisons readers may consult the King James version, the Jerusalem Bible, or *The JPS Torah Commentary: Genesis*, trans. Jewish Publication Society, ed. Nahum M. Sarna (Philadelphia, 1989).

15.

Elohim dit: “Faisons l’homme à notre image, à notre ressemblance! Qu’ils aient autorité sur les poissons de la mer et sur les oiseaux des cieus, sur les bestiaux, sur toutes les bêtes sauvages et sur tous les reptiles qui rampent sur la terre!” Elohim créa donc l’homme à son image, à l’image d’Elohim il le créa. Il les créa homme et femelle. Elohim les bénit et Elohim leur dit: “Fructifiez et multipliez-vous, remplissez la terre et soumettez-la, ayez autorité sur les poissons de la mer et sur les oiseaux des cieus, sur tout vivant qui remue sur la terre!”—TRANS.



Elohim said: "We will make Adam the husbandman—  
 As our replica, in our likeness.  
 They will *subject* [my italics] the fish of the sea, the  
 flying creatures of the heavens,  
 The beasts, the whole earth, every reptile that crawls upon  
 the earth." Elohim created the husbandman as his replica,  
 As a replica of Elohim he created him,  
 Male and female he created them.  
 Elohim blessed them. Elohim said to them:  
 "Be fruitful, multiply, fill the earth, conquer it.  
*Subject* [my italics again] the fish of the sea, the flying  
 creatures of the heavens,  
 Every living thing that crawls on the earth." [Gen. 1:26–28; trans.  
 Chouraqui]<sup>16</sup>

That is the first narrative. God commands man-woman to command the animals, but not yet to name them. What happens next, in the second narrative? There occurs something, a single and double thing, twice at the same time, something that, it seems to me, gets little notice in most readings of this Genesis that is infinite in its second breath.

*On the one hand*, the naming of the animals is performed *at one and the same time*, before the creation of Ishah, the female part of man, *and*, as a result, before they perceive themselves to be naked; and they are at first naked without shame ("The two of them are naked, the husbandman and his wife; they don't blanch on account of it.")<sup>17</sup> After a certain serpent—one we shall return to—comes by, they will perceive themselves to be naked, and not without shame.

*On the other hand*, and this is especially important, the public announcing of names remains *at one and the same time* free *and* overseen, under surveillance, under the gaze of Jehovah who does not for all that intervene. He lets Adam, he lets man, man alone, Ish without Ishah, the woman, freely call out the names. He lets him go about naming alone. But he is waiting in the wings, watching over this man alone with a mixture of curiosity and authority. God observes: Adam is observed, within sight, he names under observation. In Chouraqui's translation: "He has them come towards the husbandman *in order to see* what he will call out to

16.

Elohim dit: "Nous ferons Adâm-le Glébeux— / A notre réplique, selon notre ressemblance. / Ils assujettiront le poisson de la mer, le volatile des ciels, / la bête, toute la terre, tout reptile qui rampe sur la terre." / Elohim créa le glébeux à sa réplique, / A la réplique d'Elohim, il les crée, / mâle et femelle, il les crée. / Elohim les bénit. Elohim leur dit : / "Fructifiez, multipliez, emplissez la terre, conquérez-la. / Assujettissez le poisson de la mer, le volatile des ciels, / tout vivant qui rampe sur la terre."—TRANS.

17. "Les deux sont nus, le glébeux et sa femme : ils n'en blémissent pas."—TRANS.

them" (Gen. 2:19).<sup>18</sup> He has them come forward, he summons them, the animals that, according to the first narrative, he had created—and I firmly underline this factor that is fundamental to what concerns us—he summons them in order to "subject" (Chouraqui) them to man's command, in order to place them under man's "authority" (Dhormes). More precisely, he has created man in his likeness *so that* man will *subject, tame, dominate, train, or domesticate* the animals born before him and assert his authority over them. God destines the animals to an experience of the power of man, *in order to see* the power of man in action, in order to see the power of man at work, in order to see man take power over all the other living beings. Chouraqui: "He has them come towards the husbandman *in order to see* what he will call out to them"; Dhormes: "He brings them to man *in order to see* what he will call them."<sup>19</sup> The "in order to see" that I have underlined twice seems full of meaning. It is the same expression in both translations. God gives Ish alone the freedom to name the animals, granted, and that represents at the same time his sovereignty and his loneliness. However, everything seems to happen as though God still wanted to oversee, keep vigil, maintain his right of inspection over the names that were about to echo out and by means of which Ish, Ish all alone, Ish still without woman, was going to get the upper hand with respect to the animals. God wanted to oversee but also abandon himself to his curiosity, even allow himself to be surprised and outflanked by the radical novelty of what was going to occur, by this irreversible, welcome or unwelcome event of naming whereby Ish would begin to see them and name them without allowing himself to be seen or named by them. God lets him, Ish, speak on his own, call out on his own, call out and nominate, call out and name, as if he were able to say, "I name," "I call." God lets Ish call the other living things all on his own, give them their names in his own name, these animals that are older and younger than him, these living things that came into the world before him but were named after him, on his initiative according to the second narrative. In both cases, man is in both senses of the word *after* the animal. He follows him. This "after," that determines a sequence, a consequence, or a persecution, is not in time, nor is it temporal; it is the very genesis of time.

God thus lets Ish do the calling of his own accord, he accords him the right to give them names in his own name—but just in order to see. This "in order to see" marks at the same time the infinite right of inspection of an all powerful God *and* the finitude of a God who doesn't know what is going to happen to him with language. And with names. In short, God doesn't yet know what he really wants; this is the finitude of a God who doesn't know what he wants with respect to the animal, that is to say

18. "Il les fait venir vers le glébeux pour voir ce qu'il leur criera."—TRANS.

19. "Ils les amena vers l'homme pour voir comment il les appellerait."—TRANS.

with respect to the life of the living as such, a God who sees something coming without seeing it coming, a God who will say “*I am that I am*” without knowing what he is going to see when a poet enters the scene to give his name to living things. This powerful yet deprived “in order to see” that is God’s, the first stroke of time, before time, God’s exposure to surprise, to the event of what is going to occur between man and animal, this time before time has always made me dizzy. As if someone said, in the form of a promise or a threat, “you’ll see what you’ll see” without knowing what was going to end up happening. It is the dizziness one feels before the abyss opened by this stupid ruse, this feigned feint, what I have been feeling for so long [*depuis le temps*] whenever I run away from an animal that looks at me naked. I often wonder whether this vertigo before the abyss of such an “in order to see” deep in the eyes of God is not the same as that which takes hold of me when I feel so naked in front of a cat, facing it, and when, meeting its gaze I hear the cat or God ask itself, ask *me*: is he going to call me, is he going to address me? What is he going to call me, this naked man, before I give him woman, before I lend her to him in giving her to him, before I give her to him or before he gives her to himself by taking upon himself, from under him, from at his side [*à ses côtés*] ? Or even from his rib [*de sa côte*] ?

Since time.

For so long now it is as if the cat had been recalling itself and recalling that, recalling me and reminding me of this awful tale of Genesis, without breathing a word. Who was born first, before the names? Which one saw the other come to this place so long ago? Who will have been the first occupant, and thus the master? Who the subject? Who has remained the despot, for so long now?

Things would be too simple altogether, the anthropo-theomorphic reappropriation would already have begun, there would even be the risk that domestication has already come into effect if I were to give in to my own melancholy. If, in order to hear it in myself, I were to undertake to overinterpret what the cat might be saying to me, in its own way, what it might be suggesting or simply signifying in a language of mute traces, that is to say without any words. If, in a word, I assigned to it the words it has no need of, as is said of the cat’s “voice” in Baudelaire (“To utter the longest of sentences it has no need of words”).

But in forbidding myself thus to assign, interpret or project, must I conversely give in to the other violence or stupidity [*bêtise*], that which would consist in suspending one’s compassion and in depriving the animal of every power of manifestation, of the desire to manifest *to me* anything at all, and even to manifest to me in some way *its* experience of *my* language, of *my* words and of *my* nudity?

From the vantage of that time when the animals were named, *before original sin*, I will mark, for the moment, still in the guise of an epigraph,

the following reservation: the questions I am posing, my having confessed to feeling disarmed before a small mute living being, and my avowed desire to escape the alternative of a projection that appropriates and an interruption that excludes, all that might lead one to guess that I am not ready to interpret or experience the gaze that a cat fixes, without a word, on my nakedness, *in the negative*, if I can put it that way, as Benjamin suggests doing within a certain tradition that we must speak of later. In fact that tradition assigns to nature and to the animality named by Adam a sort of “deep sadness” (*Traurigkeit*).<sup>20</sup> Such a melancholic mourning would reflect an impossible resignation, as if protesting in silence against the unacceptable fatality of that very silence: the fact of being condemned to muteness (*Stummheit*) and to the absence of language (*Sprachlosigkeit*), to stupor also, to that *Benommenheit* that Heidegger speaks of and that he defines, in a text that I would later like to read closely, as the essence of animality (*Das Wesen der Tierheit*). *Benommenheit* is a mute stupor, stupefaction, or daze. A new translation uses the word *absorption* [*accaparement*] in order to attenuate somewhat euphemistically the potential violence of this qualification but also in order to render the sense of a type of encircling (*Umring*) within which the animal, as *alolon*, finds itself, according to Heidegger, deprived of access in its very opening to the being of the entity as such, to being as such, to the “as such” of what is. It is true that, according to Benjamin, the sadness, mourning, and melancholy (*Traurigkeit*) of nature and of animality are born out of this muteness (*Stummheit*, *Sprachlosigkeit*), but also out of and by means of the wound without a name: that of having *been given a name*. Finding oneself deprived of language, one loses the power to name, to name oneself, indeed to *respond* to one’s name. (As if man didn’t also receive his name and his names!)

The sentiment of this deprivation, of this impoverishment, of this lack would thus be the great sorrow of nature (*das grosse Leid der Natur*). It is in the hope of requiting that, of redemption (*Erlösung*) from that suffering, that humans live and speak in nature—humans in general and not only poets, as Benjamin makes clear. More interestingly, this putative sadness doesn’t just derive from the inability to speak (*Sprachlosigkeit*) and from muteness, from an aphasic inability or stupefaction that prevents the use of words. If this putative sadness gives rise to a lament, if nature laments, expressing a mute but audible lament through the sensuous breath and rustling of plants, it is because the terms have to be inverted. Benjamin suggests as much. There must be a reversal, an *Umkehrung* in the essence of nature. Following the hypothesis of this reversing reversal, nature (and animality within it) isn’t sad because it is mute (*weil sie stumm*

20. Walter Benjamin, “On Language as Such and on the Language of Man [“Über die Sprache überhaupt und über die Sprache des Menschen”] (1916), trans. Edmund Jephcott, vol. 1 of *Selected Writings*, trans. Lloyd Spencer et al., ed. Marcus Bullock and Michael W. Jennings (Cambridge, Mass., 1996), p. 72.

ist). On the contrary, it is nature's sadness or mourning that renders it mute and aphasic, that leaves it without words (*Die Traurigkeit der Natur macht sie verstummen*). For what, for so long now, has been making it sad and as a result has deprived the mourner of words, what forbids words, is not the muteness and experience of a powerlessness, an inability to name; it is in the first place the fact of *receiving one's name*. This is a startling intuition. Benjamin says that even when the one who names is equal to the gods, happy and well-blessed, being named (*benannt zu sein*) or seeing oneself given one's proper name is something like being invaded by sadness, it is sadness *itself* (a sadness whose origin would therefore always be this passivity of being named, this impossibility of reappropriating one's own name), or at least a sort of obscure foreshadowing of sadness. One should rather say *a foreshadowing of mourning (eine Ahnung von Trauer)*. A foreshadowing of mourning because it seems to me that every case of naming involves announcing a death to come in the surviving of a ghost, the longevity of a name that survives whoever carries that name. Whoever receives a name feels mortal or dying precisely because the name seeks to save him, to call him and thus assure his survival. Being called, hearing oneself being named, receiving a name for the first time involves something like the knowledge of being mortal and even the feeling that one is dying. Already dead by virtue of being promised to death: dying. (How could one, I ask in passing, thus refuse the animal access to the experience of death as such by depriving it of nomination?) But as I was suggesting just now, I am not (following) Benjamin when I find myself naked under the gaze of the animal; I am not ready to follow him in his wonderful meditation written right in the middle of the First World War, in 1916.

Why not? Among other reasons because such a meditation lays out this whole scene of a grieving aphasia within the time frame of redemption, that is to say after the fall and after original sin (*nach dem Sündenfall*). It would thus take place *since the time* of the fall. I situate this time of the fall at the purposive intersection of two traditions because in the Genesis tale as much as in the myth of Prometheus (let's remember the *Protagoras* and the moment when Prometheus steals fire, that is to say the arts and technics, in order to make up for the forgetfulness or tardiness of Epimetheus who had perfectly equipped all breeds of animal but left "man naked [*gymnon*]," without shoes, covering, or arms), it is paradoxically on the basis of a fault or failing in man that the latter will be made a subject who is master of nature and of the animal. From within the pit of that lack, an eminent lack, a quite different lack from that he assigns to the animal, man installs or claims in a single movement *what is proper to him* (the peculiarity of a man whose property it is not to have anything that is exclusively his) and his *superiority* over what is called animal life. This last superiority, infinite and par excellence, has as its property the fact of being at one and the same time *unconditional* and *sacrificial*.

That would be the law of an imperturbable logic, both Promethean and Adamic, both Greek and Abrahamic (Judaic, Christian, and Islamic). Its invariance hasn't stopped being verified all the way to our modernity. Yet I have been wanting to bring myself back to my nudity before the cat, since so long ago, since a previous time, in the Genesis tale, since the time when Adam, alias Ish, called out the animals' names *before* the fall, still naked but before being ashamed of his nudity.

I am thus speaking from within that time frame [*depuis ce temps*]. My passion for the animal is awakened at that age. I admitted just now to being ashamed of being ashamed. I could therefore be surprised by my uneasiness, my shame at being ashamed, naked before the animal or animals, only by taking myself back to a time before the fall, before shame and the shame of being ashamed. Before evil and before all ills. Can one speak of the animal? Can one approach the animal? Can one from the vantage of the animal see oneself being looked at naked? From the vantage of the animal before evil [*le mal*] and before all ills [*les maux*]?

I am trying to speak to you from within that time frame, of myself in particular, in private or in public, but of myself in particular. That time frame would also be that which, in principle, supposing it were possible, separates autobiography from confession. Autobiography becomes confession when the discourse on the self does not dissociate truth from an avowal, thus from a fault, an evil, an ill. And first and foremost from a truth that would be due, a debt in truth that needs to be paid off. Why *would one owe* truth? Why would it belong to the essence of truth to be due, and nude? And therefore confessed? Why this duty to pay off truth if hiding the truth, feigning truth, feigning also to hide, feigning to hide oneself or hide the truth, were not already the experience of evil and of ill, of a potential fault, of a culpability, of a sufferance, of a debt—of a deceiving and a lie.

How and why would truth be due? And how and why caught, surprised from the first instant in a logic of debt and owing? Why would truth be what is due, that is to say owed to veracity, to the revealing of oneself, to the truth of self as sincerity? Is there, and in particular in the history of discourse, indeed of the becoming-literature of discourse, an ancient form of autobiography immune from confession, an account of the self free from any sense of confession? And thus from all redemptive language, within the horizon of salvation as a requiting? Has there been, since so long ago, a place and a meaning for autobiography before original sin and before the religions of the book? Autobiography and memoir before Christianity, especially, before the Christian institutions of confession? That has been in doubt for so long now, and a reading of the prodigious *Confessions* of European history such as have formed our culture of subjectivity from Augustine to Rousseau, would not be about to dispel that doubt.

Between Augustine and Rousseau, within the same indisputable filiation, within the evolving history of the *ego cogito ergo sum*, stands Descartes. He waits for us with his animal-machines. I presume that he won't interrupt the lineage that, for so long now, has tied the autobiographical genre to the institution of confession.

Since that time, since time: that means since the time that has passed, but also since the time before time. Since time, that is to say since a time when there was not yet time, when time hadn't elapsed, if that is possible, before the verdict, the reckoning or the fall.

Although I must put off until later a patient reading and interpretation of the systematic and rich text that, in 1929–30, following *Being and Time*, Heidegger devoted to the animal, I note the following in anticipation of it here, having just spoken of time before time: one of the rare times, perhaps the only time (that needs checking) that Heidegger names the animal in *Being and Time*, a text that is also in its own way a treatise that seeks to be non-Christian, concerning a certain fall of the *Dasein*, it is in order to admit to a difficulty that will be saved for later (my hypothesis is this: whatever is put off until later will probably be put off for ever; later here signifies never). What is that difficulty? That of knowing if the animal *has time*, if it is “constituted by some kind of ‘time.’” According to Heidegger that “remains a problem [*bleibt ein Problem*]”:

It remains a problem in itself [or for itself, *bleibt ein Problem für sich*: remains an original problem, separate, to be treated separately] to define ontologically the way in which the senses can be *stimulated* or *touched* in something that merely has life [*in einem Nur-Lebenden*], and how and where the Being of animals [*das Sein der Tiere*], for instance [*zum Beispiel*], is constituted by some kind of “time.”<sup>21</sup>

The being of animals is only an example (*zum Beispiel*). But for Heidegger it is a trustworthy example of what he calls *Nur-lebenden*, that which is living but no more, life in its pure and simple state. I think I understand what that means, this “nothing more (*nur*)”; I can understand it on the surface, in terms of what it means, but at the same time I understand nothing. I will always ask myself whether this fiction, this simulacrum, this myth, this legend, this phantasm of what is offered as a pure concept (life in its pure state—Benjamin also has confidence in what can probably be no more than a pseudo-concept) is not precisely pure philosophy become a symptom of the history that concerns us here. Isn't that history the one that man tells himself, the history of the philosophical animal, of the animal for the man-philosopher? Is it a coincidence that the sentence

21. Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (New York, 1962), p. 396.

is the last one preceding a chapter entitled *Die Zeitlichkeit des Verfallens* (the temporality of reckoning, fall, or decay)?

I suggested just now that for certain of us perhaps, for those who welcome us here, for those who have gratified me by coming back once more, this chateau has remained for me, for so long now, a place of friendship but also of haunting [*de l'amitié hantée*]. For nearly forty years. Indeed, friendship that is haunted, shadows of faces, furtive silhouettes of certain presences, movements, footsteps, music, words that come to life in my memory, on the terraces around us, among the trees, beside the lake and in all the rooms of this mansion, beginning with this room. I enjoy more and more the taste of this memory that is at the same time tender, joyful, and melancholy, a memory, then, that likes to give itself over to the return of ghosts, many of whom are happily still living and, in some cases, present here. Others, alas, have died since that time, but they remain for me, just as when they were alive, close and present friends: Toyosaki Koitchi, Francis Ponge, Gilles Deleuze, Sarah Kofman. From here I can see them see and hear us.

However, if I am to believe my memory that has thus been invaded by memories, for so long now, a memory that is almost hallucinated, I find myself about to embark upon the most *chimerical* discourse that I have probably ever attempted, or that has ever tempted me in this chateau.

We thus confront the scene of the chimera, the temptation of or attempt at a chimera in this haunted chateau. Is it an animal, this chimera, an animal that can be defined as one, and only one? Is it more than or other than an animal? Or, as one often says of the chimera, more than one animal in one?

The animal, what a word!

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 another living creature [*à l'autre vivant*].

At the point at which we find ourselves, even before I get involved, or try to drag you after me or in pursuit of me upon an itinerary that some of you will no doubt find tortuous, labyrinthine, even aberrant, leading us astray from lure to lure, I will attempt the operation of disarmament that consists in *posing* what one could call some hypotheses in view of theses; posing them simply, naked, frontally, as directly as possible, *pose* them as I said, by no means in the way one indulgently poses in front of a spectator, a painter of portraits, or a camera, but “pose” in the sense of situating a series of “positions.”

*First hypothesis:* for about two centuries, intensely and by means of an alarming rate of acceleration, for we no longer even have a clock or a chronological measure of it, we, we who call ourselves men or humans, we who recognize ourselves in that name, have been involved in an un-



precedented transformation. This mutation affects the experience of what we continue to call imperturbably, as if there were nothing wrong with it, the animal and/or animals. I intend to stake a lot, or play a lot on the flexible separation of this *and/or*. This new situation can be determined only on the basis of a very ancient one. We must continuously move along this coming and going between the oldest and what comes of the exchange among the new, the “again,” and the “anew” of a repetition. Far from appearing, simply, within what we continue to call the world, history, life, and so on, this unheard of relation to the animal or to animals is so new that it should oblige us to worry all those concepts, more than just problematize them. That is why I would hesitate to say that we are *living through* that (if one can still confidently call *life* the experience whose limits tremble at the bordercrossings between *bios* and *zoē*, the biological, zoological, and anthropological, as between life and death, life and technology, life and history, and so on). I would therefore hesitate just as much to say that we are living through a historical turning point. The figure of the turning point implies a rupture or an instantaneous mutation for which the model or the figure remains genetic, biological, or zoological, and which therefore remains, precisely, to be questioned. As for history, historicity, even historicity, those motifs belong precisely—as we shall see in detail—to *this* auto-definition, *this* auto-apprehension, *this* auto-situation of man or of the human *Dasein* with respect to what is living and with respect to animal life; they belong to this auto-biography of man that I wish to call into question today.

Since all these words, in particular “history,” belong in a constitutive manner to the language, interests, and lures of this autobiography, we should not be overhasty in giving them credence or in confirming their pseudo-evidence. I will therefore not be speaking of an historical turning point in order to name a transformation in process, an alteration that is at the same time more serious and less recognizable than a turning point in the relation to the animal, in the being-with shared by man and by what man calls the animal: the *being* of what calls itself man or the *Dasein* with what he himself calls, or what we ourselves call, what we still dare, provisionally, to name in general but in the singular, *the animal*. However one names or interprets this alteration, no one could deny that it has been accelerating, intensifying, no longer knowing where it is going, for about two centuries, at an incalculable rate and level.

Given this indetermination, the fact that it is left hanging, why should I say, as I have more than once, “for about two centuries,” as though such a point of reference were rigorously possible in speaking of a process that is no doubt as old as man, as old as what he calls his world, his knowledge, his history and his technology? Well, in order to recall, for convenience to begin with and without laying claim to being exact, certain preexisting indices that allow us to be heard and understood and to say “us” here today. Limiting ourselves to the most imposing of these

indices we can refer to those that go well beyond the animal sacrifices of the Bible or of ancient Greece, well beyond the hecatombs (sacrifices of one hundred cattle, with all the metaphors that that expression has since been charged with), beyond the hunting, fishing, domestication, training, or traditional exploitation of animal energy (transport, plowing, draught animals, the horse, ox, reindeer, and so on, and then the guard dog, small-scale butchering, and then animal experiments, and so on). It is all too evident that in the course of the last two centuries these traditional forms of treatment of the animal have been turned upside down by the joint developments of zoological, ethological, biological, and genetic *forms of knowledge* and the always inseparable *techniques* of intervention with respect to their object, the transformation of the actual object, its milieu, its world, namely, the living animal. This has occurred by means of farming and regimentalization at a demographic level unknown in the past, by means of genetic experimentation, the industrialization of what can be called the production for consumption of animal meat, artificial insemination on a massive scale, more and more audacious manipulations of the genome, the reduction of the animal not only to production and overactive reproduction (hormones, genetic crossbreeding, cloning, and so on) of meat for consumption but also of all sorts of other end products, and all of that in the service of a certain being and the so-called human well-being of man.

All that is well known; we have no need to dwell on it. However one interprets it, whatever practical, technical, scientific, juridical, ethical, or political consequence one draws from it, no one can deny this event any more, no one can deny the *unprecedented* proportions of this subjection of the animal. Such a subjection, whose history we are attempting to interpret, can be called violence in the most morally neutral sense of the term and even includes a certain interventionist violence that is practiced, as in some very minor and in no way dominant cases, let us never forget, in the service of and for the protection of the animal, most often the human animal. Neither can one seriously deny the disavowal that this involves. No one can deny seriously, or for very long, that men do all they can in order to dissimulate this cruelty or to hide it from themselves, in order to organize on a global scale the forgetting or misunderstanding of this violence that some would compare to the worst cases of genocide (there are also animal genocides: the number of species endangered because of man takes one's breath away). One should neither abuse the figure of genocide nor consider it explained away. For it gets more complicated here: the annihilation of certain species is indeed in process, but it is occurring through the organization and exploitation of an artificial, infernal, virtually interminable survival, in conditions that previous generations would have judged monstrous, outside of every supposed norm of a life proper to animals that are thus exterminated by means of their continued existence or even their overpopulation. As if, for example, in-

stead of throwing people into ovens or gas chambers (let's say Nazi) doctors and geneticists had decided to organize the overproduction and overgeneration of Jews, gypsies, and homosexuals by means of artificial insemination, so that, being more numerous and better fed, they could be destined in always increasing numbers for the same hell, that of the imposition of genetic experimentation or extermination by gas or by fire. In the same abattoirs. I don't wish to abuse the ease with which one can overload with pathos the self-evidences I am drawing attention to here. Everybody knows what terrifying and intolerable pictures a realist painting could give to the industrial, mechanical, chemical, hormonal, and genetic violence to which man has been submitting animal life for the past two centuries. Everybody knows what the production, breeding, transport, and slaughter of these animals has become. Instead of thrusting these images in your faces or awakening them in your memory, something that would be both too easy and endless, let me simply say a word about this "pathos." If these images are "pathetic," if they evoke sympathy, it is also because they "pathetically" open the immense question of pathos and the pathological, precisely, that is, of suffering, pity, and compassion; and the place that has to be accorded to the interpretation of this compassion, to the sharing of this suffering among the living, to the law, ethics, and politics that must be brought to bear upon this experience of compassion. For what has been happening now for two centuries involves a new experience of this compassion. In response to the irresistible but unacknowledged unleashing and the organized disavowal of this torture, voices are raised—minority, weak, marginal voices, little assured of their discourse, of their right to discourse and of the enactment of their discourse within the law, as a declaration of rights—in order to protest, in order to appeal (we'll return to this) to what is still presented in such a problematic way as *animal rights*, in order to awaken us to our responsibilities and our obligations with respect to the living in general, and precisely to this fundamental compassion that, were we to take it seriously, would have to change even the very basis (and that basis is what I wish to discuss today) of the philosophical problematic of the animal.

It is in thinking of the source and ends of this compassion that about two centuries ago someone like Bentham, as is well known, proposed changing the very form of the question regarding the animal that dominated discourse within the tradition, in the language of both the most refined philosophical argument and everyday acceptance and common sense. Bentham said something like this: the question is not to know whether the animal can think, reason, or talk, something we still pretend to be asking ourselves. (From Aristotle to Descartes, from Descartes, especially, to Heidegger, Lévinas, and Lacan, this question determines so many others concerning *power* or *capability* [*pouvoirs*] and *attributes* [*avoirs*]: being able, having the power to give, to die, to bury one's dead, to dress, to work, to invent a technique, and so on, a power that consists in having

such and such a faculty, thus such and such a power, as an essential attribute). Thus the question will not be to know whether animals are of the type *zōon logon echon*, whether they *can* speak or reason thanks to that *capacity* or that *attribute* implied in the *logos*, the *can-have* [*pouvoir-avoir*] of the *logos*, the aptitude for the *logos* (and logocentrism is first of all a thesis regarding the animal, the animal deprived of the *logos*, deprived of the *can-have-the-logos*: this is the thesis, position, or presupposition maintained from Aristotle to Heidegger, from Descartes to Kant, Lévinas and Lacan). The *first* and *decisive* question will rather be to know whether animals *can suffer*.

“Can they suffer?” asks Bentham simply yet so profoundly.

Once its protocol is established, the form of this question changes everything. It no longer simply concerns the *logos*, the disposition and whole configuration of the *logos*, having it or not, nor does it concern more radically a *dynamis* or *hexis*, this having or manner of being, this *habitus* that one calls a faculty or “power,” this can-have or the power one possesses (as in the power to reason, to speak, and everything that that implies). The question is disturbed by a certain *passivity*. It bears witness, manifesting already, as question, the response that testifies to a suffering, a passion, a not-being-able. The word *can* [*pouvoir*] changes sense and sign here once one asks “can they suffer?” The word wavers henceforth. As soon as such a question is posed what counts is not only the idea of a transitivity or activity (being able to speak, to reason, and so on); the important thing is rather what impels it towards self-contradiction, something we will later relate back to auto-biography. “Can they suffer?” amounts to asking “can they *not be able*?” And what of this inability [*impouvoir*]? What of the vulnerability felt on the basis of this inability? What is this nonpower at the heart of power? What is its quality or modality? How should one account for it? What right should be accorded it? To what extent does it concern us? Being able to suffer is no longer a power, it is a possibility without power, a possibility of the impossible. Mortality resides there, as the most radical means of thinking the finitude that we share with animals, the mortality that belongs to the very finitude of life, to the experience of compassion, to the possibility of sharing the possibility of this nonpower, the possibility of this impossibility, the anguish of this vulnerability and the vulnerability of this anguish.

With this question—“can they suffer?”—we are not standing on the rock of indubitable certainty, the foundation of every assurance that one could, for example, look for in the *cogito*, in *Je pense donc je suis*. But from another perspective we are here putting our trust in an instance that is just as radical, however different it may be, namely, what is undeniable. No one can deny the suffering, fear or panic, the terror or fright that humans witness in certain animals. (Descartes himself was not able to claim that animals were insensitive to suffering.) Some will still try—this is something else we will come to—to contest the right to call that *suffering*

or *anguish*, words or concepts that they would still reserve for man and for the *Dasein* in the freedom of its being-towards-death. We will have reason to problematize that discourse later. But for the moment let us note the following: the response to the question “can they suffer?” leaves no doubt. In fact it has never left any room for doubt; that is why the experience that we have of it is not even indubitable; it precedes the indubitable, it is older than it. No doubt either, then, for the possibility of our giving vent to a surge of compassion, even if it is then misunderstood, repressed, or denied, held in respect. Before the *undeniable* of this response (yes, they suffer, like us who suffer for them and with them), before this response that precedes all other questions, the problematic changes ground and base. Perhaps it loses all security, but in any case it no longer rests on the old, supposedly natural (its ground) or historic and *artifactual* (its base) foundation. The two centuries I have been referring to somewhat approximately in order to situate the present in terms of this tradition have been those of an unequal struggle, a war being waged, the unequal forces of which could one day be reversed, between those who violate not only animal life but even and also this sentiment of compassion and, on the other hand, those who appeal to an irrefutable testimony to this pity.

War is waged over the matter of pity. This war probably has no age but, and here is my hypothesis, it is passing through a critical phase. We are passing through that phase and it passes through us. To think the war we find ourselves waging is not only a duty, a responsibility, an obligation, it is also a necessity, a constraint that, like it or not, directly or indirectly, everyone is held to. Henceforth and more than ever. And I say “to think” this war, because I believe it concerns what we call “thinking.” The animal looks at us, and we are naked before it. Thinking perhaps begins there.

Here now, in view of another thesis, is the *second hypothesis* that I think must be deduced without hesitation. It concerns or puts into effect another logic of the limit. I will thus be tempted to inscribe the subject of this thesis in the series of three conferences that, beginning with “Les Fins de l’homme” and followed by “Le Passage des frontières,” have been devoted to a properly *transgressal* if not transgressive experience of *limitrophy*. Let’s allow that word to have both a general and strict sense: what abuts onto limits but also what feeds, is fed, is cared for, raised, and trained, what is cultivated on the edges of a limit. In the semantics of *trophō*, *trophē*, or *trophos*, we should be able to find everything we need to speak about what we should be speaking about in the course of these ten days devoted to the autobiographical animal: feeding, food, nursing, breeding, offspring, education, care and keeping of animals, training, upbringing, culture, living and allowing to live by giving to live, be fed, and grown, autobiographically. *Limitrophy* is therefore my subject. Not just be-

cause it will concern what sprouts or grows at the limit, around the limit, by maintaining the limit, but also what *feeds the limit*, generates it, raises it, and complicates it. Whatever I will say is designed, certainly not to efface the limit, but to multiply its figures, to complicate, thicken, delinearize, fold, and divide the line precisely by making it increase and multiply. Moreover, the supposed first or literal sense of *trephō* is just that: transform by thickening, for example, in curdling milk. So it will in no way mean questioning, even in the slightest, the limit about which we have had a stomachful, the limit between Man with a capital M and Animal with a capital A. It will not be a matter of attacking frontally or antithetically the thesis of philosophical or common sense on the basis of which has been built the relation to the self, the presentation of the self of human life, the autobiography of the human species, the whole history of the self that man recounts to himself, that is to say the thesis of a limit as rupture or abyss between those who say “we men,” “I, a man,” and what this man among men who say “we,” what he *calls* the animal or animals. I won’t take it upon myself for a single moment to contest that thesis, nor the rupture or abyss between this “I-we” and what we *call* animals. To suppose that I, or anyone else for that matter, could ignore that rupture, indeed that abyss, would mean first of all blinding oneself to so much contrary evidence; and, as far as my own modest case is concerned, it would mean forgetting all the signs that I have sought to give, tirelessly, of my attention to difference, to differences, to heterogeneities and abyssal ruptures as against the homogeneous and the continuous. I have thus never believed in some homogeneous continuity between what calls *itself* man and what *he* calls the animal. I am not about to begin to do so now. That would be worse than sleepwalking, it would simply be too asinine [*bête*].<sup>22</sup> To suppose such a stupid memory lapse or to take to task such a naive misapprehension of this abyssal rupture would mean, more seriously still, venturing to say almost anything at all for the cause, for whatever cause or interest that no longer had anything to do with what we claimed to want to talk about. When that cause or interest begins to profit from what it simplistically suspects to be a biologicistic continuism, whose sinister connotations we are well aware of, or more generally to profit from what is suspected as a geneticism that one might wish to associate with this scatterbrained accusation of continuism, the undertaking in any case becomes so aberrant that it neither calls for nor, it seems to me, deserves any direct discussion on my part. Everything I have suggested so far and every argument I will put forward today stands overwhelm-

22. In modern French the noun, *une bête*, is normally used to mean “animal” with a slightly familiar sense; as adjective *bête* means stupid. *Une bêtise*, which I have taken the liberty of translating below with the neologism *asinanity*, means a “stupid mistake” or “idiocy.”—TRANS.

ingly in opposition to the blunt instrument that such an allegation represents.

For there is no interest to be found in a discussion of a supposed discontinuity, rupture, or even abyss between those who call themselves men and what so-called men, those who name themselves men, call the animal. Everybody agrees on this, discussion is closed in advance, one would have to be more asinine than any beast [*plus bête que les bêtes*] to think otherwise. Even animals know that (ask Abraham's ass or ram or the living beasts that Abel offered to God; they know what is about to happen to them when man says, "Here I am" to God, then consent to sacrifice themselves, to sacrifice their sacrifice or to forgive themselves). The discussion is worth undertaking once it is a matter of determining the number, form, sense, or structure, the foliated consistency of this abyssal limit, these edges, this plural and repeatedly folded frontier. The discussion becomes interesting once, instead of asking whether or not there is a discontinuous limit, one attempts to think what a limit becomes once it is abyssal, once the frontier no longer forms a single indivisible line but more than one internally divided line, once, as a result, it can no longer be traced, objectified, or counted as single and indivisible. What are the edges of a limit that grows and multiplies by feeding on an abyss? Here is my thesis in three paragraphs:

1. This abyssal rupture doesn't describe two edges, a unilinear and indivisible line having two edges, Man and Animal in general.

2. The multiple and heterogeneous border of this abyssal rupture has a history. Both macroscopic and microscopic and far from being closed, that history is now passing through the most unusual phase in which we find ourselves and for which there is no scale. Indeed, one can only speak here of history, of an historic moment or phase, from one of the supposed edges of the said rupture, the edge of an anthropocentric subjectivity that is recounted or allows a history to be recounted about it, autobiographically, the history of its life, and that it therefore calls *History*.

3. Beyond the edge of the *so-called* human, beyond it but by no means on a single opposing side, rather than "the Animal" or "Animal Life," there is already a heterogeneous multiplicity of the living, or more precisely (since to say "the living" is already to say too much or not enough) a multiplicity of organizations of relations between living and dead, relations of organization or lack of organization among realms that are more and more difficult to dissociate by means of the figures of the organic and inorganic, of life and/or death. These relations are at once close and abyssal, and they can never be totally objectified. They do not leave room for any simple exteriority of one term with respect to another. It follows from that that one will never have the right to take animals to be the species of a kind that would be named the Animal, or animal in general. Whenever "one" says, "the Animal," each time a philosopher, or anyone else says,

“the Animal” in the singular and without further ado, claiming thus to designate every living thing that is held not to be man (man as *rational animal*, man as political animal, speaking animal, *zōon logon echon*, man who says “I” and takes himself to be the subject of a statement that he proffers on the subject of the said animal, and so on), each time the subject of that statement, this “one,” this “I” does that he utters an *asinanity* [*bêtise*]. He avows without avowing it, he declares, just as a disease is declared by means of a symptom, he offers up for diagnosis the statement “I am uttering an *asinanity*.” And this “I am uttering an *asinanity*” should confirm not only the animality that he is disavowing but his complicit, continued and organized involvement in a veritable war of the species.

Such are my hypotheses in view of theses on the animal, on animals, on the word *animal* or *animals*.

Yes, *animal*, what a word!

*Animal* is a word that men have given themselves the right to give. These humans are found giving it to themselves, this word, but as if they had received it as an inheritance. They have given themselves the word in order to corral a large number of living beings within a single concept: “the Animal,” they say. And they have given themselves this word, at the same time according themselves, reserving for them, for humans, the right to the word, the name, the verb, the attribute, to a language of words, in short to the very thing that the others in question would be deprived of, those that are corralled within the grand territory of the beasts: the Animal. All the philosophers we will investigate (from Aristotle to Lacan, and including Descartes, Kant, Heidegger, and Lévinas), all of them say the same thing: the animal is without language. Or more precisely unable to respond, to respond with a response that could be precisely and rigorously distinguished from a reaction, the animal is without the right and power to “respond” and hence without many other things that would be the property of man.

Men would be first and foremost those living creatures who have given themselves the word that enables them to speak of the animal with a single voice and to designate it as the single being that remains without a response, without a word with which to respond.

That wrong was committed long ago and with long-term consequences. It derives from this word or rather it comes together in this word *animal* that men have given themselves at the origin of humanity and that they have given themselves in order to identify themselves, in order to recognize themselves, with a view to being what they say they are, namely men, capable of replying and responding in the name of men.

I would like to try and speak of a certain wrong or evil that derives from this word, to begin with by stammering some chimerical aphorisms.

The animal that I am (following), does it speak?

That is an intact question, virginal, new, still to come, a completely naked question.



For language is like the rest, it is not enough to speak of it.

From the moment of this first question one should be able to sniff the trace of the fact that this animal seems to speak French here and is no less asinine for it. "The animal that I am (following), does it speak?" This address could be a feint, like the switch from "I" to "it." The question could be the ruse or stratagem of a rhetorical question, one that would already be assured of a response. The question will shortly be very much that of the response, and no doubt I shall try to imply that one cannot treat the supposed animality of the animal without treating the question of the response and of what *responding* means. And what *erasing* means. Even those who, from Descartes to Lacan, have conceded to the said animal some aptitude for signs and for communication have always denied it the power to *respond*—to *pretend*, to *lie*, to *cover its tracks* or *erase* its own traces.

But whether it is fictive or not, when I ask "the animal that I am, does it speak?" that same question seems at that moment to be signed, sealed by someone.

What does it seal? What claim does it make? Pretense or not, what does it seem to translate?

What this animal is, what it will have been, what it would, would like to, or could be, is perhaps what I am following.

But saying that is *what I am (following)* [*que je le suis*] in French, in this and in no other language, amounts less to claiming some national idiom than to recalling an irreducible ambiguity about which we shall have more to say: an animal's signature might yet be able to erase or cover its traces. Or allow it to be erased, rather, be unable to prevent its being erased. And this possibility, that of tracing, effacing, or scrambling its signature, allowing it to be lost, would then have serious consequences. Having or not having traces at one's disposal so as to be in a position to cover or erase them, in such a manner as, it is said, some can (man, for example) and some cannot do (the animal, for example, according to Lacan), does not perhaps constitute a reliable alternative defined by an indivisible limit. We will have reason to go back over these steps and tracks. The fact that a trace can always be erased, and forever, in no way means—and this is a critical difference—that someone, man *or* animal, *can of his own accord* erase his traces.

It is a question of words, therefore. For I am not sure that what I am going to set about saying to you amounts to anything more ambitious than an exploration of language in the course of a sort of chimerical experimental exercise or the testing of a testimony. Just to see. We can act as though I was simply trying to analyze a number of discursive modalities or usages—in order to put them to the test and to see, to keep an eye out for what will come of it—that *they* (I insist on this "they"), what *humans* do with certain words, but also, and for some time yet, to track, to sniff, to trail, and to follow some of the reasons they adduce for the

very confident usage they make, and which for the moment we are making together, of words such as, therefore, *animal* and *I*.

A critical uneasiness will persist; in fact a bone of contention will be incessantly repeated throughout everything that I wish to develop. It would be aimed in the first place, once again, at the usage, in the singular, of a notion as general as “the Animal,” as if all nonhuman living things could be grouped without the common sense of this “commonplace,” the Animal, whatever the abyssal differences and structural limits that separate, in the very essence of their being, all “animals,” a name that we would therefore be advised, to begin with, to keep within quotation marks. Confined within this catch-all concept, within this vast encampment of the animal, in this general singular, within the strict enclosure of this definite article (“the Animal” and not “animals”), as in a virgin forest, a zoo, a hunting or fishing ground, a paddock or an abattoir, a space of domestication, are *all the living things* that man does not recognize as his fellows, his neighbors, or his brothers. And that is so in spite of the infinite space that separates the lizard from the dog, the protozoon from the dolphin, the shark from the lamb, the parrot from the chimpanzee, the camel from the eagle, the squirrel from the tiger or the elephant from the cat, the ant from the silkworm or the hedgehog from the echidna. I interrupt my nomenclature and call Noah to help insure that no one gets left on the ark.

Since this has come down to sketching out a taxonomy, excuse me the immodesty of a further confession. It won't be *otobiographical*, like that I tried on another occasion in respect of a Nietzschean ear, although he, like Kafka, knows his stuff better than most others when it comes to animals. Instead it will be *zootobiographical*. This zoo-auto-bio-bibliography will be brief. I allow myself or constrain myself to this indulgence precisely for mnemonic effect, in the name of the name of our meeting, “L'Animal autobiographique.” I will indulge in it before dealing in a different mode with what ties the history of the “I am,” the autobiographical and autodeictic relation to the self as “I,” to the history of “the Animal,” the human concept of the animal. Since today I would like to run ahead of myself and sketch out other steps in moving forward, that is to say in stepping out without too much retrospection and without looking twice, I will not go back over arguments of a theoretical or philosophical kind, or in what we can call a deconstructive style, arguments that for a very long time, since I began writing in fact, I have sought to dedicate 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 the *rational animal*, of life or transcendental instinct that are found at the heart of phenomenology (but, paradoxically, when it

comes to the animal, Husserl, like Hegel, is not the most “Cartesian” of the philosophers I shall later speak of). Still, short of outlining a philosophical autobiography, short of retracing my steps along the paths of philosophy, I could have, or perhaps should have undertaken an anamnestic interpretation of all *my* animals. They certainly do not form a family, but they are the critters [*bêtes*] that I have been (following) from the start, for decades and from conference to conference. I will not do that, out of modesty or discretion, and because there are too many of them, it would be interminable and seen as indecorous in this august setting. But I do think I need to open other paths, two perhaps, for whomever might wish, retrospectively, to follow such an exploration. I shall do so briefly, limiting myself strictly to the theme of our conference.

*On the one hand*, my animal figures multiply, gain in insistence and visibility, become active, swarm, mobilize, and get motivated, move and become moved all the more as my texts become more explicitly autobiographical, are more often uttered in the first person.

I just said “animal figures.” These animals are without doubt something other than figures or characters in a fable. For as I see it, one of the most visible metamorphoses of the figural, and precisely of the animal figure, would perhaps be found, in my case, in “White Mythology.” Indeed, that essay follows the movement of tropes and of rhetoric, the explanation of concept by means of metaphor, by prowling around animal language, between an Aristotle who deprives the animal of language and word and *mimesis*, and a Nietzsche who, if it can be said, “reanimalizes” the genealogy of the concept. The one who parodied *Ecce Homo* tries to teach us to laugh again by plotting, as it were, to let loose all the animals within philosophy. To laugh and to cry, for, as you know, he was mad enough to cry for an animal, under the gaze of, or cheek to cheek with a horse. Sometimes I think I see him call that horse as a witness, and primarily, in order to call it as a witness to his compassion, I think I see him take its head in his hands.

Animals are my concern. Whether in the form of a figure or not.<sup>23</sup> They multiply, lunging more and more wildly in my face in proportion as my texts seem to become autobiographical, or so one would have me believe.

It is obvious. Even a little too obvious were we to begin, say, at the end, the end of “A Silkworm of One’s Own,” published in 1998.<sup>24</sup> Already, in the iconography of “Socrates and Plato” at the Bodleian Library, the

23. “Les animaux me regardent. Avec ou sans figure, justement”: thus also, “Animals look at me. With or without a face, precisely.”—Trans.

24. See Derrida, “Un Ver à soie,” in Hélène Cixous and Derrida, *Voiles* (Paris, 1998), pp. 23–85.

animals emerge from page after page, says the signatory of a postcard from July 1979, “like *squirrels*,” “squirrels” “in a forest.” As for the *monkey* of “Heidegger’s Hand,” he takes, he grasps, but he will not give, or greet, and especially not think according to Master Heidegger. The *hedgehog* of “What Is Poetry?” letter written in the first person, bears in its quills, among other things, the heritage of a piece of my name. Which is signed “Fourmis” [*Ants*] in *Lectures de la différence sexuelle*.

For, *on the other hand*, I note in passing, almost all these animals are welcomed, in a more and more deliberate manner, on the threshold of sexual difference. More precisely of sexual differences, that is to say what for the most part is kept under wraps in almost all of the grand philosophical-type treatises on the animality of the animal. This opening, on the threshold of sexual differences, was the very track left by the hedgehog or ant, but more than that, in the most recent text, where it is precisely a matter of nakedness, with or without a veil, I was interested in the thinking of what is naked, as it is said, like a worm,<sup>25</sup> “A Silkworm of One’s Own.” From beginning to end that three-part journal talks of the ambiguity of the sexual experience at its birth. It deals with veils of modesty and truth, at the same time recalls one of the zootobiographical origins of my bestiary. After noting that “it was impossible to discern a sexual organ,” the child recalls:

There was indeed something like a brown mouth but you could not recognize in it the orifice you had to imagine to be at the origin of their silk, this milk become thread, this filament extending their body and remaining attached to it for a certain length of time: the extruded saliva of a very fine sperm, lustrous, shiny, the miracle of a female ejaculation which would catch the light and which I drank in with my eyes. . . . The self-displacement of this little fantasy of a penis, was it erection or detumescence? I would observe the invisible progress of the weaving, a little as though I was about to stumble on the secret of a marvel, the secret of this secret over there, at the infinite distance of the animal, of this little innocent member, so foreign yet so close in its incalculable estrangement.

Later, the child continues:

the spinning of its threads [or “sons”] or daughters—beyond any sexual difference or rather any duality of the sexes, and even beyond any coupling. In the beginning, there was the worm which was and was not a sex, the child could see it clearly, a sex perhaps but then which one? His bestiary was starting up.<sup>26</sup>

25. “Nu comme un vers”: compare Chaucer, “naked as a worm”; modern, “naked as a jaybird” (*Oxford English Dictionary*, s.v. “naked”).

26. Derrida, “A Silkworm of One’s Own,” trans. Geoffrey Bennington, *Oxford Literary Review* 18, nos. 1–2 (1996): 49, 50; trans. mod.

There is a rhythmic difference between erection and detumescence. It is no doubt at the heart of what concerns us here, namely, a sentiment of shame related to standing upright—hence with respect to erection in general and not only phallic surrection—and to the face-to-face. Let us leave that remark—notably the role played by sexual difference in the matter of shame—to be followed up on or discussed later: why would a man be at the same time *more and less* modest than a woman? What must shame be in terms of this “*at the same time*” of the “*more or less?*”

In calling up still more of my animal texts of yesterday or the day before, I take my cue from the title of our program. Indeed that title obliges us to cross the animal with autobiography. I therefore admit to my old obsession with a personal and somewhat paradisaic bestiary. It came to the fore very early on: the crazy project of constituting everything I have thought or written within a zoosphere, the dream of an absolute hospitality and an infinite appropriation. How to welcome or liberate so many animal-words [*animots*]<sup>27</sup> *chez moi*? In me, for me, like me? It would have amounted at the same time to something more and less than a bestiary. Above all, it would be necessary to avoid fables. We know the history of fabulation and how it remains an anthropomorphic taming, a moralizing subjection, a domestication. Always a discourse *of* man, on man, indeed on the animality of man, but for and as man.

Rather than developing that fabulous bestiary I gave myself a horde of animals within the forest of my own signs and the memoirs of my memory. I was no doubt thinking about such a company well before the visitation of the innumerable critters that now overpopulate my texts. Well before the ant, the hedgehog, or the silkworm; well before the spider, bee, or snakes of “Freud and the Scene of Writing” or of “White Mythology”; well before the wolves of the *Wolfman* in “Fors”; well before the horse of *Spurs* and especially before Kant’s horse, about which it is said, in “Parergon,” concerning his theory of free and dependent beauty, that unlike birds or crustaceans, it is “bothersome” (the theory is straitjacketed by this horse, whether one takes it to be wild or broken in, exploited, tamed, “finalized” by man, by the subject of aesthetic and teleological judgements; relayed through the jennet [*genet*], the Spanish horse that runs through the middle of *Glas*, the horse from “Parergon” is moreover compared to the steer, the sheep, the pig and the ass; there was also a quite different ass, the ass of multiple references to the *Ja Ja* of affirmation following the traces of Zarathustra); well before the mole from I forget where, *Specters of Marx* I think; well before Florian’s hare and Kant’s black swan in *Politics of Friendship*, but also before those I secretly call “my friends the birds” of Laguna Beach in “Circumfession,” where I also bring

27. This portmanteau neologism, combining “animal” and “word,” is pronounced, in the singular or the plural, the same way as the plural of “animal.” With its singular article and plural-sounding ending, it jars in oral French. See Derrida’s discussion below.—TRANS.

back on stage certain white hens sacrificed in the *Pardès* on the Day of Atonement of my Algerian childhood; and still yet before the fish of “+R” in *The Truth in Painting* that plays upon “I” by means of the *Ich* of *Ichthus*, of Ish and Ishah, crossed with Khi by means of a chiasmus, and with a certain *Chi-mère* whose name decomposes in *Glas*, where a certain eagle soars over the two columns; well before the dead-alive viruses, undecidably between life and death, between animal and vegetal, that come back from everywhere to haunt and obsess my writing; well before the reminder of all of Nietzsche’s animals in *Spurs* but also in “Otobiographies,” including a certain “hypocritical dog” (the Church) and the ears of a “phonograph dog”; well before Ponge’s zooliterature in *Signsponge* (the swallow, the shrimp, the oyster); well before the sponge itself, that marine zoophyte that is wrongly held to be a plant, and about which I spoke in this very place, but which had also passed through my work earlier, again in “White Mythology,” in relation to what Bachelard identified by the name of the “metaphysics of the sponge.”<sup>28</sup> But since I wish ultimately to return at length to the treatment of the animal in Heidegger, permit me to create a special place in this short taxonomy in the form of a reminder [*pense-bête*], for a note that appears in brackets. It is from *Of Spirit*. That short text deals abundantly and directly with the Heideggerian concept of the animal as “poor in world” (*weltarm*), something I wish to analyze tomorrow, looking closely at the seminar of 1929–30. The note in brackets in my text does not appear to relate to the development of the problematic of the animal. It brings to the fore the “gnawing, ruminant, and silent voracity of . . . an animal-machine and its implacable logic.” But there is only the resemblance of an animal-machine, Cartesian or otherwise. It is an animal of reading and rewriting. It will be at work in all the tracks we are heading down here, announcing them and ferreting them out in advance:

[Pause for a moment: to dream of the face the Heideggerian corpus would put on the day when, with all the application and consistency required, the operations prescribed by him at one moment or another would indeed have been carried out: “avoid” the word “spirit,” at the very least place it in quotation marks, then cross through all the names referring to the world whenever one is speaking of something which, like the animal, has no *Dasein*, and therefore no or only a little world, then place the word “Being” everywhere under a cross, and finally cross through without a cross all the question marks when it’s a question of language, i.e., indirectly, of everything, etc. One can imagine the surface of the text given over to the gnawing, ruminant, and silent voracity of such an animal-machine and its implacable “logic.” This would not only be simply “without

28. Gaston Bachelard, *La Formation de l'esprit scientifique* (Paris, 1972), p. 79.

spirit,” but the face (figure) of evil. The perverse reading of Heidegger. End of pause.]<sup>29</sup>

This animal-machine has a family resemblance with the virus that obsesses, not to say invades everything I write. Neither animal nor nonanimal, organic or inorganic, living or dead, this potential invader is *like* a computer virus. It is lodged in a processor of writing, reading and interpretation. But, if I may note this in generous anticipation of what is to follow, it would be an animal that is capable of deleting (thus of erasing a trace, something Lacan thinks the animal is incapable of). This quasi-animal would no longer have to relate itself to being *as such* (something Heidegger thinks the animal is incapable of) since it would take account of the need to strike out “being.” But, as a result, in striking out “being” and taking itself beyond or on this side of the question (and hence of the response) is it something completely other than a species of animal? Yet another question to be followed up on.

We are following, we follow ourselves. I shall not impose upon you a complete exposition of this theory of *animots* that I am (following) or that follow me everywhere and the memory of which seems to me inexhaustible. Far from resembling Noah’s ark it would be more like a circus, with an animal trainer having his sad subjects, bent low, file past. The multiple *animot* would still suffer from always having its master on its back. It would have it up to the neck [*en aurait plein le dos*] with being thus domesticated, broken in, trained, docile, disciplined, tamed. Instead of recalling the menagerie that some who badmouth me might characterize as my autobiobibliography, I shall simply recall the idea, or rather the troubling stakes of a philosophical bestiary, of a bestiary at the origin of philosophy. It was not by chance that it first imposed itself in the region of an undecidable *pharmakon*. Concerning the Socratic irony that “precipitates out one *pharmakon* by bringing it in contact with another *pharmakon*,” that is to say “reverses the *pharmakon*’s powers and turns its surface over,” I tried (in 1968, that is thirty years ago) to imagine what the program of a Socratic bestiary on the eve of philosophy might be, and more precisely (I note in the context of Descartes) how that would appear in a place where

29. Derrida, *Of Spirit: Heidegger and the Question*, trans. Bennington and Rachel Bowlby (Chicago, 1989), p. 134; trans. mod. Would the language Heidegger uses, a language “without” question, without question mark, this language “before” the question, this language of the *Zusage* (acquiescence, affirmation, agreement, and so on), therefore be a language without a response? a “moment” of language that is in its essence released from all relation to an expected response? But if one links the concept of the animal, as they all do from Descartes to Heidegger, from Kant to Lévinas and Lacan, to the double im-possibility, the double incapacity of question and response, is it because the “moment,” the instance and possibility of the *Zusage* belong to an “experience” of language about which one could say that, even if it is not in itself “animal,” is not lacking in the “animal”? That would be enough to destabilize a whole tradition, to deprive it of its fundamental argument.

the demonic, the cunning, indeed the evil genius has some affinity with the animal: a malign and hence perverse beast, at one and the same time innocent, crafty, and evil. Keeping myself to the program, let me refer to the note that made explicit, right in the middle, in the very center, in the binding between the two parts of "Plato's Pharmacy," this alternating border crossing:

Alternately and/or all at once, the Socratic *pharmakon* petrifies and vivifies, anesthetizes and sensitizes, appeases and anguishes. Socrates is a numbing stingray but also an animal that needles [this is a reference to well-known texts]: we recall the bee in the *Phaedo* (91c); later we will open the *Apology* at the point where Socrates compares himself precisely to a gadfly. This whole Socratic configuration thus composes a bestiary. [Of course, since this is a matter of animal figures in Socrates' presentation of the self, the question is indeed that of Socrates as autobiographical "animal."] Is it surprising that the demonic inscribes itself in a bestiary? It is on the basis of this zoopharmaceutical ambivalence and of that other Socratic *analogy* that the contours of the *anthropos* are determined.<sup>30</sup>

At the risk of being mistaken and of having one day to make honorable amends (which I would willingly accept to do), I will venture to say that never, on the part of any great philosopher from Plato to Heidegger, or anyone at all who takes on, as a *philosophical question in and of itself*, the question called that of the animal and of the limit between the animal and the human, have I noticed a protestation of principle, and especially a protestation of consequence against the general singular that is *the animal*. Nor against the general singular of an animal whose sexuality is as a matter of principle left undifferentiated—or neutralized, not to say castrated. Such an omission is not without connection to many others that form either its premise or its consequence. This philosophical or metaphysical datum has never been required to change philosophically speaking. I indeed said "philosophical" (or "metaphysical") datum for the gesture seems to me to constitute philosophy as such, the philosopheme itself. Not that all philosophers agree on the definition of *the* limit separating man in general from the animal in general (although this is an area that is most conducive to consensus and is no doubt where we find the dominant form of consensus on the matter). But in spite of that, through and beyond all their disagreements, philosophers have always judged and *all* philosophers have judged that limit to be single and indivisible, considering that on the other side of that limit there is an immense group, a single and fundamentally homogeneous set that one has the right, the theoretical or philosophical right, to distinguish and mark as opposite,

30. Derrida, *Dissemination*, trans. Barbara Johnson (Chicago, 1981), p. 119 n. 52.



namely, the set of the Animal in general, the animal spoken of in the general singular. It applies to the whole animal realm with the exception of the human. Philosophical right thus presents itself as that of "common sense." This agreement concerning philosophical sense and common sense that allows one to speak blithely of the Animal in the general singular is perhaps one of the greatest, and most symptomatic idiocies [*bêtises*] of those who call themselves humans. We shall perhaps speak of *bêtise* and of bestiality later, as that from which beasts are in any case exempt by definition. One cannot speak—moreover, it has never been done—of the *bêtise* or bestiality of an animal. It would be an anthropomorphic projection of something that remains reserved to man, as the single assurance finally, and the single risk, of what is "proper to man." One can ask why the ultimate fallback of what is proper to man, if there is such a thing, a property that could never in any case be attributed to the animal or to God, thus comes to be named *bêtise* or bestiality.

Interpretive decisions (in all their metaphysical, ethical, juridical, and political consequences) thus depend on what is presupposed by the general singular of this word *Animal*. I was tempted, at a given moment, in order to indicate the direction of my thinking, not just to keep this word within quotation marks, as if it were a citation to be analyzed, but without further ado to change the word, indicating clearly thereby that it is indeed a matter of a word, only a word, the word *animal* [*du mot "animal"*], and to forge another word in the singular, at the same time close but radically foreign, a chimerical word that sounded as though it contravened the laws of the French language, *l'animot*.

*Ecce animot*. Neither a species nor a gender nor an individual, it is an irreducible living multiplicity of mortals, and rather than a double clone or a portmanteau word, a sort of monstrous hybrid, a chimera waiting to be put to death by its Bellerophon.

Who or what was the Chimera?

Chimaera was, as we know, the name of a flame-spitting monster. Her monstrousness derived precisely from the multiplicity of animals, of the *animot* in her (head and chest of a lion, entrails of a goat, tail of a dragon). Chimaera of Lycia was the offspring of Typhon and Echidne. As a common noun *echidna* means serpent, more precisely a viper and sometimes, figuratively, a treacherous woman, a serpent that one cannot charm or make stand up by playing a flute. Echidna is also the name that is given to a very special animal found only in Australia and New Guinea. This mammal lays eggs, something quite rare. Here we have an oviparous mammal that is also an insectivore and a monotreme. It only has one hole (*mono-trema*) for all the necessary purposes, urinary tract, rectum, and genitals. It is generally agreed that the echidna resembles a hedgehog. Along with the platypus the five species of echidna make up the family of monotremes.

As the child of Typhon and Echidne, Chimaera interests me therefore because chimerical will be my address,<sup>31</sup> and I will gradually explain the reasons for it. In the first place it concerns my old and ambivalent attachment to the figure of Bellerophon who puts Chimaera to death. He deserves a ten-day conference on him alone. He represents, as is well known, the figure of the hunter. He follows. He is he who follows. He follows and persecutes the beast. He would say: I am (following), I pursue, I track, overcome, and tame the animal. Before Chimaera the animal in question was at first Pegasus, whom he held by the bit, a “golden bit given to him by Athene.” Holding him by the bit he makes him dance; he orders him to do some dance steps. I underline in passing this allusion to the choreography of the animal in order to announce that, much later, we will encounter a certain animal danceness<sup>32</sup> from the pen of Lacan. Pegasus, archetypal horse, son of Poseidon and the Gorgon is therefore the half-brother of Bellerophon himself who, descending thus from the same god as Pegasus, ends up following and taming a sort of brother, an other self: I am half (following) my brother, it is as if he says, I am (following) my other and I have the better of him, I hold him by the bit. What does one do in holding one’s other by the bit? When one holds one’s brother or half brother by the bit?

There was also the matter of a dead animal between Cain and Abel. And of a tamed, raised, and sacrificed animal. Cain, the older brother, the agricultural worker, therefore the sedentary one, submits to having his offering of the fruits of the earth refused by a God who prefers, as an oblation, the first-born cattle of Abel, the rancher.

God prefers the sacrifice of the very animal that he has let Adam name—*in order to see*. As if between the taming desired by God and the sacrifice of the animal preferred by God the invention of names, the freedom accorded Adam or Ish to name the animals, was only a stage “*in order to see*,” in view of providing sacrificial flesh for offering to that God. One could say, too hastily no doubt, that giving a name would be a means of sacrificing the living to God. The fratricide that results from it is marked as a sort of second original sin, in this case twice linked to blood, since the murder of Abel follows—as its consequence—the sacrifice of the animal that that same Abel had taken it upon himself to offer to God. What I am here venturing to call the second original sin is thus all the more linked to an apparition of the animal, as in the episode of the serpent, but this time it seems more serious and more consequential.

31. “Chimérique sera mon adresse”: compare above, “*Limitrophy* is therefore my subject,” and below, “the truth of modesty will, in the end, be our subject.” Derrida is alluding to two previous Cerisy lectures, that on Ponge in 1975, where he asserted “Francis Ponge will be my thing,” and that on Nietzsche in 1972, where he stated “Woman will be my subject” (Derrida, *Signéponge/Signsponge*, trans. Richard Rand [New York, 1984], p. 10; see also Derrida, *Spurs/Eperons*, trans. Barbara Harlow [Chicago, 1978], pp. 36–37).—TRANS.

32. *Dansité*, another neologism, pronounced the same as *densité* (density).—TRANS.

On the one hand, in fact, Cain admits to an *excessive* fault: he kills his brother after failing to sacrifice an animal to God. This fault seems to him unpardonable, not simply wrong but excessively culpable, *too* grave. But isn't a wrongdoing always excessive, in its very essence? As a form of default in the face of the imperative [*le défaut devant le "il faut"?*] "Cain said to Jehovah: 'My fault is too great to bear'" (Gen. 4:13; trans. Dhormes). "My wrong is too great to carry" (Gen. 4:13; trans. Chouraqui).<sup>33</sup>

This excess will be paid for in two ways: by his flight, of course, for Cain is said to be "hunted," "expelled," tracked, persecuted ("you have expelled me," "you have chased me out," Cain says to God); but also by means of the flight of the one who feels pursued, by the shameful hiding of himself, by the veil of yet another nakedness, by the avowal of that veil ("I will hide myself from before you. I will be a fugitive and flee on earth and it will come to pass that whoever happens upon me will kill me" [Gen. 4:14; trans. Dhormes]; "I will veil myself before you. I will move and wander throughout the earth and whoever finds me will kill me" [Gen. 4:14; trans. Chouraqui]).<sup>34</sup> There is thus a crime, shame, distancing, the retreat of the criminal. He is at the same time put to flight and hunted but also condemned to shame and dissimulation. He must hide his nakedness under a veil. A little as though it followed a second original sin this ordeal follows the murder of a brother, it is true, but it also follows the test to which he has been put by a God who prefers the animal offering of Abel. For God had put Cain to the test by organizing a sort of temptation. He had set a trap for him. Jehovah's language is indeed that of a hunter. As if he were going after a nomad shepherd farmer, such as Abel, "herder of cattle" [*pâtre d'ovins*], or "shepherd of small animals" [*pasteur de petit bétail*], as opposed to the sedentary agriculturist, the "cultivator of the ground" [*cultivateur du sol*], "the servant of the glebe" [*serviteur de la glèbe*] that was Cain who made his offering from the "fruits of the earth" or of the "glebe." Having refused Cain's vegetable offering, preferring Abel's animal offering, God had exhorted a discouraged Cain not to lose face, in short to be careful not to fall into sin, not to fall victim to the wrongdoing that was waiting for him around the corner. He encouraged him to avoid the trap of temptation and to once more tame, dominate, govern:

So Jehovah said to Cain: "Why do you feel anger and why is your visage downfallen? If you act well, will you not pick yourself up? If you do not act well Sin *lurks* at your door [I underline this word *lurks* (*est tapi*), referring to sin, like an animal lying in wait in the shadow, waiting for its prey to fall into the trap, a victim prey to temptation,

33. "Caïn dit à Iahvé: 'Ma faute est trop grande pour que je la porte!'" "Mon tort est trop grand pour être porté."

34. "Je me cacherai de devant toi. Je serai fugitif et fuyard sur la terre et il arrivera que quiconque me rencontrera me tuera" (Dhormes). "Je me voilerai face à toi. Je serai mouvant, errant sur terre: / et c'est qui me trouvera me tuera" (Chouraqui).

a bait or lure]: its force is coming towards you but have dominion over it.” [Gen. 4:6–7; trans. Dhormes]<sup>35</sup>

The word *lurk* also appears in the otherwise very different Chouraqui translation: “. . . at the opening fault lurks; its passion comes towards you. Govern it” (Gen. 4:7).<sup>36</sup> By killing his brother Cain falls into the trap; he becomes prey to the evil *lurking* in the shadow like an animal.

However, *on the other hand*, the paradoxes of this manhunt follow one after the other as a series of experimental ordeals: “in order to see.” Having fallen into the trap and killed Abel, Cain covers himself with shame and flees, wandering, hunted, tracked in turn like an animal. God then promises this human animal protection and vengeance. *As if* God had repented. *As if* he were ashamed or had admitted having preferred the animal sacrifice. *As if* in this way he were confessing and admitting remorse concerning the animal. (This moment of “repentance,” of “retraction,” “going back on oneself”—there is an immense problem of translation here, unlimited stakes in the semantics that I leave aside for the moment—is not the only such moment; there is at least one other at the time of the Flood, another animal story.)<sup>37</sup> So God promises seven vengeance, no more, no less. He vows to take revenge seven times on anyone who kills Cain, that is to say the murderer of his brother, he who, after this second original sin has covered the nakedness of his face, the face that he has lost before Him.

This double insistence upon nudity, fault, and default at the origin of human history and within sight or perspective of the animal cannot not be associated once more with the myth of Epimetheus and Prometheus: first, man receives fire and technology to compensate for his nakedness, but not yet the art of politics; then, from Hermes this time, he receives shame or honor, and justice (*aidos* and *dikē*), which will permit him to bring harmony and the bonds of friendship (*desmoi philias*) into the city (*polis*).

In bringing Genesis into relation with the Greek myths once more, still within sight and perspective of the animal, of fault and of nakedness, I am not speculating on any hypothesis derived from comparative history or the structural analysis of myth. These narratives remain heterogeneous in status and origin. Moreover I don’t hold them to be causes or

35. “Alors Iahvé dit à Caïn: ‘Pourquoi éprouves-tu de la colère et pourquoi ton visage est abattu? Si tu agis bien, ne te relèveras-tu? Que si tu n’agis pas bien le Péché est tapi à ta porte : son élan est vers toi, mais toi, domine-le!’”—Trans.

36. “À l’ouverture la faute est tapie ; à toi sa passion. Toi, gouverne-la.”—Trans.

37. Genesis 6:6: “Jehovah repented for having put man on the earth” . . . “I repent for having made them” (“Iahvé se repentit d’avoir fait l’homme sur la terre. . . . Je me repens de les avoir faits [Gen. 6:6; Dhormes]). Chouraqui uses the verb *regretter* (“to regret, be sorry”). The King James version says, “It repenteth the Lord. . . . It repenteth me.” I insist on what is almost remorse, for it immediately precedes Noah’s ark and the new covenant; this time it is *all the living* that will accompany Noah. I will return to this.

origins of anything whatsoever. Nor verities or verdicts. Simply and at least I hold them to be two symptomatic translations whose internal necessity is confirmed all the more by the fact that certain characteristics partially overlap from one translation to the other. But translation of what?

Well, let us say of a certain “state,” a certain situation—of the process, world, and life obtaining among these mortal living things that are the animal species, those other “animals” and humans. Its analogous or common traits are all the more dominant given that their formalization, that to which we are devoting ourselves here, will allow us to see appear in every discourse concerning the animal, and notably in the Western philosophical discourse, the same dominant, the same recurrence of a schema that is in truth invariable. What is that? The following: what is proper to man, his superiority over and subjugation of the animal, his very becoming-subject, his historicity, his emergence out of nature, his sociality, his access to knowledge and technics, all that, everything (in a nonfinite number of predicates) that is proper to man would derive from this originary fault, indeed from this default in propriety, what is proper to man as default in propriety—and from the imperative [*il faut*] that finds in it its development and resilience. I will try to show this better later, from Aristotle to Heidegger, from Descartes to Kant, from Lévinas to Lacan.

Let us return to Bellerophon. He didn't trouble me only because he gained the upper hand with respect to his animal brother or half-brother (Pegasus), nor only because he vanquished Chimaera and so confirmed his mastery as hunter-tamer. Rather, all of Bellerophon's exploits can be deciphered *from top to bottom* as a history of modesty, of shame, of reticence, of honor to the extent that he is linked to modest decency (*aischunē* this time and not just *aidōn*). That allows us to make explicit in advance the fact that the truth of modesty will, in the end, be our subject. The ordeals that constitute the story of Bellerophon are well known. They are all destined to put to the test his sense of modesty. Because he has resisted the shameless advances of Stheneboea, the wife of his host, Proetus, king of Argos; because he is accused by that shameless woman, also called Antea, of having seduced her or of having taken her with violence during the hunt, he is condemned to death by her husband. But, out of respect for the laws of hospitality, the latter cannot himself put his rival to death. He therefore sends to his father-in-law, king of Lycia, this Bellerophon bearing a letter that, instead of recommending him to his future host, prescribes his execution (this is already the story of Hamlet sent to England by his father-in-law who entrusts to him a letter that is a death sentence. Hamlet escapes the trap. I make this allusion to Hamlet in order to recall in passing that that play is an extraordinary zoology: its animal figures are innumerable, which is somewhat the case all through Shakespeare—more to follow). Bellerophon thus carries with him, with-

out knowing it, a verdict in the form of a letter of death whose truth escapes him. He becomes its unconscious purveyor [*facteur*]. But his second host begins sheltering the postman before unsealing the letter; he is therefore obliged in turn, as if held by a potential bit, to respect the laws of hospitality and so defer the execution of the sentence. Instead he submits Bellerophon to a new series of hunting, war, and combat exploits. It is in that context that the hunt of the Chimaera takes place. The Chimaera was said to be “invincible,” of a divine race and in no way human (*theion genos, oud’anthrōpon* says the *Iliad* in Book VI, line 180): a lion in front, a serpent behind, a goat in the middle, its breath spouting frightening bursts of flame (*chimaira, deimon apopneiousa puros menos aithomenoio*).

As we shall understand, that is not how Descartes describes the Chimaera whose existence is excluded at the moment of “I think therefore I am” in part four of *Discourse on the Method* (“we can distinctly imagine a lion’s head on a goat’s body without having to conclude from this that a chimera exists in the world.”)<sup>38</sup>

What is this “world?” We will later ask what “world” means? In passing we can consider whether we should take seriously the fact that in his description of the Chimaera Descartes forgets the serpent. Like Homer he names the lion and goat, but he forgets the serpent, that is to say the behind. The serpent (*drakōn*, dragon) is the animal’s behind, the part that is at the same time the most fabulous, the most chimerical, like the dragon, and also the most cunning: the cunning genius of the animal, the evil genius as animal perhaps. A question concerning the serpent, therefore, concerning evil and shame.

The final episode is not recounted by Homer but by Plutarch. It again puts Bellerophon to the test of nakedness. It is the seventh and last test. Once more Bellerophon falls prey, if I might suggest, to women. In a movement of shame or of modesty (*hyp’aischunēs*) before women he backs down from his outrage at the hounding persecution that he is victim to, perpetrated by his brother-in-law Iobates. Having decided to destroy the city with the help of Poseidon, his father, he advances on it followed by a wave that threatens to engulf everything. But the women come on to him, offering themselves to him shamelessly. Their behavior is doubly indecent for they expose themselves in all their nakedness and they offer their bodies, prostituting themselves, for sale. They try to seduce him in exchange for being saved. Faced with this pornography Bellerophon weakens. He doesn’t give in to their shameless advances, quite the contrary; he gives in to the impulse of his own shame and backs down before the immodesty of these women. He pulls back, retreats in shame (*hyp’aischunēs*) faced with the shameful conduct of these women. So the wave recedes and the city is saved. This movement of shame, this

38. René Descartes, *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*, trans. John Cottingham, Robert Stoothoff, and Dugald Murdoch, 2 vols. (Cambridge, 1985), 1:131.

reticence, this inhibition, this retreat, this reversal is, no doubt, like the immunizing drive, the protection of the immune, of the sacred (*heilig*), of the holy, of the separate (*kadosh*) that is the very origin of the religious, of religious scruple. I have tried to devote several essays to analyzing that, relating it to what Heidegger calls *Verhaltenheit*, restraint, in his *Beiträge zur Philosophie*. As I tried to do in “Faith and Knowledge” where I sought to account for all the paradoxes of the auto-immune, I might have been tempted today had I the time, which I don’t, to bring into focus once more this terrible (and always possible) perversion by means of which the immune becomes auto-immunizing, finding there some analogical or virtual relation with auto-biography.<sup>39</sup>

Autobiography, the writing of the self as living, the trace of the living for itself, being for itself, the auto-affection or auto-infection as memory or archive of the living would be 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), but an immunizing movement that is always threatened with becoming auto-immunizing, as is every *autos*, every ipseity, every automatic, automobile, autonomous, auto-referential movement. Nothing risks becoming more poisonous than an autobiography, poisonous for itself in the first place, auto-infectious for the presumed signatory who is so auto-affected.

*Ecce animot*—that is what I was saying before this long digression. In order not to damage French ears too sensitive to spelling and grammar I won’t repeat the word *animot* too often. I’ll do it several times but each time that, henceforth, I say the animal [*l’animal*] or the animals [*animaux*] I’ll be asking you to silently substitute *animot* for what you hear. By means of the chimera of this singular word, the *animot*, I bring together three heterogeneous elements within a single verbal body.

1. I would like to have the plural of animals heard in the singular. There is no animal in the general singular, separated from man by a single indivisible limit. We have to envisage the existence of “living creatures” whose plurality cannot be assembled within the single figure of an animality that is simply opposed to humanity. This does not of course mean ignoring or effacing everything that separates humankind from the other animals, creating a single large set, a single great, fundamentally homogeneous and continuous family tree going from the *animot* to the *homo* (*faber*, *sapiens*, or whatever else). That would be an *asinanité*, even more so to suspect anyone here of doing just that. I won’t therefore devote another second to the double stupidity of that suspicion, even if, alas, it is quite widespread. I repeat that it is rather a matter of taking into ac-

39. See Derrida, “Faith and Knowledge: The Two Sources of ‘Religion’ at the Limits of Reason Alone,” trans. Sam Weber, in *Religion*, trans. David Webb, Weber, and Jason Gaiger, ed. Derrida and Gianni Vattimo (Stanford, Calif., 1998), pp. 42–47.

count a multiplicity of heterogeneous structures and limits. Among non-humans and separate from nonhumans there is an immense multiplicity of other living things that cannot in any way be homogenized, except by means of violence and willful ignorance, within the category of what is called the animal or animality in general. From the outset there are animals and, let's say, *l'animot*. The confusion of all nonhuman living creatures within the general and common category of the animal is not simply a sin against rigorous thinking, vigilance, lucidity, or empirical authority; it is also a crime. Not a crime against animality precisely, but a crime of the first order against the animals, against animals. Do we agree to presume that every murder, every transgression of the commandment "Thou shalt not kill" concerns only man (a question to come) and that in sum there are only crimes "against humanity?"

2. The suffix *mot* in *l'animot* should bring us back to the word, namely, to the word named a noun [*nommé nom*]. It opens onto the referential experience of the thing *as such*, as what it is in its being, and therefore to the 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, namely the word, the nominal language of the word, the voice that names and that names the thing *as such*, such as it appears in its being (as in the Heideggerian moment in the demonstration that we are coming to). The animal would in the last instance be deprived of the word, of the word that one names a noun or name.

3. It would not be a matter of "giving speech back" to animals but perhaps of acceding to a thinking, however fabulous and chimerical it might be, that thinks the absence of the name and of the word otherwise, as something other than a privation.

*Ecce animot*, that is the announcement of which I am (following) something like the trace, assuming the title of an autobiographical animal, in the form of a risky, fabulous, or chimerical response to the question "But me, who am I?" that I have bet on treating as that of the autobiographical animal. Assuming that title, which is itself somewhat chimerical, might surprise you. It brings together *two times two* alliances, as unexpected as they are irrefutable.

*On the one hand*, the title gives rise to the thought, in the informal form of a playful conversation, a suggestion that would take witty advantage of idiom, that quite simply there are those among humans, writers, and philosophers whose character implies a taste for autobiography, the irresistible sense of or desire for autobiography. One would say, "(s)he's an autobiographical animal," in the same way that one says, "(s)he's a theatrical animal, a competitive animal, a political animal," not in the sense that one has been able to define man as a political animal but in the sense of an individual who has the taste, talent, or compulsive obsession for politics: he who likes that, likes doing that, likes politics. And does it well. In that sense the autobiographical animal would be the sort of man or



woman who, as a matter of character, chooses to indulge in or can't resist indulging in autobiographical confidences. He or she who works *in* autobiography. And in the history of literature or philosophy, if it can be suggested in such a summary manner, there are "autobiographical animals," more autobiographical than others, animals for autobiography: Montaigne more than Malherbe, similarly Rousseau, the lyrical and romantic poets, Proust and Gide, Virginia Woolf, Gertrude Stein, Celan, Bataille, Genet, Duras, Cixous; but also (the matter is structurally more rare and more complicated when it comes to philosophy) Augustine and Descartes more than Spinoza, Kierkegaard, playing with so many pseudonyms, more than Hegel, Nietzsche more than Marx. But because the matter is really too complicated (it is our theme after all) I prefer to end the list of examples there. With the problems it poses this connotation of the autobiographical animal must certainly remain present, even if tangential, to our reflections. It will weigh on them with its virtual weight.

But, *on the other hand*, I was not thinking of that usage of the expression "autobiographical animal" in the last instance and in order to get to some bottom of the matter, if there is such a thing. It happens that there exist, between the word *I* and the word *animal*, all sorts of significant connections. They are at the same time functional and referential, grammatical and semantic. Two general singulars to begin with: the *I* and the *animal* designate an indeterminate generality in the singular and by means of the definite article. The *I* is anybody at all; *I* am anybody at all and anybody at all must be able to say "I" to refer to herself, to his own singularity. Whosoever says "I" or apprehends or poses him- or herself as an "I" is a living animal. On the other hand, animality, the life of the living, to the extent that one claims to be able to distinguish it from the inorganic, from the purely inert or cadaverous physico-chemical, is generally defined as sensibility, irritability, and *auto-motricity*, a spontaneity that is given to movement, to organizing itself and affecting itself, marking, tracing, and affecting itself with traces of its self. This *auto-motricity* as auto-affection and relation to itself is the characteristic recognized as that of the living and of animality in general, even before one comes to consider the discursive thematic of an utterance or of an *ego cogito*, more so of a *cogito ergo sum*. But between this relation to the self (this Self, this ipseity) and the *I* of the "I think," there is, it would seem, an abyss.

The problems begin there, we suspect, and what problems they are! But they begin where one attributes to the essence of the living, to the animal in general, this aptitude *that it itself is*, this aptitude to being itself, and thus the aptitude to being capable of affecting itself, of its own movement, of affecting itself with traces of a living self, and thus of *autobiographing* itself as it were. No one has ever denied the animal this capacity to track itself, to trace itself or retrace a path of itself. Indeed the most difficult problem lies in the fact that it has been refused the power to transform those traces into verbal language, to call to itself by means of

discursive questions and responses, denied the power to efface its traces (which is what Lacan will do, and we will come back to everything that that implies). Let us set out again from this place of intersection between these two general singulars, the animal (*l'animot*) and the "I," the "I"s, the place where in a given language, French for example, an "I" says "I." Singularly and in general. It could be anyone at all, you or I. So what happens there? How can I say "I" and what do I do thereby? And in the first place, me, what am I (following) and who am I (following)?

"I": by saying "I" the signatory of an autobiography would claim to point himself out physically, introduce himself in the present [*se présenter au présent*] (*sui*-referential deictic) and in his totally naked truth. And in the naked truth, if there is such a thing, of his or her sexual difference, of all their sexual differences. By naming himself and responding in his own name he would be saying "I stake and engage my nudity without shame." One can well doubt whether this pledge, this wager, this desire or promise of nudity is possible. Nudity perhaps remains untenable. And can I finally show myself naked in the sight of what they call by the name of animal? Should I show myself naked when, concerning me, looking at me, is the living creature they call by the common, general and singular name of the animal? Henceforth I will reflect (on) the same question by introducing a mirror. I import a full-length mirror [*une psyché*] into the scene. Wherever some autobiographical play is being enacted there has to be a *psyché*, a mirror that reflects me naked from head to toe. The same question then becomes whether I should show myself but in the process see myself naked (that is reflect my image in a mirror) when, concerning me, looking at me, is this living creature, this cat that can find itself caught in the same mirror? Is there animal narcissism? But cannot this cat also be, deep within her eyes, my primary mirror?

The animal in general, what is it? What does that mean? Who is it? To what does that "it"<sup>40</sup> correspond? To whom? Who responds to whom? Who responds in and to the common, general and singular name of what they thus blithely call the "animal?" Who is it that responds? The reference made by this what or who regarding me in the name of the animal, what is said in the name of the animal when one appeals to the name of the animal, that is what needs to be exposed, in all its nudity, in the nudity or destitution of whoever, opening the page of an autobiography, says, "here I am."

"But as for me, who am I (following)?"

40. *Ça*, also "Id."—TRANS.