first, in occupying the first place among the first, en arkhé, to prefer the first place or not to say “after you.” “After you,” as Lévinas says I no longer know where, is the beginning of ethics. Not to serve oneself first, as we all know, is the ABC of good manners, in society, in the salons, and even when eating at the common table in an inn.

Rousseau says so too, in passing, in another literal and forgotten reference to the werewolf, in the sixth book of the Confessions, on which I conclude. Whereas in the first book, Rousseau had said, as I recalled this forgotten reference, “and I lived like a real werewolf,” here he writes:

With my well-known timidity you imagine that I did not so quickly get to know brilliant women and their entourage: but in the end, following the same route, lodging in the same inns, and on pain of passing for a werewolf forced to present myself at the same table, we were bound to get to know each other.¹

So as not to be unsociable, again, and outside-the-law, so as not to pass for a werewolf, he approaches these women and sits down at the table. I recommend that you read more closely all these texts. In other parts of the Confessions, which I owe to the helpfulness of Olivia Custer not to have forgotten and to have located, and which I shall mention at the beginning next time, Rousseau again uses the figures of the wolf and the werewolf to evoke other wars or other trials of which he is the witness, the victim or the accused. It is always a matter of the law and of placing the other outside the law. The law (nomos) is always determined from the place of some wolf.

I shall call it lyonomy.

No genelycology or anthropolycology without lyonomy.

¹ This passage was reconstituted on the basis of the recording of the session.


3 [Translator’s note] Derrida supplies the English word “gender” in parentheses after “genre sexuel.”
Because I prefer not to use up time on return and recapitulation, I shall merely recall on the one hand that, moving between the two genres (the feminine) beast and the (masculine) sovereign, we saw—apart from all those wolves and princes—a procession of Leviathans, chimeras, centaurs, lion-men, and fox-men, and, on the other hand, we saw that the enigma of the place of man, of what is proper to man, kept coming back insistently: precisely between the two. We saw why, in an at least apparent contradiction, if the sovereign, the law, the state, prosthetics were often posited (with or without an explicit theological grounding, with or without religion) as what was proper to man, it is nonetheless in the name of what is proper to man and the right of man, the dignity of man, that a certain modernity supposedly threw sovereignty into crisis. This paradoxical question of what is proper to man also ran through everything we said and quoted (a great number of genelycological texts on the lycanthrope, especially in the figure of the werewolf). In passing, I announced that I would return, as to what is proper to man, to these two features that are said paradoxically to be proper to man and not to the beast, namely bête [stupidity] (I announced, and I will be good as my word, that we would read a text by Deleuze on this subject for guidance) and bestialité, bestial cruelty (I announced, and I will be good as my word in just a moment, that we would read a text by Lacan on this subject for guidance).

Before getting to that, I would like to emphasize the way in which the werewolf, the "outlaw" as the English translation of Rousseau's Confessions has it (you remember), the outlaw, the wolf-man as werewolf is identified not only as asocial, outside-the-political-law (we illustrated this at length, especially with texts of Rousseau's) but outside-the-theological-and-religious law, as a miscreant, basically as an atheist.

The werewolf or the outlaw is, then, "without faith or law" (sans foi ni loi).

One "without faith or law." This is <what> comes out in other usages of Rousseau's (a Rousseau who is decidedly obsessed by this figure, by wolves: that's his thing, wolves, ça le regarde [that's his thing: literally "that looks at him"], the wolves look at him, like the Wolf Man, and I've already counted the Wolf Man six or seven appearances of the wolf or the werewolf, like the Wolf Man who feels he is being looked at by six or seven wolves on the walnut-tree or his genelycological tree. The wolves, ça le regarde).

At least twice more, the same Confessions present the wolf, or the werewolf, as someone who basically does not recognize the sovereignty of God, neither religious law nor the church, especially the Christian church, and so is "without faith or law." Rousseau speaks of it as though it were an accusation made by a prosecutor in an indictment or an inquisition: confess, you are a wolf or a werewolf, "without faith or law." But sometimes he is the one doing the accusing (in which case he is the Just Man accusing justly and trying to get the others to confess, confessing them, in sum, instead of confessing anything himself), sometimes it is he who is accused, and then the accusation is unjust. He is wrongly presumed guilty. He does not confess.

Here, very rapidly, are these two examples.

1. The first, in book 9 of the Confessions, is remarkable to the extent that all the combatants in what is basically a war of religion, and a war of religion that is not far from turning into a civil war of religion—all the protagonists in this war, all the belligerents, are compared to "wolves fiercely trying to tear each other to pieces," rather than to Christians or philosophers. In other words, to be a Christian or a philosopher is to cease being a beast and a wolf. And in this war among fierce wolves, Rousseau, for his part, is himself the only non-wolf. In the passage I am going to read, I shall emphasize the words "Christian" and "philosophers," of course, and "religious civil war," but above all, by way of transition to what is to come, the words "cruel" and "faith" (in "good faith"). And the word "craziness" because it is here a question of going crazy or driving crazy.

Beyond this object of morality and conjugal honesty, which belongs radically to the whole social order, I gave myself another more secret one of concord and public peace, a greater object and one perhaps more important in itself, at least at the time we were in. The storm provoked by the Encyclopédia, far from abating, was then at its height. The two parties, unleashed against each other with the greatest fury, rather resembled enraged wolves, fiercely trying to tear each other to pieces, than Christians and philosophers who wish mutually to enlighten each other, to convince each other and bring each other back to the way of truth. Perhaps the only thing lacking to one side or the other for it to degenerate into civil war were vigorous leaders with credit, and God knows what would have been produced by a religious civil war, in which the cruellest intolerance would be basically the same on both sides. As a born enemy of any partisan spirit, I had frankly told some hard truths to both sides, to which they had not listened. I got the idea of another expedient that in my simplicity seemed to me admirable: that of softening their reciprocal hatred by destroying their prejudices, and showing each party the merit and virtue of the other, worthy of public esteem and the respect of all mortals. This not very sensible project, which assumed good faith among men, and by which I fell into the failing for
which I had reproached Abbé de St. Pierre, had the success it was bound to have: it did not bring the two parties any closer together, and united them only to condemn me. Until experience made me aware of my craziness, I gave myself over to it, I dare say, with a zeal worthy of the motive that had inspired it in me, and I sketched out the characters of Wolmar and Julie in a transport that made me hopeful of making them both lovely and, what is more, each through the other.

2. In the second place, conversely, whereas here he made an accusation and said that he was innocent, whereas he has just claimed to denounce the wolves, to arbitrate among the wolves in the name of the justice he represents, in the name of the man and the non-wolf that he is—at the very beginning of book 12, to the contrary, he explains how he was himself, so unjustly, accused of being a wolf, and even a werewolf, still in a religious battlefield, in a quasi–civil war of religion, in the war that was being waged against him, in a war of religion declared against him, the Antichrist and the werewolf. This is after the publication of Émile. The imprecation, war, and religious persecution waged against him is also a political police operation, a censorship, especially French but virtually European and international: against Rousseau the werewolf. The lexicon of cruelty reappears in it. As for the word “lycanthropy,” which appears in this passage, a note in the Pléiade edition makes it clearer by referring to the Dictionary of the Académie française of the time, 1762: “Lycanthropy; mental illness in which the patient imagines he has turned into a wolf.” But the editor adds: “But here it would rather be the mental state of a man who is full of hatred, cruel [my emphasis, J.D.], enraged like a wolf.”

These two decrees were the signal of the cry of malediction that arose against me throughout Europe with a fury that is unprecedented. All the gazettes, all the newspapers, all the brochures sounded the most terrible tocson! Especially the French, such a gentle, polite, generous people, so proud of their propriety and concern for the wretched, suddenly forgetting their favorite virtues, distinguished themselves by the number and violence of the outrages they showered on me as often as they could. I was an impious man, an atheist, a crazy person, I was enraged, a ferocious beast, a wolf. The continuator of the Journal de Trévoux went so far as to my supposed lycanthropy that he clearly showed up his own. In short, you would have said that people in Paris were afraid of police involvement if, when publishing something on any subject at all, they failed to push in some insult against me. Vainly seeking the cause of this unanimous animosity, I was ready to believe that the whole world had gone mad.5

<And later:>

After that the people, openly stirred up by the ministers, made light of the King’s rescripts, of the orders of the Council of State, and abandoned all restraint. I was preached against from the pulpit, called the antichrist, and pursued across the countryside like a werewolf. My Armenian dress gave me away to the populace: I cruelly felt the drawback it represented, but taking it off in these circumstances seemed cowardice to me. I could not resolve to do it, and walked calmly abroad with my kaftan and fur bonnet surrounded by the cries of the rabble and sometimes its stones. Several times as I walked past a house, I heard the inhabitants saying: bring me my gun so I can shoot him.6

Cruelty, then, criminality, being outside the (religious or civil) law, being without faith or law, that’s what characterizes, not the wolf itself, but the werewolf, the wolf-man, the lycanthrope, the mad or sick man. This cruelty of the “without faith or law” would then be proper to man, that bestiality that is attributed to man and causes him to be compared to a beast, and apparently also proper to man in that he presupposes the law, even when he opposes it, whereas the beast itself, even if it can be violent and ignore the law, cannot, in this classical logic, be held to be bestial. Like bête, bestiality, bestial cruelty would thus be proper to man. That is the question, and that is also the deep axioms the path and statements of which I announced we would follow and problematize in Lacan.

The stakes are sizable. No less than the question of knowing how a psychoanalytic discourse, especially when it alleges a “return” to Freud (some of whose strategies in this field, in the lycenstein, lycanthrope, or genelycopolitics of this field, we have already mentioned), how such a psychoanalytic discourse (such and such a psychoanalytic discourse and not another, for just as there is not the beast and the sovereign, just as there is not one sovereignty, there is not one psychoanalysis but a multiplicity of discourses that take into account the possibility of another so-called logic of the unconscious, a multiplicity that is heterogeneous, conflictual, historical, i.e. perfectible and open to a still undecided future) [a question of wondering, then, how such and such a psychoanalytic-type discourse and not another],

5. Ibid., p. 591, and p. 1566, n. 1.
6. Ibid., p. 591.
such and such a discourse the force and relative representativity of which are remarkable, can help us think, but can also fail to help us think or even forbid us to think in this domain. My hypothesis is that Lacan’s discourse plays this double role.

Before broadening and gradually diversifying our references to the Lacanian corpus, I shall take as my starting point a noteworthy article in the *Écrits* entitled “Functions of Psychoanalysis in Criminology” (1950), which I invite you to read in its entirety.

Lacan begins by recalling something that is very classical and traditional, however novel it may look under his pen. What? Lacan begins by declaring that what is proper to man, the origin of man, the place where humanity begins, is the Law, the relation to the Law (with a capital L). In other words, what separates Man from Beast is the Law, the experience of the Law, the Superego, and therefore the possibility of transgressing it in Crime. Basically, as opposed to the Beast, Man can obey or not obey the Law. Only he has that liberty. Only he, then, can become criminal. The beast can kill and do what seems to us bad or wicked but will never be held to be criminal, never be incriminated, one cannot have a beast appear before the law (even though that has happened, and we need to remember that fact, but let’s leave it for now). Lacan is here on the side of a certain common sense, according to which the beast, ignorant of the Law, is not free, neither responsible nor culpable, cannot transgress a Law it does not know, cannot be held to be criminal. A beast never commits a crime and is never in infraction of the law. Which means that Crime, as transgression of the Law, would be proper to man. With Law and Crime, man begins. I quote:

One imagines that having received in psychology such an input from the social, Freud the doctor should have been tempted to give something back, and that with *Totem and Taboo* in 1912, he should have wished to demonstrate in the primordial crime the origin of the universal Law. However subject to methodological criticism this work may be, the important thing is that it recognized that with Law and Crime begins man, after the clinician had shown that their meanings supported everything down to the form of the individual not only in his value for the other, but in his erection for himself.

Thus the conception of the superego saw the light of day.

Naturally, Lacan having recognized that Law and Crime are what is proper to man, the beginning of man, the emergence of a superego being recognized by the same token (the beast is a beast not only in that it cannot say “me” [moi] or “I,” as Descartes and so many others have thought and as Kant literally wrote in the very opening lines of his *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View*), but above all, as Lacan is at bottom claiming here, what the beast lacks is not only an “ego” [moi] but a “superego.” And if Lacan juxtaposes and places into an essential contiguity Law and Crime, by capitalizing their names (“with Law and Crime begins man”), this is because Crime is not only committed against the law and in transgression of the law, but because the Law can also be the origin of crime, the Law can be criminal, the superego can be criminal. And it is this structural possibility that we must not forget, as to what is proper to man, and this is what we are going to follow in Lacan’s wake. In any case, Lacan says quite clearly at the bottom of the same page that the superego, which is the guardian of the law, on the side of the law, can also be a delinquent, that there can be felony and crime of the superego itself:

The signification of self-punishment covers all these ills and these gestures. Will it then be necessary to extend it to all criminals, to the extent that, according to the formula in which the icy humor of the legislator is expressed, given that no-one is supposed to be ignorant of the law, everyone can foresee its incidence and therefore be held to be seeking out its blows?

This ironic remark ought, by obliging us to define what psychoanalysis recognizes as crimes or felonies issuing from the superego, to permit us to formulate a critique of the scope of this notion in anthropology.

What consequences can we draw from this? What consequences does Lacan himself begin by drawing from it for the interpretation of the *homo homini lupus*? For the moment I am limiting myself to this question of the *homo homini lupus*, i.e. the werewolf, the man who behaves like a wolf for man, and leaving to one side the enormous dossier of Lacan and others’ interpretation of the Wolf Man, about which there would be so much to say, but about which I have more or less explained myself elsewhere.

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9. Ibid., p. 130 (p. 106).

10. This is how the sentence appears in the typescript. Perhaps it should read as follows: “Naturally, given that Lacan has thus recognized that Law and Crime are proper to man, the beginning of man, there is recognized [est reconnue] rather than the ‘et reconnue’ of the typescript by the same token the emergence of a superego…”

11. Ibid. (p. 107).

"The form of the adage *homo homini lupus* misleads as to its meaning," declares Lacan, still in the article "Functions of Psychoanalysis in Criminology," in the course of a fifth section in which he undertakes to oppose (and one can only follow him in this) the hypothesis that there are such things as "criminal instincts." He wants to demonstrate that psychoanalysis, precisely, even if it comprises a "theory of instincts" or rather of drives (Trieb), rejects this assigning of innate (and therefore genetically predetermined) instincts toward criminality. What Lacan immediately implies with this distinction between acquired and innate is that the animal (as he says everywhere else, as we shall see) is confined to this finiteness of the innate, innate wiring or programming, whereas man, in his relation to the law (and therefore to crime), is not so confined. Always the question of liberty and the machine. The question, then, is indeed the old question of the innate and the acquired. Not that, for Lacan, there can be no fixed and animal instinct in man: of course there is an animality in man, but crime, cruelty, and ferocity do not come from instinct, they transcend animality, they assume not merely a "liberty" and a "responsibility," and therefore a "peculiarity" (words that Lacan is careful not to pronounce here, but with respect to which we shall see later that the corresponding and indissociable concepts, especially those of response and responsibility, play a decisive role), these statements also assume that clarity has been achieved with respect to a word that Lacan not only puts forward twice, but that here literarily designates the major criterion: namely the word "fellow" [semblable].

What is supposed to distinguish man, as "wolf for man," from the animal, what is supposed to distinguish the wolf-man or the werewolf from the animal, and thus from the wolf itself, what is supposed to distinguish human cruelty or ferocity from all animal violence — animal violence to which one cannot consequently give the attribute of cruelty (only man is cruel, the animal can harm, but it cannot do evil for evil and so be cruel) — what is supposed to distinguish cruel humanity from non-cruel (and therefore innocent) animality is that the cruel man attacks his fellow, which the animal supposedly does not. So it is this notion of "fellow" which will carry the whole burden of the demonstration (which is, moreover, as classical and traditional as can be, in my view) by which Lacan intends to correct the error he supposed has been made in the interpretation of *homo homini lupus* ("the form of the adage," he says and I recall, "misleads as to its meaning"), an error that supposedly would consist in believing that man is a wolf, and thus an animal for man, which Lacan is about to contest. I'll now quote and comment on these two paragraphs, emphasizing as I go the words "fellow" and "cruelty":

For if instinct indeed signifies the uncontestable animality of man, one cannot see why it would be less docile for being embodied in a rational being. The form of the adage *homo homini lupus* misleads as to its meaning, and Balthazar Gracián, in one of the chapters of his *Crítico*, forges a fable in which he shows what the moralistic tradition means when it indicates that the ferocity of man with respect to his fellow goes beyond anything that animals can do, and that faced with the threat that this ferocity poses to the whole of nature, even the carnivores recoil in horror.

But this very cruelty implies humanity. It is a fellow that it is targeting, even in being of another species. No experience has gone deeper than that of analysis in probing, in lived experience, the equivalence signaled to us by the pathetic call of Love: it is thyself that thou striketh, and the glacial deduction of Spirit: it is in the fight to the death for pure prestige that man gets himself recognized by man.14

What can one reply to this type of discourse? Apparently it makes sense [tombe sous le sens], as they say, which implies also that not only is it full of good sense (and continues to hold animality to be innocent, even when it does harm, and man to be guilty, peccable, precisely because he is capable of good and of perfecting himself, amending himself, capable of confessing and repenting, etc.), but that it is inscribed in an ethics of sense, an ethics that tends to save sense, as sense of the human and of human responsibility.

On the other hand, it is difficult not to subscribe to the critique of a theory of the "criminal instincts" of certain individuals, a theory which is not only contestable qua theory but is one that can induce, as we know, all sorts of political, juridical, policing, pedagogical, and even eugenicist and bioethical strategies. What are we supposed to do with individuals presumed to be hereditarily predisposed to crime and cruelty, genetically predisposed, and so potential recidivists? There's no point in trotting out current examples of serial killers,15 sexual psychopaths, even pedophiles, etc. So one can only subscribe to the vigilance called for by Lacan with respect to a fixist geneticism, and what is at stake here is nothing less than the place of psychoanalysis, a certain psychoanalysis in society, in law, and above all in penal law.

But once we have approved Lacan's argumentation, within the limits of a certain conjunction and a certain ethico-political motivation, things as I

13. Ibid., p. 147 [p. 120].
14. Ibid., Derrida's emphasis.
15. [Translator's note:] "Serial killers" is in English in the text.
see them cannot and should not stop there; and it is the whole Lacanian and even psychoanalytical axiomatic that would need to be recast.

I shall for the moment limit myself to bringing out three points from this particular passage. But they are three points that will constantly, when we read other texts of Lacan’s, tie in with an immense discursive wool or warp that seems to me to be problematic through and through.

1. First, the distinction between the innate and the acquired, and thus between instinct and everything that goes with “culture,” “law,” “institution,” “freedom,” etc., has always been fragile, and more fragile than ever today, exactly like the presupposition of an animality deprived of language, history, culture, technique, relation to death as such, and the transmission of acquired knowledge. I am one of those—it is true that there are not many of us—who have always smiled at this machine of presuppositions to be deconstructed. But it happens moreover that the most positive science today (see the recently published book on the origins of man (Coppens? ?)) shows that some animals (not that hypostatic fiction labeled The Animal, of course, but some among those that are classified as animals) have a history and techniques, and thus a culture in the most rigorous sense of the term, i.e. precisely, the transmission and accumulation of knowledge and acquired capacities. And where there is transgenerational transmission, there is law, and therefore crime and peculiarity.

2. Saying that cruelty is essentially human because it consists in causing suffering to one’s fellow comes down to giving an exorbitant credit to this value of the fellow. Even more so if we say that when one is cruel to another species, it is still one’s fellow that one is targeting. Even when one is cruel with respect to this or that animal, Lacan is basically suggesting, it is a man one is targeting—a fertile hypothesis and one no doubt to be taken seriously, but which does not prove that all cruelty with respect to one’s non-fellow [dissemblable] is immediately rendered innocent because what it is targeting in truth and at bottom is still the fellow, man targeted through the animal. How does one recognize a fellow? Is the “fellow” only what has human form, or is it anything that is alive? And if it is the human form of life, what will be the criteria for identifying it without implying a whole determinate culture, for example European, Greco-Abrahamic culture, and in particular Christian culture, which installs the value of “neighbor” or “brother” in the universality of the world, as totality of all creatures? And I point out that Lacan ends this article with a reference, in spite of every-thing, and in spite of the detail I’ll give in a moment, a quite reassuring or reassured reference, I’d say, a little overconfident, to what he calls “eternal fraternity.” In Politics of Friendship I tried to “deconstruct” the bases of this fraternity, and I cannot go over this again here.17

These are the last words of Lacan’s article, and in them, let us not forget, a certain concept of the subject is at stake: “if we can provide a more justly rigorous truth, let us not forget that we owe it to the following privileged function: that of the recourse of the subject to the subject, which inscribes our duties in the order of eternal fraternity: its rule is also the rule of every action allowed us.”

Now obviously, and this is the detail I promised, when Lacan talks of this “eternal fraternity,” we must not hear in it merely the sort of edifying, ironic, pacificist, and democratic praise which often denotes and connotes so many appeals to fraternity. Especially to an “eternal fraternity”—which I said a moment ago ran the risk of being overconfident. But Lacan, as he recalls earlier in the same article, does not forget the murderous violence that will have presided over the establishment of the law, namely the murder of the father, thanks to which (thanks to the murder, thanks to the father, thanks to the murder of the father) the guilty and shameful sons come to contract, through a sort of at least tacit oath or sworn faith, the equality of the brothers. The trace of this founding criminality or this primitive crime, the memory of which is kept by the (animal) totem and the taboo—this murderous trace remains ineffaceable in any egalitarian, communitarian, and compassionate fraternity, in this primitive contract that makes of any compassionate community a cofraternity.

There remains the immense risk of what is still a fraternalism of the “fellow.” This risk is double (and also affects Lévinas’s discourse, let it be said in passing): on the one hand, this fraternalism frees us from all ethical obligation, all duty not to be criminal and cruel, precisely, with respect to any living being that is not my fellow or is not recognized as my fellow, because it is other and other than man. In this logic, one is never cruel toward what is called an animal, or a nonhuman living creature. One is already exculpated of any crime toward any nonhuman living being. And specifying, on the other hand, as Lacan does: “It is a fellow that it [this cruelty] is targeting, even in a being of another species,” does not change or fix anything. It is always my fellow that I am targeting in a being of another species. So the fact remains that I cannot be suspected of cruelty with respect to an animal


that I cause to suffer the worst violence, I am never cruel toward the animal as such. Even if I can be accused of being criminal with respect to an animal qua human, insofar as I am targeting, through it or its figure, my neighbor or my fellow. Even if it were a foreigner as my fellow. If I am judged, or if I judge myself, to be cruel by killing a beast or millions of beasts, as happens every day, directly or not, it is only insofar as I am supposed to have killed, by “targeting,” consciously or unconsciously, my fellows, humans, figures of the human via these beasts—this “via” able to mobilize all sorts of unconscious logics or rhetorics. It is always man, my fellow, the same as I, myself in sum, that I am making suffer, that I kill, in a culpable, criminal, cruel, and incriminative manner.

But does one only have duties toward man and the other man as human? And, above all, what are we to reply to all those who do not recognize their fellow in certain humans? This question is not an abstract one, as you know. The worst, the cruellest, the most human violence has been unleashed against living beings, beasts or humans, and humans in particular, who precisely were not accorded the dignity of being fellows (and this is not only a question of profound racism, of social class, etc., but sometimes of the singular individual as such). A principle of ethics or more radically of justice, in the most difficult sense, which I have attempted to oppose to right, to distinguish from right, is perhaps the obligation that engages my responsibility with respect to the most dissimilar [le plus dissemblable, the least “fellow”-like], the entirely other, precisely, the monstrously other, the unrecognizable other. The “unrecognizable” [mêconnaisable], I shall say in a somewhat elliptical way, is the beginning of ethics, of the Law, and not of the human. So long as there is recognizability and fellow, ethics is dormant. It is sleeping a dogmatic slumber. So long as it remains human, among men, ethics remains dogmatic, narcissistic, and not yet thinking. Not even thinking the human that it talks so much about.

The “unrecognizable” is the awakening. It is what awakens, the very experience of being awake.

The “unrecognizable,” and therefore the non-fellow [le dissemblable]. If one trusts and binds oneself to a Law that refers us only to the similar, the fellow, and defines criminal or cruel transgression only in what it is targeting as fellow, that means, correlatively, that one has obligations only to the fellow, be it the foreigner as fellow and “my neighbor,” which, step by step, as we know, in fact intensifies our obligations toward the most similar and the nearest [du plus semblable et du plus proche]. More obligation toward men than toward animals, more obligation toward men who are close and similar than toward the less close and less similar (in the order of probabilities and supposed or fantasized resemblances or similarities: family, nation, race, culture, religion). One will say that this is a fact (but can a fact ground and justify an ethics?): it is a fact that I feel, in this order, more obligations toward those who closely share my life, my people, my family, the French, the Europeans, those who speak my language or share my culture, etc. But this fact will never have founded a right, an ethics, or a politics.

3. Finally, if we rely on Lacan’s axiomatics or good sense, once there is cruelty only toward the fellow, well, not only can one cause hurt without doing evil [faire du mal sans faire le mal] and without being cruel not only toward humans not recognized as true humans and true brothers (I leave the choice of examples up to you, and this is not only about racism), but also toward any living being foreign to the human race. The obvious consequence is that not only would one not be cruel (or criminal, criminalizable, or culpable) when one caused suffering to people not recognized and legitimized as such (which happens every day somewhere in the world), but one would have the right to inflict the worst suffering on “animals” without ever being suspected of the least cruelty. There would be no cruelty in industrial abattoirs, in the most horrific stockbreeding establishments, in bullfights, in dissections, experimentations, breaking and training, etc., in circuses, menageries, and zoos (of which more soon). I need not belabor the point.

Here, two corollaries that are also two virtual complications of this schema.

A. First complication. One might object to my objection (so this is an objection I’m making to myself and that I will try my best to integrate and take into account) that what I am doing is simply an almost limitless broadening of the notion of “fellow” and that in talking about the dissimilar, the non-fellow, I am surreptitiously extending the similar, the fellow, to all forms of life, to all species. All animals qua living beings are my fellows. I accept this counterproposition, but not without twice further upping the ante by pointing out:

1. In the first place, the first upping of the ante: that this broadening would already, of itself, be markedly, significantly, and obviously in breach with everything that everyone has in mind, and Lacan in particular, when they talk about the fellow: fellow means for them, as is undeniable obvious, not “living being in general” but “living being with a human face.” There is here an uncrossable qualitative limit; I mean a qualitative and essential limit. To put this limit to the test of the worst experimentations, it is enough to imagine (I leave you to do so) a thousand situations in which one would have to decide which life goes first—before the other. According to the humanist logic the presupposition of which we are trying to think through, saving a human
embryo a few weeks old, destined after birth to live a short life—one day, for example—and a life of mental and physical handicap—saving such a life without the slightest future ought to come before the lives of millions, or an infinite number of living animals in full health and with a full future. Who will say that this choice really is possible or easy? Whatever reply one really gives to this question, whatever decision one takes (and these are not abstract and artificial examples, as one could show, decisions such as this are taken every day), what is certain is that in the humanist logic deployed by Lacan, the putting to death of the newborn, abandoning the newborn to its death, the failure to assist a person in danger that that represents, will be judged to be criminal and cruel, whereas the killing of billions of beasts would not be. The frontier is here qualitative and essential; numbers and time do not count. There is no “crime against animality” nor crime of genocide against nonhuman living beings.

2. In the second place, the second uprising of the ante: it is not enough to say that this unconditional ethical obligation, if there is one, binds me to the life of any living being in general. It also binds me twice over to something nonliving, namely to the present nonlife or the nonpresent life of those who are not living, present living beings, living beings in the present, contemporaries—i.e., dead living beings and living beings not yet born, nonpresent-living-beings or living beings that are not present. One must therefore inscribe death in the concept of life. And you can imagine all the consequences this would have. Moreover, it is not certain that even in the originary history or fiction of the murder of the primal father according to which the brother-sons subject themselves to the law because, says Freud, the shame of their crime compels them to do so, it is not certain that this shame does not signify, always already, in its possibility, the bond of obligation or debt with respect to the dead.

B. Second complication. There are indeed “animal rights”: some national legislations proscribe some acts of violence, some forms of torture or violence toward animals; and there are, as you know, all sorts of likable associations in the world that would like to do more, to publish universal declarations of the rights of animals analogous to the declaration of the rights of man. But, to put it briefly, the texts of existing laws only forbid certain forms of cruelty or torture, but they do not forbid the killing of animals in general, be it for the production of meat for food, or for experimentation and dissection. The struggle against certain forms of hunting and against bullfighting is under way and has little chance of getting very far for the moment. Killing an animal, at any rate, is not held to be cruel in itself. As for the declarations of the rights of animals called for by some people, beyond the fact that they never go so far as to condemn all putting to death, they most often follow, very naively, an existing right, the rights of man adapted by analogy to animals. Now these rights of man are in a relation of solidarity and indissociability, systematically dependent on a philosophy of the subject of a Cartesian or Kantian type, which is the very philosophy in the name of which the animal is reduced to the status of a machine without reason and without personhood. This is a major failure of logic, the principle of which I merely point out, there being no need to say anymore about it here. I prefer, since it is a matter of the determination by the subject of the subject of the object of subject, to look more closely at what is implied here by this concept of subject: including, as to the animal, what becomes of it after the transformation or subversion that Lacan imprints on the concept of the subject. You will recall that it was by what he called a “recourse [. . .] to the subject” that Lacan concluded the article we were reading. Let me read that sentence again:

if we can provide a more justly rigorous truth, let us not forget that we owe it to the following privileged function: that of the recourse of the subject to the subject, which inscribes our duties in the order of eternal fraternity: its rule is also the rule of every action allowed us.

Would it suffice for an ethics to remind the subject (as Lévinas will have attempted) of its being-subject, its being-host or hostage, and thus its being-subject to the other, the Wholly Other or to any other [au Tout-Autre ou à tout autre]? 19

I do not believe so. This does not suffice to break the Cartesian tradition of the animal-machine with neither language nor response. This is not
sufficient, even in a logic or an ethics of the unconscious which, without giving up on the concept of the subject, would lay claim to some "subversion of the subject."

With this Lacanian title, "Subversion of the Subject," we are, then, moving from one ethical denial to another. In "Subversion of the Subject and Dialectic of Desire in the Freudian Unconscious" (1960), a certain passage names "the animal" or "an animal"—in the singular and without further specification. It marks perhaps both a step beyond and a step backward from Freud as to the relation between man, the unconscious, and what I call the animot. This remarkable page first gives the impression, and the hope, that things are going to change, especially as to the concept of communication or information that is assigned to what is called the animal, the animal in general. This "animal" is supposedly only capable, so one thinks, of a coded message or a narrowly signaling signification, under strict constraint: fixed in its programming. Lacan begins to take on the "platitude" of "modern information theory." It is true that he is speaking here of the human subject and not the animal, but he writes this, which indeed names the sovereign as absolute Master but which seems to announce, and even allow one to hope for, a different note:

The Other, as prior site of the pure subject of the signifier, holds the master-position in it, even before coming to existence—to say it with and against Hegel—as absolute Master. For what is omitted in the platitude of modern information theory, is that one cannot even speak of a code unless it be

chine, like the animal, supposedly cannot do, is not to emit signs but, says the Discourse on Method (part 5), to "respond." Like animals, machines that had "the organs and the external shape of a monkey [. . .] could not use words or other signs by composing them as we do to declare our thoughts to others. For we may well conceive of a machine so constructed that it proffers words, and even words relating to bodily actions that cause some change in its organs; so that if touched in a particular place, it might ask what one wishes to say to it, or in another, it might cry out that one is hurting it, and other similar things; but not that it could arrange them diversely to respond [my emphasis—J.D.] to the meaning of everything said in its presence, as the dullest of men can do." [Translator's note: my translation of Descartes.]


22. [Derrida's note:] Translator-to-come's note on the word "animot." Quote for example pages 298–99 of "L'animal que donc je suis," on what motivates or justifies the choice of this word "animot," more untranslatable than ever. [Editors' note: See L'animal autobiographique, pp. 298–99, and L'animal que donc je suis, pp. 73–77.] [Translator's note: The editors of the French edition suggest that the opening of the note ("Note du traducteur à venir") should perhaps read "Note au traducteur . . ." ("note to the translator . . .").]

already the code of the Other, whereas it's a quite different matter when it comes to the message, since it is on this basis that the subject is constituted, so that it is from the Other that the subject receives even the message that he emits.21

We shall return, after a detour, to this page of "Subversion of the Subject . . ." It posits (and I mean posits, it emits in the form of a thesis or presupposes without bringing in the slightest proof) that the animal is characterized by its inability to pretend to pretend and to efface its traces, so that it could not be a "subject," i.e. a "subject of the signifier."

The detour I'll sketch out now will permit us to go back through earlier texts of Lacan's, where, it seems to me, they simultaneously announced a theoretical mutation and a stagnant confirmation of the legacy, its presupposition and its dogmas.

What allowed one still to hope for a decisive displacement of the traditional problematic was what, for example, in "The Mirror-Stage as Formative of the Function of the I," as early as 1926, took into account a specular function in the sexualization of the animal. This was quite rare for the time. And that was even the case if, and it is a massive limitation, this passage via the mirror immobilizes the animal forever, according to Lacan, in the snares of the imaginary, depriving it thus of all access to the symbolic, i.e. to the Law itself (which we have just been talking about) and to everything that is supposed to make up what is proper to man. The animal will never be, like man, a "prey of language." "One must posit," we read later, in "The Direction of the Treatment," "that, as a fact of an animal prey to language, the desire of man is the desire of the Other."24 (This figure of the prey characterizes symptomatically and recurrently Lacan's "animal" obsession at the very moment he is so keen to dissociate the anthropological from the zoological: man is an animal but he speaks, and he is less a beast of prey than a beast that is prey to speech.) There is desire, and therefore unconscious, only of man, never of the animal, unless it be as an effect of the human unconscious, as though by some contagious transfer or some mute interiorization (which would still have to be accounted for), the animal, domesticated or tamed, translated into itself the human unconscious. Careful to distinguish, as we have just seen, the unconscious drive from instinct and the "genetic," in which he encloses the animal, Lacan maintains in "Position of the Un-


conscious" that the animal cannot have its own unconscious, properly its own, as it were, and if the logic of this expression were not ridiculous. But it would be ridiculous primarily for Lacan himself, perhaps, since he writes: "At the time of propedetica, one can illustrate the effect of the enunciation by asking the pupil if he can imagine the unconscious in an animal, unless it be some effect of language: of human language."25

Each word in this sentence would merit a critical examination. The thesis is clear: the animal has neither the unconscious nor language, it does not have the other, it has no relation to the other as such, except by an effect of the human order, by contagion, appropriation, domestication.

No doubt taking into account the sexualizing specularity of the animal is a remarkable advance, even if it captures the animot in the mirror, and even if it holds the female pigeon or the desert locust in captivity in the imaginary. Referring at this point to the effects of a Gestalt attested to by a "biological experimentation" which does not fit with the language of "psychic causality," Lacan praises this theory not with the recognition that the "maturation of the gonad in the female pigeon" presupposes the "sight of a congeneric" and therefore another pigeon, whatever its sex. And that is true to the point that simple reflection in a mirror suffices. A visual image also suffices for the desert locust to pass from solitude to gregariousness. Lacan speaks, in a way that I think significant, of passage from the "solitary" form to the "gregarious" form, and not to the social and still less political form, of course, as though the difference between the gregarious and the social were the difference between animal and man.26 This motif and this word "gregarious," and even "gregarism," reappear in force around ten years later, around animality, in "Remarks on Psychic Causality" (1946),27 a text at the end of which, moreover, Lacan claims that one cannot get beyond Descartes. The analysis of the specular effect in the pigeon is more developed but goes in the same direction: the ovulation of the female pigeon, according to then recent work by Harrison (1939),28 happens on mere sight of a form that suggests a congeneric pigeon, a reflecting sight, basically, even in the absence of a real male. It really has to do with specular vision, of image or visual image, and not with identification by odor or cry. Even if the courtship play is physically prevented by a glass plate, and even if the couple is made up of two females, ovulation occurs. It happens after twelve days when the couple is heterosexual, as it were, and after a period that can be as long as two months for two females. A mirror is enough to make it happen.29

One of the interesting things about this interpretation, is that, like Descartes basically, and according to this tried-and-true biblico-Promethean tradition to which I keep returning, it puts in relation the fixity of animal determinism, in the order of information or communication, with a certain originary perfection of the animal. Conversely, if "human knowledge" is "more autonomous than that of the animal from the force-field of desire,"30 and if "the human order is distinguished from nature,"31 this is paradoxically, because of an imperfection, an originary defect of man, who, basically, received speech and technology only in place of something lacking. This is what Lacan places at the center of his "Mirror-Stage . . .," namely "the datum of a true specific prematurity of birth in humans."32 The defect linked to this prematurity supposedly corresponds to the "objective notion of the anatomical incompleteness of the pyramidal system," what embryologists call "fetalization," the link of which to a certain "intraorganic mirror"33 is recalled by Lacan. An autotelic specularity of the inside is linked to a defect, a prematurity, an incompleteness of the little human.

We must register with the greatest prudence what we have just rather hastily called a limited but incontestable advance, still on the threshold of "Subversion of the Subject . . ." For not only can the animal, held in the imaginary, not accede to the symbolic, the unconscious, and language (and therefore to the egological function of the autodeictic "I"), but the description of its semiotic power remained determined, in the "Rome Discourse"

28. See Proceedings of the Royal Society, series B (Biological Sciences), vol. 126, no. 845 (February 1939).
31. "Variations on the Standard Treatment," in Écrits, p. 354 [p. 294]: "For it is appropriate to meditate the fact that it is not only by a symbolic assumption that speech constitutes the being of the subject, but that, via the law of alliance, by which the human order is distinguished from nature, speech determines, from before birth, not only the status of the subject, but the coming into the world of its biological being."
33. Ibid., p. 97 [p. 78].
(1953), in the most dogmatically traditional manner, fixed in Cartesian fiction, in the presupposition of a code that allows only reactions to stimuli and not responses to questions. I say "semiotic system" and not language, for it is language that Lacan also refuses to the animal, allowing it only what he calls a "code," the "fixity of a coding" or a "system of signaling." Other ways of naming what—in a cognitivist problematic of the animal, which often repeats, while appearing to oppose, the most tired truisms of metaphysics—is called the "hardwired response" or "hardwired behavior." Lacan is so much more precise and firm in taking up on his own account the old, modernized tops of the bees that he seems, as it were, to have an uneasy conscience about it. I sense a muted worry under the authority of this new, but so, so old discourse on bees. Lacan claims to base himself on what he calmly calls the "animal realm" in order to criticize the current notion of sign language, in opposition to "human languages." When bees apparently "respond" to a "message," they are not responding, they are react-


35. [Derrida's note:] See Joëlle Proust, Comment l'esprit vient aux bêtes: Essai sur la représentation (Paris: Gallimard, 1997), p. 150. The same author does everything to make the word "response," in the case of the animal, mean nothing other than a programmed reaction, deprived of all responsibility or even of all "intentional" responsibility—this word "intentional" being used with an imprudence, a confidence, not to say a phenomenological crudeness, that makes one smile. About the syrphid, an insect "programmed to seek out females by automatically applying a pursuit trajectory according to a certain algorithm to intercept the object pursued," Joëlle Proust cites Ruth Millikan, and comments as follows: "What is interesting in this type of response is that it is inflexible produced by certain precise characteristics of the stimulus (here, its size and speed). The insect cannot respond to other characteristics, nor can it dismiss targets that show characteristics incompatible with the expected function. It cannot abandon its flight when it "perceives" that it is not following a female. This insect appears to have no means of evaluating how correct its own perceptions are. It therefore seems unduly generous to attribute to it an intentional capacity properly so called. It responds to signs, but these signs are not characteristics of an independent object; they are characteristics of proximal stimulations. As Millikan says, it follows a "proximal rule." However, the prewired response has as its aim the fecundation of a female syrphid, i.e. an object existing in the world" (pp. 228–29). I emphasize the words that, more than others, would call for a vigilant reading. The critical or deconstructive reading that we are calling for would seek less to give back to the animal or to such and such an insect the powers here being denied it (even though that sometimes seems possible) <than> to wonder if the same type of analysis could not claim just as much relevance in the case of man, for example in the "wiring" of his sexual and reproductive behavior. Etc.

ing: they are merely obeying the fixity of a program, whereas the human subject responds to the other, to the question of the other. This is a literally Cartesian discourse. Later, as we shall see, Lacan expressly opposes reaction to response as animal realm to human realm, just as he opposes nature to convention:

We are going to show the inadequacy of the notion of sign language via the very manifestation that best illustrates it in the animal realm, and that looks as though, if it had not recently been the object of an authentic discovery, one would have had to invent it with this purpose in mind.

Everyone now admits that the bee, returned to the hive from its nectar-gathering, transmits to its companions by two sorts of dance the indication of the existence of nectar, close or far. The second dance is the more remarkable, because the plane in which it describes the figure eight which has given it the name "wagging dance," and the frequency of the circuits completed in a given time, exactly designate on the one hand the direction determined in relation to solar inclination (whereby bees can navigate in all weather, thanks to the sensitivity to polarized light), and on the other the distance, up to several kilometers, at which the nectar is to be found. And the other bees respond to this message by heading immediately for the place thus designated.

Ten years or so of patient observation sufficed for Karl von Frisch to decode this type of message, for it is indeed a code, or system of signalization that only its generic character forbids us from qualifying as conventional.

Is it a language for all that? We can say that it is distinguished from a language precisely by the fixed [my emphasis] correlation of its signs with the reality that they signify. For in a language the signs take their value from their relationship among themselves, in the lexical division of the semantemes as much as in the positional or even flexional use of the morphemes, in contrast with the fixity [my emphasis again] of the coding here put in play. And the diversity of human languages takes its full value in this light.

What is more, if the message of the type here described determines the action of the socius, it is never retransmitted by it. And this means that it remains fixed [still my emphasis] to its function of relay for the action, from which no subject detaches it as symbol of communication itself.6 Even if one subscribed provisionally to this logic (to which, moreover, I have no objection, though I would like simply to reinscribe it quite differently, beyond any simple human/animal opposition), it is difficult to reserve, as

Lacan does explicitly, differentiality of signs to human language and not to the animal code. What he attributes to signs, which "in a language" (understand: in the human order) "take their value from their relationships among themselves," etc., and not only from the "fixed correlation of these signs to reality," can and must be granted to any code, animal or human.

As for the absence of response from the animal-machine, as for the trenchant distinction between reaction and response, there is nothing fortuitous about the fact that the most Cartesian passage is to be found in what follows this discourse on the bee, on its system of information that cannot introduce it into the "field of speech and language." What is at stake is indeed the constitution of the subject as human subject, when it passes the limit of information to accede to speech:

For the function of language here is not to inform but to evoke.

What I am seeking in speech is the response of the other. What constitutes me as a subject, is my question. In order to have myself recognized by the other, I proffer what was, only in view of what will be. To find him, I call him by a name that he must assume or refuse in order to respond to me.

[... ] If now I face the other in order to interrogate him, no cybernetic apparatus, however rich you imagine it to be, can make a reaction of what is response. Its definition, as second term in the stimulus-response circuit, is only a metaphor sustained by the subjectivity imputed to the animal in order to elide it later in the physical schema to which it is reduced. This is what we have called putting the rabbit into the hat to pull it out later. But a reaction is not a response.

If I press an electric button and there is light, there is response only for my desire.17

Once more, it is not a question here of erasing all the difference between what we call reaction and what we commonly call response. The point is not to confuse what happens when one presses a computer key and what happens when one asks a question of one's interlocutor; and still less to endow what Lacan calls "the animal" with what he calls a "subjectivity" or an "unconscious" that would allow one, for example, to put said animal in an analytic situation (even though analogous scenarios are not necessarily excluded with certain animals in certain contexts — and if we had time we could imagine hypotheses to refine this analogy). My reservation bears only on the purity, rigor, and indivisibility of the frontier that separates, already among "us humans,"

reaction from response: and consequently the purity, rigor, especially the indivisibility of the concept of responsibility — and consequently of the concept of sovereignty, which depends on it. The general disquiet that I am formulating thus is aggravated in at least three ways:

1. when we really do have to take into account a logic of the unconscious that ought to forbid any immediate certainty as to the consciousness of freedom that all responsibility presupposes;

2. especially when, and particularly in Lacan, this logic of the unconscious is grounded on a logic of repetition that, in my view, will always inscribe a destiny of iterability, and therefore some reactional automaticity in every response, however originary, free, decisive and a-reactional it might appear;

3. when (in Lacan in particular) the materiality of speech, the body of language, is recognized. Lacan recalls this <on> the following page: "Speech is indeed a gift of language, and language is not immaterial. It is a subtle body, but it is a body." And yet in the meantime he will have grounded all "responsibility" and, first of all, all psychoanalytic responsibility, and thereby all psychoanalytic ethics, on the distinction that I find so problematical between reaction and response. He even founds on this distinction — and this is what I really wanted to show — his concept of subject:

From that point on, there appears the decisive function of my own response that is not only, as they say, to be received by the subject as approbation or rejection of his discourse, but truly to recognize or abolish the subject qua subject. This is the responsibility of the analyst each time he intervenes by speaking.38

Why do the stakes seem so much higher here? By problematizing, as I am doing, the purity and indivisibility of a line between reaction and response, and especially the possibility of tracing this line between mankind in general and the animal in general, one runs the risk, as people notice and won't fail to complain to me about, of throwing doubt on all responsibility, all ethics, all decision, etc. To which I would respond, as it really is a matter of responding, schematically, on the level of principle, with the following three points:

1. On the one hand, having doubts about responsibility, decision, one's own being-ethical, can be, or so it seems to me, and ought perhaps to remain, the indefeasible essence of ethics, of decision, and of responsibility. Any knowledge, certainty, and firm theoretical assurance on this subject


would suffice to confirm, precisely, the very thing that one is trying to deny, namely a reactionality in the response. I'm saying "deny" [dénier, in the psychoanalytic sense], and that's why I always place denial at the heart of all these discourses on the animal.

2. On the other hand, without erasing the difference, a nonoppositional and infinitely differentiated, qualitative, intensive difference, between reaction and response, the point is, on the contrary, to take it into account in the whole differentiated field of experience and of a world of life. And to do so without distributing this differentiated and multiple difference, in such a massive and homogenizing way, between the human subject on the one hand and the nonsubject that is the animal in general on the other, this latter coming to be, in another sense, the nonsubject subjected to the human subject.

3. Finally, the point would be to elaborate another “logic” of decision, response, event—as I also try to deploy it elsewhere and which seems to me less incompatible with what Lacan himself, in “Subversion of the Subject . . .”, says of the code as “code of the Other.” Meaning that Other from whom “the subject receives even the message he emits.” This axiom ought to complicate any simple distinction between responsibility and reaction, with all its consequences. And so the point would be to reinscribe this difference of reaction and response and thereby this historicity of ethical, juridical, or political responsibility, into another thinking of life, living beings, into another relation of the living to their ipseity, and thereby to their supposed sovereignty, their autos, their own autokinesis and reactionary automaticity, to death, to technique, or to the machinic.

After this detour, if we come then to the later text entitled “Subversion of the Subject and Dialectic of Desire in the Freudian Unconscious,” we will, it is true, follow the same logic in it, and the same oppositions—especially the opposition of imaginary and symbolic, of the specular capture of which the animal is capable and the symbolic order of the signifier to which it does not have access. At this juncture of the imaginary and the symbolic, the whole question of the relation to self in general is played out, the position of the self, the ego and sovereign ipseity of course, but also the position of the theoretician or the institution in the history of which said theoretician articulates and signs his discourse on that juncture: here Lacan's discourse and its signature. (We cannot do this here, within these limits, but we should have to place in its proper perspective, a few years after the war, with its ideological stakes, the whole essentially anthropological aim of the period, even as it claimed to go beyond any positive anthropology or any metaphysico-humanistic anthropocentrism. And, above all, in an entirely legitimate way, beyond biologist, behaviorist physicalism, geneticism, etc. For Heidegger as for Lacan and so many others, the point at that time was to lay out a new fundamental anthropology and to reply to and for the question “What is man?” This moment has not at all been left behind, it is even putting forward new forms of the same dangers.)

In “Subversion of the Subject . . .”, the refinement of the analysis bears on other conceptual distinctions. They seem equally problematic to me as those we have just been analyzing and, moreover, remain indissociable from them.

We are dealing apparently with a parenthesis (“Let us observe in a parenthesis . . .”), but a parenthesis that to my eyes is capital. For it bears on the dimension of testimony in general. Who testifies about what and whom? Who proves, who looks, who observes whom and what? What about knowledge, certainty, and truth? “Let us observe in parentheses,” says Lacan, “that this Other distinguished as place of Speech, imposes itself no less as witness of Truth. Without the dimension that it constitutes, trickery in speech would not be distinguishable from mere feint, which, in combat or sexual display, is however very different.”

The figure of the animal, then, has just emerged in this difference between feint and trickery. Recall what we were saying about Machiavelli, about the prince and the fox, and about the fox that feigns not being the fox that it is or even that it is imitating. I am not a fox, the prince can say, basically, the prince who is not really a fox but who is acting like a fox, who knows how to feign being a fox all the while feigning not to feign and therefore not to be the fox that he basically is in what he says or does. Lacan would say that only a prince or a man is capable of this, not a fox. A clean distinction between what Lacan says the animal is able to do, i.e. strategic feint (following, chasing, or persecuting, be it warlike, predatory, or seductive), and what it is unable to do and testify to, namely the trickery of speech in the order of the signifier and of Truth. The trickery of speech, as we shall see, is of course the lie (and the animal cannot really lie, according to common sense, according to Lacan and many others, even if, as we know, it knows how to feign); but, more precisely, trickery is lying insofar as it comprises, in promising the truth, the supplementary possibility of speaking the truth in order to mislead the other, to make the other believe something other than the truth (you know the Jewish joke told by Freud and often


40. Ibid., p. 807 [p. 683].
cited by Lacan: “Why tell me you are going to X, so that I’ll believe you’re going to Y, when you’re going to X?”). According to Lacan, it is this lie, this trickery, this second-degree feint that the animal is unable to do, whereas the “subject of the signifier,” in the human order, supposedly has the power to do so and, moreover, supposedly comes into being as a subject, institutes and comes to itself as sovereign subject by virtue of this power: a reflexive second-degree power, a conscious power of trickery through feigning to feign. One of the interesting things about this analysis is that Lacan really does concede a lot, this time—more in any case than anyone in philosophy and more than he himself had done in earlier writings—to this ability to feign on the part of what he always calls “the animal,” “an animal,” on the part of what he terms here its “dancity,” with an “a.”41 “Dancity” is the ability to feign in dance, lure, display, in the choreography of hunting or seduction, in the display shown before making love or to defend oneself when making war, and so in all the forms of the “I am” or “I am followed” that we are tracking here. But whatever he concede to the animal in this way, Lacan holds it in the imaginary or the presymbolic (as we noted in his “Mirror-Stage” period and in the example of the pigeon or the desert locust). He holds “the animal” prisoner in the specularity of the imaginary; or rather he holds that the animal holds itself in this captivity and speaks with reference to it of “imaginary capture.” Above all, he holds the animal down to the first degree of feigning (feigning without feigning feigning) or, what comes to the same thing here, to the first degree of the trace: ability to trace, track, track down [dépister], but not to throw the tracking off track [dépister le dépistage] and to efface its track.

For a “But” will indeed fold this paragraph in two (“But an animal does not feign feigning”). An accounting separates out the columns of what must be conceded to the animal (feint and trace, the inscription of the trace) and what must be denied it (trickery, lying, the feint of the feint, and the effacement of the trace). But—what the articulation of this “But” perhaps leaves out of sight, discreetly in the shade, among all the features listed, is perhaps the reference to life, to the “vital.” And it is indeed the question of life that is occupying us in this seminar, before all and after all, between the beast and the sovereign. Everything conceded to the animal is done so under the heading of “vital situations,” whereas—one would be tempted to conclude—the animal, be it hunter or game, is deemed incapable of an authentic relation to death, of a testimony to a mortality essential to the heart of Truth or its Speech. The animal is a living being that is only living, an “immortal” living being, as it were. As in Heidegger (to whom Lacan is here closer than ever, in particular, as we shall see, as to what links the logos to the possibility of “tricking” and “making mistakes” [“tromper” et “se tromper”]), the animal does not die. Moreover, for this same reason the animal supposedly knows nothing of mourning, sepulcher, and corpse—which Lacan says is a “signifier”:

Let us observe in parentheses that this Other distinguished as place of Speech, imposes itself no less as witness of Truth. Without the dimension that it constitutes, trickery in Speech would not be distinguishable from mere deceit, which, in combat or sexual display, is however very different. Deploying itself in imaginary capture, the feint is part of the play of approaching and breaking away that constitutes the originary dance, in which these two vital situations find their scansion, and the partners who follow it—what we shall venture to write as their dancity. The animal, moreover, shows itself capable of this when it is tracked: it is able to throw off track43 by feigning a departure in one direction. This can go so far as to suggest among game animals the nobility of honoring the aspect of display that is part of the hunt.

41. [Translator’s note] Lacan’s neologism “dansité” is a homophone of “dénités,” density.


43. [Derrida’s note] Lacan explains in an important note to the “Séminaire sur le Purgatoire” (Écrits, p. 22) the original use he makes here of the word “dépister”: not to track, sniff out, trail but, on the contrary, as it were, to cover the trail by erasing one’s tracks, dépister. In this note he invokes both Freud’s famous text on “The Antithetical Sense of Primal Words,” Benveniste’s “magisterial correction” of it, and a piece of information from [the etymological dictionary] of Bloch and Warburg, who date from 1875 the second usage of the word dépister. The question of the antithetical meaning of certain words “remains entire,” says Lacan, “if one bring out in its rigor the agency of the signifier.” Indeed, I would be tempted to say, upping the ante, especially if, as is the case here, we put to the test the axioms of a logic of the signifier in its double relation to the distinction between the animal order (imaginary capture) and the human order (access to the symbolic and the signifier), on the one hand, and a different interpretative putting to work of undecidability, on the other. The supposedly established difference between pister and dépister, or rather between dépister (to trace or follow a trail) and dépister (to erase a trail or voluntarily lead the follower astray), gathers and guarantees the whole distinction between human and animal according to Lacan. This distinction only has to tremble for the whole axiomatic to be ruined, in its very principle. This is what we are going to have to clarify.
sovereignty. The real human sovereign is the signifier. The entry of the subject into the human order of the law presupposes this passive finitude, this infirmity, this defect that the animal does not suffer from. The animal knows nothing of evil, lies, and trickery. What the animal lacks is precisely the lack in virtue of which man is subject to the signifier, subject subjected to the sovereign signifier. But being subject of the signifier is also to be a subjecting subject, a master subject, an active and deciding subject of the signifier, master enough in any case, if you will, to feign feigning and thereby to be able to posit one's power of effacement of the trace. This sovereignty is the superiority of man over beast, even if it is based on the privilege of the defect, lack, or fault, a failing that is referred to the generic prematurity of birth as well as to the castration complex—that Lacan, in a text I shall quote in a moment, designates as the scientific (or in any case nonmythological) and Freudian version of original sin or the Adamic fault.

This is where the passage from imaginary to symbolic is determined as passage from the animal order to the human order. This is where subjectivity, as order of the signifier from the place of the Other, was supposedly missed by the traditional philosophy of the subject, along with the relations between man and animal. Such at least is Lacan's allegation when he subtly reintroduces the logic of anthropocentrism and firmly reinforces the fixism of the Cartesian cogito as a thesis on the animal-machine in general.

All this has been articulated only confusedly by philosophers, professionals though they be. But it is clear that speech begins only with the passage from feint to the order of the signifier, and that the signifier demands another place—the place of the Other, the other witness, the witness Other than any of the partners—so that the speech that it supports can lie, i.e. posit itself as Truth.

Thus it is from somewhere other than the Reality that it concerns that Truth draws its guarantee: it is from speech. Just as it is from speech that it receives that mark that institutes it in a structure of fiction.

This allusion to a "structure of fiction" would send us back to the debate around The Purloined Letter. Without reopening that debate at this point, let us note here the reflexive acuity of the word "fiction." The concept toward which it leads is no longer merely that of the figure or the simple feint,
but the reflexive and abyssal concept of a feigned feint. It is via the power to feign the feint that one accedes to Speech, to the order of Truth, to the symbolic order, in short to the human order. And thereby to sovereignty in general, as to the order of the political.

(Before even specifying once more the principle of the reading that I am attempting, I should like to evoke at least one hypothesis. Although Lacan often repeats that there is no Other of the Other, although for Lévinas, to the contrary, from another point of view, the question of justice is born of this quest for the third party and an other of the other who would not be "simply his fellow," one wonders whether the denied but common implication of these two discourses about the other and the third party does not situate at least one instance of the animal, of the animal-other, of the other as animal, of the other-living-mortal, of the nonfellow in any case, the nonbrother [the divine or the animal, here inseparable], in short of the a-human in which god and animal form an alliance according to all the theo-zoomorphic possibilities properly constitutive of myths, religions, idolatries and even the sacrificial practices of monotheisms that claim to break with idolatry. What is more, the word "a-human" holds no fear for Lacan who, in a postscript to "Subversion of the Subject . . . ," notes that he was not at all upset by the epithet "a-human" that one of the conference participants had used to describe what he said.)

What is Lacan doing when he posits "that the signifier demands an other place—the place of the Other, the other witness, the witness Other than any of the partners"? Must not this beyond of the partners, and thus of the specular or imaginary duel, if it is to break with the image and the fellow, at least be situated in a place of alterity radical enough (what I earlier called the unrecognizable) that one must break with all identification of an image of self, with any fellow living being, and therefore with all fraternity?  

49. See, for example, "Subversion of the Subject . . . ," p. 818 [p. 693].

50. [Derrida's note:] "Paix et proximité," in Emmanuel Lévinas, special issue of Cahiers de la nuit surveillée, 1984, p. 345. Cited and commented in Adieu à Emmanuel Lévinas (Paris: Galilée, 1997) [trans. Pascale-Anne Brault and Michael Naas as Adieu to Emmanuel Levinas (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999)]. In this text, in which Lévinas asks himself the very worried question, in the end left hanging, of what a third party would be that was both "other than the neighbor," "but also an other neighbor and also a neighbor of the other and not simply the other's fellow," it remains clear that the question remains, as he himself says on the same page, in the order of the "interhuman," and even of the citizen.

51. [Derrida's note:] As to the value of "fraternity," as I tried to deconstruct its tradition and authority in Politiques de l'amitié (Paris: Galilée, 1994), one ought to study also its credit in Lacan, well beyond the passage we were reading earlier and the suspicion or human proximity, with all humanity? Must not this place of the Other be a-human? If that were the case, the a-human, or at least the figure of some divinanimality (to say it in one word), even if it were pre-sensed via man, would be the quasi-transcendental referent, the excluded, foreclosed, denied, tamed, sacrificed ground of what it grounds: namely the symbolic order, the human order, the law, justice. Is this necessity not acting in secret in Lévinas and Lacan, who, moreover, so often encounter each other's path despite all the differences in the world? This is one of the reasons why it is so difficult to hold a discourse of mastery or transcendence with respect to the animal and simultaneously claim to do so in the name of God, in the name of the name of the Father or the name of the Law. The Father, the Law, the Animal, etc., the sovereign and the beast—should one not recognize here basically one and the same thing? Or, rather, indissociable figures of the same Thing? One could add the Mother, and it probably would change nothing. Nietzsche and Kafka understood this perhaps better than philosophers or theorists did, at least in the tradition we are attempting to analyze.

Of course, once again, my concern is not primarily to object frontally to the logic of this discourse and what it brings with it of the Lacan from the period of the Écrits (1960). I must for now leave hanging the question of knowing whether, in the texts that followed or in seminars (published or not, accessible or inaccessible), the frame of this logic was explicitly reexamined. Especially when the oppositional distinction between the imaginary and the symbolic, which forms the very axiomatics of this discourse on the animal, seems to be increasingly left to one side, if not rejected, by Lacan. As always, I am trying to take into account the strongest systematic organization of a discourse in the form in which it gathers itself at a relatively determinable moment of its process. Spanning thirty years, the various texts gathered in one volume, the Écrits, strongly bound to itself, give us in this respect a reliable hold and path to follow. Among the published and accessible texts that follow the Écrits, one should, in particular, try to follow the path that leads, interestingly but I believe without a break, to the analyses of animal mimeticism, for example, always from the point of view of view, from that of the image and the "seeing oneself looked at," even by a can of sardines that can't see me ("First, if it means anything when Petit-Jean says brought to bear on the Parricide brothers according to the logic of Totem and Taboo. In many places, Lacan certainly dreams of an other fraternity, for example in those final words of "Aggressivity in Psychoanalysis": "It is to this being of nothingness that it is our daily task to open anew the way of his meaning in a discreet fraternity to which we never measure up" (Écrits, p. 124 [p. 101])).
to me that the can’t see me, this is because, in a certain sense, after all, it really is looking at me. It is looking at me at the level of the point of light, which is where everything that looks at me is to be found, and that is not at all a metaphor."^{52}

Instead of objecting to this argumentation, then, I would be tempted to emphasize that the logical, and therefore rational, fragility of some of its articulations ought to commit us to a general reworking of this whole conceptuality.

In the first place, it seems difficult to identify or determine a limit, i.e. an indivisible threshold, between feint and feigned feint. What is more, even supposing that this limit is conceptually accessible (and I do not believe it is), it would still remain to find out in the name of what knowledge or what testimony (and knowledge is not a piece of testimony), one can calmly declare that the animal in general is incapable of feigning feint. Lacan here invokes no ethological knowledge (the growing and spectacular refinement of which is proportional to the refinement of the animot), nor any experience, observation, or personal attestation worthy of belief. The status of the assertion that denies the animal feigned feint is purely dogmatic in its form. But there is no doubt a hidden motivation to this humanist or anthropological dogmatism, and that is the certainly obscure but undeniable feeling that it is difficult, if not impossible, to tell the difference between a feint and a feigned feint, between the ability to feign and the ability to feign feigning. For example, in the most elementary sexual display, how would one distinguish between a feint and a feigned feint? If it is impossible to provide a criterion here, one could conclude either that any feigned feint remains a simple feint (animal, or imaginary, as Lacan would say) or else, to the contrary, and with equal validity, that any feint, however simple it be, repeats itself and posits itself undecidedly, in its possibility, as feigned feint (human or symbolic, according to Lacan). As I shall make clearer in a moment, a symptomatology (and of course a psychoanalysis) can and must always conclude that it is possible, for any feint, to be a feigned feint, and for any feigned feint to be a simple feint. The distinction between lie and feint then becomes precarious, along with the distinction between Speech and Truth (in Lacan’s sense) and everything he claims to distinguish from it. And therefore between man and beast. The feint requires that the other be taken into account; it supposes, then, simultaneously, the feint of the feint—of a simple supplementary play of the other in the strategy of the game. This supplementarity is at work from the first feint. Lacan, moreover, cannot deny that the animal takes the other into account. In the article “On a Question Preliminary to Any Possible Treatment of Psychosis” (1957–58), there is a remark that goes in this direction and that I should have liked patiently to link to our network: simultaneously in tension, if not in contradiction, with Lacan’s discourse on the imaginary capture of the animal (in this way basically deprived of an other) and in harmony with the discourse on pathology, evil, lack, or defect that mark the relation to the other as such in man but are already announced in the animal:

To take up a formula that had pleased Freud when he heard Charcot say it, “this does not stop it from existing”—here, the Other in its place A.

For remove it from there, and man can no longer even maintain himself in the position of Narcissus. The anima, as though through the effect of an elastic band, snaps back onto the animus and the animus onto the animal, which, between S and a, maintains with its Umwelt “foreign relations” that are significantly narrower than ours, without however one’s being able to say that its relations with the Other are non-existent, but only that they appear to us only in sporadic sketches of neurosis.\footnote{53}

In other words, the beast only resembles man and only enters into relations with the Other (in a weaker fashion, because of a “narrower” adaptation to the environment) to the extent of its illness, the neurotic defect that brings it closer to man, to man as defect of premature animal, as yet insufficiently determined. If there were a continuity between the animal order and the human order, and hence between animal psychology and human psychology, it would follow this line of evil, of fault, and of defect. Lacan, moreover, claimed that he did not hold to a discontinuity between the two psychologies (animal and human), at least qua psychologies: “May this digression here dissipate the misunderstanding that we apparently allowed some people to reach: that of imputing to us the doctrine of a discontinuity between animal and human psychology, which is very far from what we think.”\footnote{54}

What does this mean? That the radical discontinuity between the animal and the human, an absolute and indivisible discontinuity that he nonetheless

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confirms and deepens, no longer has to do with the psychological as such, anima and psyche, but precisely with the appearance of an other order.

On the other hand, an analogous (I do not say identical) conceptual undecidability comes to trouble the opposition, so decisive for Lacan, between making and effacing tracks [or traces]. The animal can trace, inscribe, or leave tracks, but, Lacan adds, it "does not efface its tracks, which would already mean that it became the subject of the signifier." Now here too, even supposing that we rely on this distinction, Lacan justifies neither by testimony nor by ethological knowledge the assertion whereby "the animal," as he says, the animal in general, does not efface its tracks. Beyond the fact that, as I had tried to show elsewhere (and this is why, so long ago, I had substituted the concept of trace for that of signifier), the structure of the trace presupposes that to trace comes down to effacing a trace as much as imprinting it, all sorts of animal practices, sometimes ritual practices, for example in burial and mourning, associate the experience of the trace and that of the effacing of the trace. A feint, moreover, and even a simple feint, consists in rendering a sensory trace unreadable or imperceptible. How could one deny that the simple substitution of one trace for another, the marking of their diacritical difference in the most elementary inscription, the one Lacan concedes to the animal, involves effacement as much as imprinting? It is just as difficult to assign a frontier between feint and feigned feint, to draw an indivisible line through the middle of a feigned feint, as it is to distinguish inscription from effacement of the trace.

But let us go further, and ask a type of question that I should have liked, given time, to generalize. It is less a matter of wondering whether one has the right to refuse the animal such and such a power (speech, reason, experience of death, mourning, culture, institution, politics, technique, clothing, lying, feigned feint, effacement of the trace, gift, laughter, tears, respect, etc.—the list is necessarily indefinite, and the most powerful philosophical tradition in which we live has refused all of that to the "animal"). It is more a matter of wondering whether what one calls man has the right, for his own part, to attribute in all rigor to man, to attribute to himself, then, what he refuses to the animal, and whether he ever has a concept of it that is pure, rigorous, indivisible, as such. Thus, even supposing, concesso non dato, that the "animal" is incapable of effacing its traces, by what right should one concede this power to man, to the "subject of the signifier"? And especially from a psychoanalytic point of view? Any man may certainly be conscious, within a space of doxic phenomenality, of effacing his traces. But who will ever judge the efficacy of this gesture? Do we need to recall that any effaced trace, in consciousness, can leave a trace of its effacement the symptom of which (be it individual or social, historical, political, etc., and even technical—one can never be sure of having erased something on a computer, etc.) can always guarantee its return? Do we need, especially, to remind a psychoanalyst of this? And to recall that any reference to the power to efface the trace is still speaking the language of the conscious and even imaginary self?

All this does not come down to saying (I've explained this at length elsewhere) that the trace cannot be effaced. On the contrary. It is in the nature of a trace that it always effaces itself and is always able to efface itself. But that it efface itself, that it can always efface itself, from the first moment of its inscription, through and beyond repression, does not mean that anybody, God, man, or beast, is its master or sovereign subject and can have the power to efface it at its disposal. On the contrary. In this respect, man has no more sovereign power to efface his traces than the so-called "animal." To efface his traces radically, hence just as radically to destroy, deny, put to death, even put himself to death.

But one should not conclude from this that the traces of the one and the others cannot be effaced—and that death and destruction are impossible. Traces are effaced, like everything, but it is in the very structure of the trace that it is not in the power of anyone to efface it or above all to "judge" as to its effacement, still less an assured, constitutive power to efface, performatively, what effaces itself. The distinction can appear to be subtle and fragile, but this fragility fragilizes all the solid oppositions that we are tracking, beginning with the distinction between the symbolic and the imaginary that in the end sustains this whole anthropocentric reestablishment of the superiority of the human order over the animal order, of the law over the living being, etc., where this subtle form of phallogocentrism seems to bear witness in its way to the panic that Freud talks about: wounded reaction not to the first trauma of humanity, the Copernican (the earth revolves around the sun), not to the third trauma, the Freudian (the decentering of consciousness in view of the unconscious), but to the second trauma, the Darwinian.

Before provisionally moving away from Lacan's text, I should like to situate a task and issue a reminder.

The task would commit us, on the basis of everything we have inscribed here under the sign of the Cartesian cogito, to analyze closely Lacan's reference to Descartes. As with the reference to Hegel, and often associated with it, the appeal to Descartes, to the Cartesian I think, was constant, determining, complex, differentiated. In a rich set of references and in a broad investigation, a first marker would be imposed on us by our problematic. It would be found in the pages that immediately follow the paragraph on
the difference between the nonfeigned feint of the animal and the feigned feint of man capable of effacing its traces. In it, Lacan shares out praise and criticism.

On the one hand, the “Cartesian cogito does not fail to recognize” the essential, namely that consciousness of existence, the sum, is not immanent to it but transcendent, and therefore beyond specular or imaginary capture. This comes down to confirming that an animal cogito remains a captive of the identificatory image, a situation one could formalize by saying that the animal accedes to the ego, the “me,” only by missing the “I,” but not an “I” that itself accedes to the signifier only on the basis of a lack: the (animal) self lacks the lack. Lacan writes, for example:

The ego is thenceforth a function of mastery, a play at being imposing, a constituted rivalry [so many features that are not refused to the animal]. In the capture that it undergoes from its imaginary nature, it masks its duplicity, i.e. that the consciousness in which it assures itself of an incontestable existence (a naïveté to be found deployed in the meditation of a Fénelon) is in no way immanent to it, but indeed transcendent since it sustains itself on the basis of the unary trait of the ego-ideal (which the Cartesian cogito does not fail to realize). Whereby the transcendental ego itself is relativized, implicated as it is in the misrecognition in which are inaugurated the identifications of the ego.55

But, on the other hand, the ego cogito is dislodged from its position as central subject. It loses mastery, central power, and becomes a subject subjected to the signifier.

The imaginary process moves thus from the specular image to “the constitution of the ego on the road of subjectivation by the signifier.” This seems to confirm that the becoming-subject of the ego passes via the signifier, Speech, the Truth, etc., i.e. by losing immediate transparency, consciousness as consciousness of a self-identical self. Which leads to an only apparent paradox: the subject is confirmed in the eminence of its power by subverting it and bringing it back to its defect, namely that animality is on the side of the conscious ego, whereas the humanity of the human subject is on the side of the unconscious, the law of the signifier, Speech, the feigned feint, etc.:

The promotion of consciousness as essential to the subject in the historical aftermath of the Cartesian cogito is for us the misleading accentuation of the transparency of the “I” in actu at the expense of the opacity of the signifier that determines that “I,” and the slippage whereby Bewusstsein serves to cover the confusion of the Selbst, comes precisely in the Phenomenology of Spirit to demonstrate, with Hegel’s rigor, the reason for his error.56

So the accentuation of transparency is said to be “misleading” [trompeuse]. This does not only mean the “going astray” [se tromper] of error, but a “being misled” [se tromper] of trickery, lying, lying to oneself as belief, “making believe” in the transparency of the ego or of self to self. That would be the risk of the traditional interpretation of the Cartesian cogito, perhaps the risk of Descartes’ auto-interpretation, of his intellectual auto-biography, one never knows. Whence the Lacanian promotion of the cogito and the diagnosis of lying, trickery, misleading transparency at the heart of the cogito itself.

“Hegel’s rigor,” he says. We should then have to follow the interpretation that Lacan proposes of the struggle between the Master and the Slave, at the point where it comes to “decompose the equilibrium of fellow to fellow,” The same motif of the “alienating dialectic of the Master and the Slave” appears in “Variations on the Standard Treatment” (1955); animal specularity, with its lures and aberrations, comes to “structure durably the human subject,” by reason of the prematurity of birth, “a fact in which one apprehends this dehiscence of natural harmony, demanded by Hegel as the fecund illness, the happy fault of life, in which man, by distinguishing himself from his essence, discovers his existence.”57 The reinscription of the question of the animal, in our reinterpretation of the reinterpretation of Hegel by Lacan, could be situated at the point at which the latter reintroduces the reminder about the imaginary, the “specular capture” and the “generic prematurity of birth,” a “danger” “unknown to Hegel.” Here too, what is at stake is life. Lacan says so clearly, and the move to the human order of the subject, beyond the animal imaginary, is indeed a question of life and death:

The struggle that establishes him is indeed one of pure prestige [whereby it is no longer animal, according to Lacan], and what is at stake is to do with life, well placed to echo that danger of the generic prematurity of birth, unknown to Hegel, and which we have made the dynamic mainspring of specular capture.58

How are we to understand the word “generic,” which qualifies with so much force the insistent and determining concept of “prematurity,” namely the absolute event without which this whole discourse would lose its “main-

55. “Subversion of the Subject . . . ,” p. 809 [p. 685].
56. Ibid. pp. 809–10 [p. 685].
spring,” as Lacan himself says, beginning with the relevance of the distinction between imaginary and symbolic? Is the “generic” a trait of the human genus as animal genus or a feature of the human insofar as it escapes from genus, from the generic, the genetic—by the defect, precisely, of a certain de-generation [dé-génération], rather than that of merely degenerating [dé-générescence], a de-generation the very defect of which engenders symbolic “generation,” the relations between generations, the law in the Name of the Father, Speech, Truth, Trickery, the feigned feint, the power to efface the trace, etc.?

From this question, which we shall leave in abeyance, like a task, at the point where, nonetheless, it proceeds from this traditional logic of the originary defect, I return to what I announced as a final reminder, namely what gathers this whole placing into perspective of the defect in the history of the original fault, an original sin that finds its mythical relay in the Oedipus story, and then its nonmythical relay in the “castration complex” as formulated by Freud. In the following quotation, in which I shall emphasize the lack and the defect, we shall see again all the stages of our journey, Genesis, the snake, the question of “I” and of the “What am I?” (“What am I following?”), a quotation from Valéry’s Sketch of a Serpent (“the universe is a defect in the purity of Non-Being”), etc.:

This is what is lacking for the subject to be able to think himself exhausted by his cogito, namely what about him is unthinkable. But where does this being come from who appears to be in some sense at fault [en défaut] in the sea of proper names?

We cannot ask this of this subject as an “I.” To know the answer, he lacks everything, since, if this subject “I,” I was dead, as we said, he would not know it. Therefore that he does not know me to be alive. So how am I to prove it to Myself?

For I can, at a pinch, prove to the Other that he exists, not of course with the proofs of the existence of God with which the centuries have been killing Him, but by loving him, a solution provided by the Christian kerygma.

This is, moreover, a solution that is too precarious for us even to think of grounding in it a detour for what is our problem, namely: What am I?

I am in the place whence it is shouted: “the universe is a defect in the purity of Non-Being.”

And this is not without reason, for in being maintained, this place makes

59. [Translator’s note:] Derrida’s parentheses enclose the words “être et suivre” to draw attention to the ambiguity of “je suis,” which can mean both “I am” and “I follow.”

The Beast & the Sovereign

Volume I

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