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## **Political Animals**

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## Political Animals

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# POLITICAL ANIMALS

GEOFFREY BENNINGTON

In this essay, as my title might already suggest, I want to look again at a very famous passage from the opening of Aristotle's *Politics* (indeed one of the most famous passages in all Western philosophy), according to which man is by nature a political animal and is so, more at any rate than some other political animals, because he, and he alone, is an animal possessed of *logos*. More especially, I want to look at this passage in the light of more or less recent readings of it offered by Lyotard (especially) and Derrida (somewhat). In passing, I'll also look at what is a little less obviously a reading of this passage in Aristotle, in Hobbes's chapter "Of Commonwealth," that opens part 2 of the *Leviathan*. And in conclusion I'd like to refer to Heidegger's commentary on this passage of Aristotle, as recently published in English in the 1924 lecture course *Basic Concepts of Aristotelian Philosophy*.

The context for those readings (in Lyotard and Derrida, at least) is an effort to rethink the concept of animality, or the supposed specificity of the human as against the animal, which Derrida especially thinks is a crux of Western philosophy's "metaphysics of presence" and logocentrism, more specifically insofar as it forms part of a problematical concept of sovereignty. In the case of both Derrida and Lyotard, this look at animality has (or is supposed to have) political consequences, or at least consequences for how we might think about politics.

## 1

In the case of Derrida this political aspect is reasonably straightforward, if only because his quite brief look at the passage from Aristotle takes place in the context of his final seminar series, entitled *The Beast and the Sovereign*. The reading of this passage from Aristotle (which is perhaps more like a reading *out* than a fully-fledged reading: this whole final session is the transcript of a largely improvised session) is in part aimed at questioning Agamben's confidence in the possibility of making a clean distinction between two Greek terms for "life," *bios* and *zoé*. You will remember that in *Homo Sacer*, Agamben wants to claim that *zoé* corresponds to his own notion of "bare life," whereas *bios* is always a form or mode of life, as in, for example, *bios politikos*. Derrida is unimpressed by Agamben's attempt to secure this distinction, and more especially to secure it in the light of the opening pages of Aristotle's *Politics*. One of his main purposes in this final session is to suggest, *contra* Agamben and to some (lesser) extent *contra* Foucault, that so-called bio- or zoo-politics must be seen to begin at least as early as Aristotle, and cannot therefore be presented as proper to or definitive of "modernity." Here at any rate is the end of the seminar:

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*This paper is based on a talk given to the Philosophy Department Colloquium at Emory University in October 2009. The discussions of Lyotard and Hobbes are in part adapted from my article "Peut-être une politique. . . ." I reserve for another occasion a discussion of Rancière's quite unsatisfactory discussion of this same passage from Aristotle at the beginning of *La mésentente*.*

*You remember the distinction Agamben was trying to make, which seemed to me untenable, between the definition of the zōon politikon as essential attribute or as specific difference. But precisely, what Aristotle says—and this is where this distinction between the two attributions does not work—is that man is that living being who is taken by politics: he is a political living being, and essentially so. In other words, he is zōo-political, that's his essential definition, that's what is proper to him, idion; what is proper to man is politics; what is proper to this living being that man is, is politics, and therefore man is immediately zōo-political, in his very life, and the distinction between bio-politics and zōo-politics doesn't work at all here—moreover, neither Heidegger nor Foucault stays with this distinction, and it's obvious that already in Aristotle there's thinking of what is today called “zoopolitics” or “biopolitics.” Which doesn't mean—as I suggested last time and I'm stressing today—which doesn't mean, of course, that Aristotle had already foreseen, thought, understood, analyzed all the figures of today's zoopolitics or biopolitics: it would be absurd to think so. But as for the biopolitical or zoopolitical structure, it's put forward by Aristotle, it's already there, and the debate opens there. [Beast 348–49]*

In the penultimate session of the same seminar, already questioning Agamben, Derrida had also spent some time discussing Heidegger's reading of Aristotle's *zōon logon ekhon*,<sup>1</sup> and especially his suggestions, in the *Introduction to Metaphysics* and later in the “Letter on Humanism,” that these supposed Aristotelian “definitions” of man are on the one hand too rationalistic (already in Aristotle pulling the supposedly original sense of *logos* toward the bad Latin and modern sense of *ratio* and rationality), and on the other too biologicistic or zoologicistic, looking for the essence of man on the basis of his *animalitas* and in so doing falling short of his true *humanitas*. One of the things Derrida is interested in pursuing in these late seminars is the way in which Heidegger both opens up a possible deconstruction of the massive metaphysical opposition between man and animal, and at the same time reinforces some of the most classical metaphysical gestures in this respect. A little later I'll try to take at least a brief look at the earlier Heidegger seminar (which I do not think Derrida knew), where he dwells apparently more literally and patiently on this passage from Aristotle.

In the case of Lyotard, the politics is perhaps less apparent than it is in Derrida, if only because an influential account of Lyotard's later work, by the French philosopher and leading Lyotard commentator Gérard Sfez, makes much of a supposed “eclipse” of the political in the last decade of Lyotard's work.<sup>2</sup>

(Incidentally, “eclipse” is also Agamben's word in *Homo Sacer*, where he says that the current “eclipse” of politics is due to its failure to take into account “the decisive event of modernity” [4], namely the politicization of bare life as such:<sup>3</sup> what Derrida claims

<sup>1</sup> I am not sure Aristotle ever quite uses this formulation (the exact formula *zōon politikon* appears only at *Politics* 1278b 19): at *Politics* 1253a, the sequence goes first, “. . . it is clear that the city-state is a natural growth [phaneron hoti tōn phusei hē polis esti], and that man is by nature a political animal [kai hoti ho anthrōpos phusei politikon zōon],” and just a few lines later, “why man is a political animal in a greater measure than any bee or any gregarious animal is clear [dioti de politikon ho anthrōpos zōon pasēs mellitēs kai pantos agelaiou zōou mallon, dēlon]: For nature, as we declare, does nothing without purpose [outhen gar, hōs phamen, matēn hē phusis poiei]: and man alone of the animals possesses logos” [logon de monon anthrōpos ekhei tōn zōōn].

<sup>2</sup> See Sfez, “The Writings of the Differend,” and, more generally, Sfez's book, Jean-François Lyotard.

<sup>3</sup> The notion of an “eclipse” of politics reappears in the portentous final paragraph of Agamben's *State of Exception* [88] where that eclipse is attributed the “contamination” of politics by law.

against this in *The Beast and the Sovereign* is that the Aristotle text cannot reasonably be taken to be saying anything other than the politicization of life as such [that being just what Aristotle says man is], and so this can hardly be taken to be a foundational event for “modernity,” whatever that term is supposed to mean. There would be more to be said about this figure of eclipse, and what happens to it if it is not taken as a historical or even temporal event, but as something originary or constitutive: maybe politics has some more intimate connection with eclipse, or maybe what we most readily call “politics” always involves the eclipse of what we sometimes call “the political”? Or as they say in Washington, maybe politics [or the political] is always already getting eclipsed by “playing politics,” by what the French call “la politique politicienne”? What if, for example, something about politics *as such* [in its co-originary with “bare life,” at least in the case of human animals] always involves or induces that “eclipse”? And what if this doubling-up structure, which I sometimes call “the politics of politics,” whereby politics always eclipses itself in a kind of parody or parroting of itself, just happens *because of* the very *logos* that makes politics possible in the first place? What if this marks an essential internal limit to any rationalist view [be it Kantian, Hegelian, Rawlsian, or even Marxist] of politics as such? This is what I’ll be arguing on the back of Hobbes a little later, and just this, I want to suggest, is what gives politics a kind of insuperable inner difficulty or inhibition that gives rise to the “negative politics” that is the theme for this issue, and that explains the permanent resistance of politics to philosophical grasp. But let’s not get ahead of ourselves: back to Sfez’s claim about Lyotard.)

For example, in 1983 in *The Differend*, Lyotard offers a kind of definition of politics (or maybe of “the political”): “Politics consists in the fact that language is not a language, but phrases, or that Being is not Being, but *There is’s*” [*des Il y a*]. . . . Politics, however, is the threat of the differend. It is . . . par excellence the question of linkage” [138; §190]. Elsewhere, he characterizes a differend [*différend*] (the possibility of which is itself definitive of politics, then) as “the unstable state and instant of language wherein something which must be able to be put into phrases cannot yet be,” and goes on to say, “What is at stake in a literature, in a philosophy, *in a politics perhaps*, is to bear witness to differends by finding idioms for them” [13; §22, emphasis added]. But, says Sfez, observe how politics falls out of the picture five years later in the otherwise parallel formulation from the introduction to Lyotard’s 1988 book *The Inhuman*, where he writes, “It is the task of writing, thought, literature, the arts, to venture to . . . bear witness” [7]. That to which one bears witness now is not the differend as such, but what Lyotard calls a “debt to childhood” [7], and this bearing-witness no longer seems to involve politics: in his book on Lyotard, Sfez goes so far as to say that it’s as though now there were an “impossibility of the political expression of the *différend*” [21]. Sfez, not at all implausibly, then, has Lyotard henceforth turning away from politics towards writing, *écriture*, supposedly better able than politics to bear witness to infancy, childhood and (as Lyotard finds increasingly interesting), affect.

I am not entirely convinced by Sfez’s argument, in spite of its initial plausibility. First, the place of politics in *The Differend* is not simple: saying that “everything is political” if, *so long as*, politics is defined as the possibility of the differend on the occasion of the least linkage (or phrasing) is so general a statement that it both commits Lyotard to a great deal and at the same time not to very much (in that no one else ever quite defined politics that way), and the list that begins by assigning the task of bearing witness to the differend to literature and philosophy ends not simply with “politics” but with “a politics *perhaps*” [emphasis added]. So the politics that is supposedly getting eclipsed only after *The Differend* is perhaps already not shining so very brightly before Sfez’s eclipse sets in. And more importantly, the later passage from *The Inhuman* is mere lines away from a paragraph in which Lyotard, having described what he calls the “metaphysics of de-

velopment” [7] (he seems to mean transnational capitalism, or what we now tend to call “globalization”) in terms of an inhuman process of complexification which has no purpose other than that very complexification itself, and is in his view not really *opposable*, goes on to say that the politics we inherited from the revolutionary tradition has become useless, and adds, “the question I am raising here is simply this: what else remains as ‘politics’ except resistance to this inhuman? And what else is left to resist with but the debt which each soul has contracted with the miserable and admirable indeterminateness from which it was born and does not cease to be born?—which is to say, with the other inhuman?” [7].

So it looks as though there’s still *something* of a politics in play, if not an oppositional or would-be revolutionary politics, a “politics” in scare-quotes, at least, and that “politics” (which I do not think is fundamentally different at all from what Lyotard was advancing five years earlier in *The Differend*) is here being referred to something “inhuman” that is not the same inhuman as the inhuman advance of “development” or what might now be called “globalization.” That inhuman, that second, other inhuman within us, is what will, in the brief text I will discuss here, be referred indeed to infancy, childhood or affect: but more importantly for me, it will be referred to animality in a discussion (as often in Lyotard’s case, I would hesitate to call it a reading, exactly) of the famous passage from Aristotle I mentioned at the outset. This brief text from 1990 (two years after *The Inhuman*), translated under the title “The Affect-Phrase,” on the basis of a republication in a posthumous French volume as “La phrase-affect,” (this title, however, being assigned to it by the editors rather than by Lyotard himself) was in fact first published under the (for me) more interesting title “L’inarticulé, ou le différend même”: “The inarticulate, or the differend itself” (the very differend, the differend even . . .).<sup>4</sup> And indeed this text does begin by trying to bring out something essential about the concept of the differend (itself). The thought goes as follows: if a differend in general, and the wrong [*le tort*] to which it bears witness, can only show up (as it were: maybe we’re already in the eclipse here) as silence or as a silencing, an impossibility of justice being done between the phrase-universes and the discursive genres laid out in *The Differend*, then it *ought* to be possible to go on and say something more focused about silence *itself* as sign of the *differend itself*, or perhaps about the specific form or type of silence that is involved here. In order to understand how Lyotard had apparently moved beyond (or at least past) the book entitled *The Differend*—that I had been inclined to present in my 1988 *Lyotard: Writing the Event* as a kind of triumphant pinnacle or culmination, the *telos* of Lyotard’s entire work—I suggested in an earlier essay<sup>5</sup> that the focus on silence as the *differend* “itself” pushed to the limit the “language-game game” being played in *The Differend*, and opened the way for Lyotard’s renewed engagement with psychoanalysis in subsequent work, work that he always thought would give rise to what in conversation he persistently called a “supplement” to *The Differend*, in which he would address, broadly speaking, the essential *affective* dimension of its eponymous concept, largely ignored in the book itself (but actually, in my view, with which I think he did not entirely agree, already prepared much earlier in Lyotard’s work, for example in the introduction to his monumental 1971 volume *Discours, figure*). What Lyotard calls the “affect-phrase” is the affect “itself” considered *as* phrase or sentence (rather than the phrase or sentence that reports on or describes an affect, say), and it pushes the language-game game to the limit in that affect, *qua* phrase or sentence, and apparently alone among all phrases or sentences, *does not even present a universe* (whereas in general, according to the basic definitions of *The Differend*, “a

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<sup>4</sup> See my more extensive comments on this title in “Figure, Discourse.”

<sup>5</sup> “The Same, Even, Itself . . .”

phrase presents at least one universe” [70; §111]), in that it merely “signals” some apparently indeterminate sense or meaning without that sense or meaning being referred to any referent, and without its being addressed by any addressor or to any addressee. This indeterminacy of the affect-phrase (its inarticulacy, even) also means that (again unlike other phrases or sentences) no generic linking or *enchaînement* is possible with respect to an affect-phrase: thus *any* affect-phrase causes injury and damage to articulated language as such, and in return articulated language inflicts a wrong, a *tort*, on the affect-phrase in general, to the extent that it is violently articulating the inarticulable. This is not just any old *tort*, but something like the being-*tort* of *tort*, *tort itself*, because, “If articulation and inarticulation are irreducible the one to the other, this *tort* can be said to be radical” [“Affect-Phrase” 105; §5]. The language-game game seems here to come up against a certain limit and perhaps itself needs rephrasing if that radical *tort* is to be thought.

This is where, not coincidentally, I believe (if it is true that a differend is in some sense a mark of everything’s being political, and if this little text of Lyotard’s is trying to home in on something essential about the differend itself, even) Lyotard turns to Aristotle at the opening of the *Politics*, if only at first to take from that text something that might seem to confirm Sfez’s hypothesis about a turning away from politics. Aristotle, you remember, argues that man is *naturally* political (in the sense that the nature of any thing is its *telos*, and the *telos* of man is to form part of a *polis*), and at any rate *more political* than other animals (not the only political animal, as is sometimes wrongly assumed, but more political than other animals, some of whom are also political)<sup>6</sup> and more political because of his possession of *logos*, as opposed to animals’ mere *phônè*. Lyotard invokes this passage as the source of a distinction to be found “in the ancient grammarians” between the “articulated voice [*phônè énarthros*]” that humans have, and the “mixed (or confused) voice [*phônè sunkékhuméne*]” that all animals supposedly have [“Affect-Phrase” 107; §12]. *Logos*, in the sense of articulated speech (Lyotard says Aristotle also calls it *dialektos*, which is not the case in this particular passage, though Aristotle certainly uses this word often elsewhere, and the French translation of the *Politics* by Tricot has a note saying that “in the present passage, *logos* is more or less synonymous with *dialektos*” [*La politique* 29]) is not just distinguished from *phônè*, but strongly differentiated from and even opposed to it. Lyotard comments:

*All animals, man included, have the aisthèsis of pain and pleasure, and the phônè through which they signal this aisthèsis to one another [sèmainein allèlois]. [Actually, elsewhere Aristotle is quite clear that some animals, fish for example, typically do not possess phônè, but let’s not get into that now. –GB] The logos, reserved to human animals, which Aristotle also names dialektos, appears heterogeneous to the phônè: to it belongs the capacity “to render manifest the useful and the harmful, and as a result of this the just and the unjust, and other similar things” (1253 a 15). It notably follows that a properly political community, where what is at stake is not only the signalling of pleasure and pain but also deliberating and deciding upon the useful and the just, requires this phônè énarthros, this articulated phrase, that is the logos. [“Affect-Phrase” 107; §12]*

Which seems to go along with Sfez’s hypothesis: the differend itself, even, the being-differend of the differend, if you will, now seems to be summed up in this inarticulate, quasi-animal affect-phrase, *phônè* that is not *logos*; and it is the *logos* that this phrase is not, most certainly is not, which makes of man a political animal to a higher degree than other animals (cf. too, *History of Animals* 589a 2, where the word Aristotle uses is *poli-*

<sup>6</sup> See for example the quite nuanced discussion in *History of Animals* 487b 33–488a 14.

*tiketeron*), in that only the *logos*, in this sense of the term at least, allows one to formulate the sentences proper to politics, namely deliberative phrases bearing on questions of the useful and the harmful, and thereby the just and the unjust. To the extent that the affect-phrase is not articulated, it seems not to be political, and to the extent that the affect-phrase (which is scarcely a phrase, then, rather a vocalization or a vociferation) is the place of the differend *itself*, even, it would seem to follow that Lyotard was right to look elsewhere than in politics for the means of phrasing this essential differend itself . . . even.

So it looks as though the Aristotelian sense of politics (which entails articulation and deliberative argumentation) insofar as it is grounded in *logos* rather than *phônè*, and insofar as *phônè* lines up with an immediate and inarticulate expression of pleasure or pain, of affect, excludes the marker of the differend itself, and it even looks as though politics (in the Aristotelian sense) is based on the *exclusion* of the animal *phônè* that is thereby close to the “other” politics, the “a politics perhaps” or the “politics” (in quotation marks) that Lyotard would line up with the differend itself (or the possibility of the differend) and with the possibility of resistance to globalization, which resistance (or so one might imagine) Aristotelian-type deliberative politics has signally failed to produce. Lyotard indeed goes on to say that *phônè* will in fact be “banished” from human language, and transcendently so (his term) just for being inarticulate and unargued. So the Aristotelian exclusion would indeed apparently set up a whole logocentric closure (not Lyotard’s term) that would be of a piece with the humanism usually associated with the all too famous claims associated with Aristotle that man is a political animal and that man is an animal possessed of *logos*.

## 2

Let me leave Lyotard and turn to another reading of the Aristotle passage from *Politics* 1253a. I am using the term “reading” perhaps a little provocatively, as it is not at all presented as such. Indeed its author, Thomas Hobbes, presents himself (in his mature work at least) as being about as anti-Aristotelian as possible—not only in that the Aristotelians are among the main culprits of bringing what Hobbes calls “Darknesse from Vain Philosophy,” and not only because they have transformed the university into a place where philosophy is no more than a “handmaid to the Romane Religion,” thus turning the study of philosophy into a study that is “not properly Philosophy (the nature whereof dependeth not on Authors, [I stand rebuked. –GB]) but Aristotelity” [*Leviathan* 462]—but because Aristotle himself is so very wrong about so many things that Hobbes can write “I beleeve scarce any thing can be more absurdly said in naturall Philosophy, that that which now is called *Aristotles Metaphisiques*; nor more repugnant to Government, than much of that hee hath said in his *Politiques*; nor more ignorantly, than a great part of his *Ethiques*” [*Leviathan* 461–62].<sup>7</sup>

“Much of that hee hath said,” but perhaps not all, and indeed one of the chapters of *Leviathan* that one might be excused for thinking quite central to the book, namely Chapter XVII, the opening chapter of Part 2 (“Of Common-Wealth”), entitled “Of the Causes, Generation, and Definition of a Common-Wealth,” begins with what I am suggesting is a kind of rereading (or perhaps rewriting) of the opening of Aristotle’s *Politics* that is our

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<sup>7</sup> In spite of Hobbes’s vehement remarks, it is at least arguable that he remains in places close to Aristotle’s Rhetoric, of which he was in fact the first English translator: see the evidence for this proximity presented by Leo Strauss in *The Political Philosophy of Hobbes* 35–42.



guide here.<sup>8</sup> I can set up the problem, helped by Hobbes's marginal annotations, which provide a kind of telegraphic version of the argument. So: "The End of Commonwealth, particular Security . . . Which is not to be had from the Law of Nature . . . Nor from the conjunction of a few men or families . . . Nor from great Multitude, unlesse directed by one judgement . . . And that continually" [117–19]. This first half of the chapter is a kind of counter-derivation of the *polis* or commonwealth from its origin, which certainly has at least half an eye on Aristotle. Having reached this point, Hobbes, now with explicit reference to Aristotle, entertains a possible question about political animals (the marginal summary has: "Why certain creatures without reason, or speech [i.e. *logos* –GB], do nevertheless live in society, without any coercive Power" [119]). Here's how Hobbes presents the question in the body of the text:

*It is true, that certain living creatures, as Bees, and Ants, live sociably one with another, (which are therefore by Aristotle numbred amongst Politicall creatures;) and yet have no other direction, than their particular judgements and appetites; nor speech, whereby one of them can signifie to another, what he thinks expedient for the common benefit: and therefore some man may perhaps desire to know, why Man-kind cannot do the same. To which I answer. . . .* [119]

So the problem is: there are non-human political animals who seem to do just fine, politically speaking, without the complex apparatus of commonwealth by institution, and notably without unified coercive sovereignty, and they don't even have language to help them figure things out. The lurking paradox would then be related to the suspicion that the very thing that makes man *more* political than other political animals somehow simultaneously brings with it a *less* political, or at least a less successfully political fate for the humankind that (or so one might think) ought to be better able to get these things right, because of the superiority of the *logos*, than bees or ants and other critters.

Hobbes does like a numbered list, and his reply to this imagined objection has six distinct points. Of these, I want to dwell on the fourth, which seems to have a certain privilege over the others, if only because it is precisely to do with language, which, as we have seen, is the specific difference from animals that Hobbes invokes in the general presentation of the problem. Fourthly, then, says Hobbes, no longer explicitly referring to Aristotle, but more or less quoting him directly for the beginning of this response to the objection: "Fourthly, that these creatures, though they have some use of voice, in making knowne to one another their desires, and other affections; yet they want that art of words . . ." [119]. That art of words, one assumes in the wake of Hobbes's general presentation of the problem, and in the flow of the Aristotle text that we thought Hobbes was more or less translating here, whereby they could signify to one another the expedient and the inexpedient, and by extension the just and the unjust and so on. But in fact not at all, and indeed rather the contrary. What follows is interesting to track in Hobbes from the earlier *Elements of Law* (1640), through the *De Cive* (1642), to the *Leviathan* itself (1651): in all three cases, the same problem is addressed in six points, and in all three cases the specific language point is the fourth. Here is the version from the *De Cive*:

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<sup>8</sup> Derrida's *The Beast and the Sovereign seminar presents, I believe for the first time in his published work, a quite extensive reading of Hobbes, but although he refers to what he calls the "enthral-ling" chapter XVI, "Of Persons, Authors, and things Personated," which immediately precedes this one, and analyzes at some length the immediately following chapter XVIII, "Of the Rights of Sovereigns by Institution," he does not refer to this chapter, nor apparently remark on the close relation it bears to the Aristotle passages he reads or reads out in the final session.*

*Fourthly, however well the animals may be able to use their voices to indicate their feelings to each other, they still do not have the art of words that is needed to arouse the passions, notably, to make the Good appear Better, and the Bad Worse than they really are. [So the problem seems to be essentially one of exaggeration: language gets humans into discussion of the good, but also gets them into exaggerating that good or its opposite. –GB] But man’s tongue is a trumpet to war and sedition; and it is said that Pericles once made thunder and lightning in his speeches and threw all Greece into confusion. [On the Citizen 71–72]*

This seems bad enough: the very thing that in Aristotle distinguishes man from other animals, i.e. *logos* in the sense of language, no sooner has him using it in the way that most clearly distinguishes it from the *phônè* of animals (i.e. to talk of good and bad and thus, naturally perhaps, to emerge from the nature of what Hobbes elsewhere calls “bruit beasts”) than that use is *already* pushing him toward sedition and thereby civil war, i.e. dragging him back down or back out into a nature worse than that of the animals who seem to do well enough in *their* politics without *logos* (or sovereignty) at all. (In the version of this fourth point in *The Elements of Law*, Hobbes cuts straight to the chase and says “Fourthly, they [i.e. the other political animals] want speech, and are therefore unable to instigate one another to faction, which men want not” [105].)

Bad enough, I was saying: but this “bad enough” that comes apparently straight from the ability to claim to distinguish good from bad, and that leads apparently straight to the worst thing of all (“Civil Warre”), gets *even worse* than this in the *Leviathan*, if that is possible, in that what in the *De Cive* is merely to do with a tendency toward exaggeration here becomes something rather more sinister altogether:

*Fourthly, that these creatures, though they have some use of voice, in making knowne to one another their desires, and other affections; yet they want that art of words, by which some men can represent to others, that which is Good, in the likeness of Evill, and Evill, in the likeness of Good; and augment, or diminish the apparent greatnesse of Good and Evill; discontenting men, and troubling their Peace at their pleasure. [119–20]*

Which pushes the exaggeration problem of the *De Cive* to a kind of catastrophic point: man possessed of *logos* and not just *phônè* not only uses language to *exaggerate* good and evil, but also to *invert* them and present the one *as* the other. Which is why, one might then imagine, unlike the animals who do not have this problem, man needs a unifying and coercive sovereign will to decide and enforce what will *count* as good and evil, independently of always potentially misleading, seditious, and factional deliberation among the *logos*-enabled people.

If you are inclined to imagine that this is simply one side of the *logos* that distinguishes man from other political animals, namely an unfortunate tendency—to which I will return—for language to get out of hand in the form of rhetoric, and that the dignity of man might be salvaged by looking to the other standard translation of *logos*, namely “reason,” (and Hobbes duly points out in the *Leviathan* that “the Greeks have but one word *logos*, for both *Speech* and *Reason*; not that they thought there was no *Speech* without *Reason*; but no *Reasoning* without *Speech*” [29])<sup>9</sup>—if that’s what you think, then you

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<sup>9</sup> This priority of speech over reason in Hobbes, which is of a piece with his “nominalism,” is widely supposed to be a mark of his “modernity.” See Strauss, “On the Basis of Hobbes’s Political Philosophy” 174. (Strauss is commenting on Raymond Polin’s *Politique et philosophie chez Thomas Hobbes* [Paris: PUF, 1953]). Cf. too, on this aspect of Hobbes, Heidegger’s brief remarks in *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics* 328–29, and the earlier, longer treatment of Hobbes’s thinking about the copula in the 1927 course *The Basic Problems of Phenomenology* 183–92.

will be disappointed. Remember that the answer we've been looking at is the fourth of six: the third answer Hobbes gives is in fact focused on reason, and if anything the case for humanity is even worse here than in the case of language. In the *De Cive*, this third answer is as follows:

*Thirdly, animals without reason neither see, nor believe they see, any defects in the conduct of their common affairs; but any group of men includes a large number who suppose themselves cleverer than the rest, and make attempts to change things, and they differ among themselves and try different things, and that is dissension and civil war. [71]*

And in the *Leviathan*:

*Thirdly, that these creatures, having not (as man) the use of reason, do not see, nor think they see any fault, in the administration of their common business: whereas amongst men, there are very many, that thinke themselves wiser, and abler to govern the Publique, better than the rest; and these strive to reforme and innovate, one this way, another that way; and thereby bring it into Distraction and Civill warre. [119]*

However active and even activist this “reading” of Aristotle by Hobbes, it does seem to bring out something important and interesting. *Logos*, supposedly the specific possession of man, opens the possibility of politics, of the *polis*, but simultaneously opens the possibility of the collapse of politics into what Hobbes usually calls “Civil Warre,” or into the so-called “state of nature” which is a nature much more violent than any other animal nature. In Hobbes, at least, this is a paradoxical structure just because it seems that Good and Evil, the possible confusion or inversion of which he relates to language in the political sphere, are in fact potentially confused or inverted from the start, so that politics *as such* is as good as it is bad, as good as it is evil, as artificial as it is natural, prone to ruin by the very same means that made it possible. (I imagine Derrida would want to say: politics in Hobbes is *autoimmune*.) This confusion of apparent opposites affects many moments in Hobbes: so that in this numbered sequence of six responses to our question about why other political animals do not appear to need the unifying and coercive sovereign that Hobbes claims human animals need, the fifth, perhaps unconsciously remembering the ambiguity of the Greek word *stasis*, has Hobbes claiming, on the basis of a distinction between *injury* and *damage* that might bear reading against Lyotard’s distinction in *The Differend* between *tort* and *dommage*, that “Man is . . . most troublesome, when he is most at ease” [*Leviathan* 120]. (In his different way, Aristotle too is haunted by such possibilities of a kind of infra-nature, or nature worse than that of the animals: and indeed this is the matrix of Derrida’s interest in the paradoxical convergences in the tradition between beast and sovereign, for example when Aristotle famously writes in the immediate context of our passage from the *Politics* that “man is by nature a political animal, and a man that is by nature and not merely by fortune citiless is either low on the scale of humanity or above it . . .” [9; 1253a 3–6], and just a little later “It is clear therefore that the state is also prior by nature to the individual . . . a man who is incapable of entering into partnership, or who is so self-sufficing that he has no need to do so, is no part of a state, so that he must be either a lower animal or a god” [11–12; 1253a 26–30].) And more generally in Hobbes, as we could quickly verify by looking at Chapter IV of the *Leviathan*, language as such is as close as can be to its “abuses,” always on the point of drifting into what in a moment we shall probably be calling *rhetoric*. If *logos*, as supposedly definitive of the human, were to turn out to be inseparable from rhetoric, for example (and I think that

that is indeed the case in Hobbes, much to his indignation and dismay), then there might be consequences for how we think about politics more generally. I could also insert here a reading of Chapter XXV of *Leviathan*, “Of Counsell,” in which there’s an apparently unstoppable drift from a proper exercise of counsel to an improper rhetorical one, and I could also show that these problems show up much more acutely for Hobbes in the case of democracy, which in *The Elements of Law* he memorably describes as being no more than an “aristocracy of orators” [120].<sup>10</sup> Democracy in Hobbes tends to lead to the ruin of politics just as does the rhetorical drift of language.<sup>11</sup>

### 3

The possible inseparability of *logos* and rhetoric (notably in Aristotle), which I am suggesting can be seen at work in Hobbes, and which I’ll examine very briefly in the light of a recently published lecture course of Heidegger’s, is also argued for in an article on which Lyotard bases some of his claims about Aristotle (and which, one can only assume from its publication date of 1984, was written independently of the Heidegger course that was published in German only in 2002). This article, by the French scholar Jean-Louis Labarrière, nominally about the difference between human and animal imagination in Aristotle, ends up all about questions of language. According to Labarrière’s Aristotle, what non-human animals lack in lacking *logos* is less reason or even articulate language as such (for animals *do* display rationality, and as their *phônè* is not entirely separable from certain values of *logos*, insofar as *logos* here is close to *dialektos*, and some animals according to Aristotle *do* exhibit something like a *dialektos*, then we might want to conclude, *contra* Lyotard, and indeed *contra* the use he makes of this article by Labarrière, that the distinction between *logos* and *phônè* is not as clear cut in Aristotle as he wants to make it seem). What non-human animals lack in lacking *logos* is less reason or even articulate language as such, then, than precisely *rhetoric* as the art of persuasion. Animals in fact have some access to *logos*, but not to the dimension of *doxa*, opinion: and *doxa* is the basis of rhetoric. The aspect of *logos* to which animals do not have access, says Labarrière’s Aristotle, is precisely the rhetorical dimension in which opinions are put forward and deliberated in the public arena [32]. This dimension, which Labarrière wants to claim gives human political life what he calls an “ethical surplus-value” compared to the merely “economic” rationality of the political life of non-human political animals [44], is manifested essentially in the speeches of orators made before the assembled citizens, in which, according to the initial definition from the *Politics*, humans discuss the useful and the harmful, the just and the unjust.<sup>12</sup> This leads to what Labarrière calls a “paradox,” whereby the orator, who is exploiting that aspect of the *logos* that distinguishes him from non-human animals, sees that *logos* (that the tradition wanted to reclaim in terms of rationality) drifting toward the rhetorical, toward a persuasive and seductive eloquence, potentially exploiting all the possibilities of exaggeration and falsity that exercised

<sup>10</sup> See my preliminary discussion of some of these aspects of Hobbes in “Scatter.” For the parallel case of Locke, see my “The Perfect Cheat: Locke and Empiricism’s Rhetoric.”

<sup>11</sup> I offer a more detailed reading of these issues in Hobbes in “Le conseil de Hobbes,” forthcoming in Fernanda Bernardo, ed., Derrida et le politique.

<sup>12</sup> According to Labarrière, then, the specifically political *logos* “manifeste en effet ce sur quoi porte le discours de l’orateur politique : l’utile et le nuisible, sujets d’opinion et de délibération, utile et nuisible dont le juste et l’injuste semblent être une conséquence . . . le juste se définit par rapport aux lois qui sont elles-mêmes soumises aux constitutions [Pol. IV, I, 1289a 11–20]. Ce que le *logos* manifeste, il le manifeste donc dans les harangues . . . les discours du genre délibératif, . . . qui se font devant le peuple réuni en son assemblée dans « l’espace public » . . . discours portant sur tout ce qui intéresse les citoyens et la cité” [44].

Hobbes so much. Labarrière is certainly simplifying (and anachronizing) the situation by calling this dimension of language “aesthetic,” and finding it merely “paradoxical” that the properly human ethical supplement of the political should thus show up “aesthetically.” I want to say that this rhetorical drift marks a much graver problem—one that Hobbes really does identify—in *logos* and thereby in politics as such. Man is naturally a political animal insofar as he is possessed of a *logos* that turns out in this rather essential or primordial way to be *rhetorical*. There is no “eclipse” of politics here supervening on some ideal shining, but rather the fulfillment of politics as always already eclipsed by rhetoric, which would then be both its condition and its ruin. Rhetoric means that politics is always drawn into what I was earlier calling the politics of politics, and the politics of politics is, as everyone knows and usually laments as though it could simply be avoided, the death of politics, the becoming-corrupt of the political as such, the death of politics living at the heart of politics.

Labarrière who is, understandably enough, concerned to preserve the preeminence of the ethical moment in all this, even when recognizing that it has to go via this “paradoxical” aesthetic or rhetorical path, is led thereby to what I take to be a rather desperate reading of *Rhetoric* 1418 a 40. Here, near the end of the *Rhetoric*, Aristotle says “if you have no enthymemes, then fall back upon moral discourse: after all, it is more fitting for a good man to display himself as an honest fellow than as a subtle reasoner” [213].<sup>13</sup> It is not hard to imagine a rather different reading (which would then at first blush seem to lend itself to a Hobbesian “pessimism” about human animals), according to which Aristotle’s text is really suggesting (whatever Aristotle’s intention may have been) that moralism is a useful rhetorical fallback possibility for the orator who has been unable to construct a genuinely plausible discourse, and that to that extent moral talk is caught up *within* rhetoric as one of its possibilities, or even its *best* possibility, in that it can always present itself as not rhetorical at all. “Moral discourse” on this reading always might be just another rhetorical ploy (the “southern lawyer” ploy, my students tell me), whereby the (apparent) absence of rhetoric in (apparent) moral righteousness is just another, supplementary, turn of rhetoric. On this type of reading, rhetoric has no outside, and the *logos* that makes man naturally a political animal is not (*pace* Labarrière, who thus seems to be *himself* falling back on moral discourse at the end of his article)—not so much a paradoxical means of securing the ethical surplus-value of politics and thus saving the dignity of the human, as a more complex and perhaps even sinister possibility that rather resonates with the sense that contemporary political discourse has become swamped by just this kind of rhetorical hyper-moralism, and tends to confirm Hobbes’s “reading” of Aristotle.

Or perhaps Heidegger’s? For although I had developed the readings I have been sketching here before I had the chance to read the 1924 seminar on the *Basic Concepts of Aristotelian Philosophy*, I may seem (I might be rather proud of myself if I had) to have come to a somewhat Heideggerian conclusion, insofar as Heidegger himself takes a very broad view of rhetoric (as exemplified in Aristotle’s treatise) as the true instantiation of the sense of *logos* as fundamentally related to man’s “naturally” political Being, and indeed equiprimordial with it.<sup>14</sup> Heidegger even goes so far as to say that rhetoric, at

<sup>13</sup> I am appealing here to the Rhys Roberts translation. John Henry Freese has “In fact, it is more fitting that a virtuous man should show himself good than that his speech should be painfully exact.” Theodore Buckley: “the show of goodness more befits a virtuous man, than accuracy of speech.” Kai mallon tō epieikei harmottei khreton phainesthai ē ton logon akribē: the translation probably hangs on how the verb phainesthai is taken: to appear as what one is, or to appear to be what one is not—the suggestion is that this is undecidable, and just that is an effect of rhetoric. This apparently innocent example has some quite serious consequences in Heidegger’s radicalization of phenomenology through his intensive reading of Aristotle in the 1920s, as I show in forthcoming work.

<sup>14</sup> “The determination of being-with-one-another is equiprimordial with the determination of speaking-being” [Heidegger, *Aristotelian Philosophy* 45].

least for the Greeks, is no less than the “hermeneutic of being-there itself” [*Aristotelian Philosophy* 75]. It is probably true to say, however, that Heidegger takes a less “cynical” view of this situation than Hobbes (or than I seem to be taking here). This involves his wanting to claim, in part against the literality of Aristotle’s text, that rhetoric should not be thought of as a *tekhnè* but as a *dunamis*, not merely an art but a more fundamental faculty or ability. This interpretative decision on Heidegger’s part has the advantage of allowing rhetoric a path toward both a kind of political and ethical dignity uncontaminated by sophistry, and, beyond that, toward a more proper relation to truth itself, on the basis of which true concepts might even be forged. I do not have time to put due pressure on Heidegger’s reading here, for example in what I think is an awkward attempt to argue that for Aristotle “*Rhetorikè* is not *tekhnè*, though it is *tekhnikon*” [79, invoking 1355b 33],<sup>15</sup> and that “the about-which of rhetoric is the speaking-with-one-another-in-a-deliberative-mode for which there is no *tekhnè*” [92].<sup>16</sup> Further, Heidegger has an energetic but equally contestable reading of how Aristotle has rhetoric relate to sophistry, at least in its political guise, switching from the *Rhetoric* itself to the very end of the *Nichomachean Ethics* (which is itself really a kind of introduction to the *Politics* and would rapidly loop us back to the “political animal” passage that has been our starting point) to find Aristotle criticizing the sophists for identifying politics with rhetoric and even placing rhetoric higher than politics [92], but omitting to mention (or rather misrepresenting [79]) a passage from the *Rhetoric* itself in which Aristotle, examining the distinction between Rhetoric and its most obvious counterpart Dialectic, suggests that it is possible to distinguish the *dialectician* from the sophist in that the former’s arguments proceed *kata ten dunamin*, whereas the latter’s, the sophist’s, are driven not *en te dunamei* but *en te proairesis*. (Freese’s translation has perhaps a little misleadingly “not the faculty but the moral purpose” [15]: the point seems to be that the sophist knows in advance the conclusion he wants to reach and bends the argument to reach just that conclusion—he already knows the story he wants to tell—whereas the dialectician follows the argument itself to the conclusion it truly reaches.)<sup>17</sup> Heidegger picks up the fact that the sophist acts “*en te proairesis*,” and immediately opposes that, not to the proper *dunamis* of Dialectic, as does Aristotle himself, but to Rhetoric, which he immediately claims “is maintained *en dunamei*” [79]. But Aristotle in this passage is in fact *contrasting* the situation of Dialectic (in which the sophist *can* indeed be distinguished from the dialectician by means of this *dunamis/proairesis* contrast) with that of Rhetoric, in which those who argue soundly [*kata ten epistemen*] and those who argue out of *proairesis* are still both called rhetors [1355b 18], and to that extent are not at all as readily distinguishable as are the dialectician and the sophist. I’m inclined to want to argue against Heidegger that in a general way he cannot dismiss the *tekhnè* here quite so easily (indeed I’d suggest that he is going a little too proaieretic on us in order to get the *tekhnè* and the looming possibility of sophistry out of the picture), and that putting it back in opens the possibility of the trickiness of rhetoric always possibly coming to the fore, as it does so brutally and catastrophically in Hobbes. If I am correct about this, then the “hermeneutic of being-there” would be infiltrated by a basic uncertainty as to its status, and the possibility of a constitutive becoming-rhetorical

<sup>15</sup> One page earlier Heidegger says bluntly that the definition of rhetoric as *dynamis* rather than *tekhnè* “is asserted despite the fact that Aristotle more often designates it as *τέχνη*. This designation is ungenue, while *δύναμις* is the genuine definition” [78].

<sup>16</sup> Heidegger goes on: “That which occurs to everyone in an everyday and accustomed manner is not specific to a trade or occupation. Everyone is in the position of being able to speak with others in the people’s assembly . . .” [92].

<sup>17</sup> Heidegger himself defines *proairesis*: “The ‘anticipation’ of a *τέλος*, of an ‘end’ of *πράξις*, is *προαίρεσις*” [42]. There would be a lot to add here about the fate of these kinds of reversals in narrative theory, from Sartre’s *La nausée* through Barthes and Genette.

of politics would be at least as plausible as a becoming-political (and thereby ethical and even epistemological) of rhetoric (quite apart from any longer-term implications for one's understanding of the distinction between authentic and inauthentic in Heidegger's later developments of Dasein and everydayness, for example, and indeed for the famous co-originary of truth and untruth).

What I'd like to suggest in conclusion is that this troublesome persistence of the rhetorical, as the specific feature of *logos* insofar as it distinguishes man among political animals, paradoxically complicates the very specificity it seemed to establish. For one thing, that rhetoric exploits in its *logos* is precisely what we might be tempted to call a residual *phônè*, a kind of persistent animality of language (perhaps what Derrida in a rather different context calls an "animality of the letter," as the "primal and infinite equivocal-ity of the signifier").<sup>18</sup> To put it more jokily (although this is really pretty serious, which doesn't mean it can't also be *funny*), among the upshot of our readings might be that *logos* is always somewhat *phoney*, that politics is always somewhat animal, that humanity has no essential definition, and that the concept of sovereignty is always a rather desperate and hollow expedient. Politics, I am here suggesting, is from the start (both historically and logically) doubled up on itself as its own ruin or derision, the immediate corrosion of the pieties it also always secretes, the wanton scattering, to left and right, of its own stated aspirations. And yet this would be its only chance, the very situation of politics itself, just where we are, now.

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<sup>18</sup> Derrida uses these expressions in the early essay "Edmond Jabès et la question du livre" [108, 109]. See my brief commentary in "Half-Life" 116.

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