CHAPTER 8

The Violence of Stupidity

The White Whale swam before him as the monomaniac incarnation of all those malicious agencies which some deep men feel eating in them, till they are left living on with half a heart and half a lung. That intangible malignity which has been from the beginning; to whose dominion even the modern Christians ascribe one-half of the worlds; which the ancient Ophites of the east reverenced in their statue devil; − Ahab did not fall down and worship it like them; but deliriously transferring its idea to the abhorred white whale, he pitted himself, all mutilated, against it. All that most maddens and torments; all that stirs up the lees of things; all truth with malice in it; all that cracks the sinews and cakes the brain; all the subtle demonisms of life and thought; all evil, to crazy Ahab, where visibly personified, and made practically assailable in Moby Dick. He piled upon the whale's white hump the sum of all the general rage and hate felt by his whole race from Adam down; and then, as if his chest had been a mortar, he burst his hot heart’s shell upon it.

H. MELVILLE. *Moby Dick*

If, as Bartelson contends, “sovereignty has no essence,” if sovereignty cannot be tracked to a set of identifiable naturalised foundations or capabilities in a “people”, then how are we to understand it? Through this book I have understood sovereignty as a particular mode of domination that arises through conflict. Following Foucault, I have argued that sovereignty is a means to fix a pattern of domination, through institutions, practices, law and knowledge, which allows for the continuation of war by other means. Taking this broad definition of sovereignty, and linking it clearly with warfare, has allowed for an understanding of sovereignty that goes beyond the territorial and institutional limits of the Westphalian imagination, towards understanding sovereignty as a relation that might extend to our claimed human sovereignty over other animals, a claim that operates across the borders of nation states, and thus is truly cosmopolitan in its scope. Through this analysis, I have argued that we must reverse a prevalent understanding that domination—human or otherwise—is justified by superiority. On the contrary, as we began to see more clearly in

Chapter 4 in relation to Locke, humans are not more intelligent, or more rational, or more just. On the contrary: we dominate and appropriate animals, and through this process of domination, after the fact of appropriation, name ourselves, conveniently, as superior. This chapter completes this analysis through a reading of Jacques Derrida’s last lectures, which I believe precisely focus upon this trajectory of analysis of sovereignty that I have laid out here. In this chapter I will examine Derrida’s reading of animality and sovereignty, both to understand how we might re-understand human sovereignty over other animals, but also to simultaneously recognise the operation of animal sovereignties as a mode of resistance against human domination.

Derrida’s Beasts

Against a continental philosophical tradition that has largely been ambivalent in relation to addressing human violence toward non human animals, Derrida spoke clearly on violence and domination of non human animals in his late work, particularly *The Animal That Therefore I Am* and Derrida’s final lectures in 2002–04, published under the English title of *The Beast and the Sovereign* in two volumes (which I will refer to as Beast 1 and Beast 2). The later work, in so far as it deals with animality and sovereignty, is directly connected to this book. In so far as Beast 1 and Beast 2 provide slightly different, although interconnected, readings on sovereignty, I will treat both volumes separately in the following analysis.

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4 Two substantive collections so far have been published offering English readers some insight into this work: namely, *The Animal That Therefore I Am* which contained fragments of a ten hour seminar Derrida gave in 1997; and recently, Derrida’s final lectures in 2002–04, published under the English title of *The Beast and the Sovereign*.

5 Derrida’s work is frequently multilayered and playful; Beast 1 and Beast 2 are no exception to this tradition. Derrida approaches his central thematic in Beast 1 and Beast 2 in a perhaps typical fashion: that is by teasing out aspects of the problem through a critical textual analysis of apparently disparate pieces of prose and poetry. Many of the texts Derrida analyses in Beast 1 are representative of the modern Western philosophical canon, including those thinkers that are familiar interlocutors with Derrida’s work—Nietzsche, Heidegger, Schmitt and Lacan—as well as less frequent visitors, including Gilles Deleuze and Agamben. Derrida also explores work outside the strict confines of philosophy, including literature and literary theory (for example, Paul Celan, Paul Valéry and D.H. Lawrence). Like much of Derrida’s written