CAN I DIE?

DERRIDA ON HEIDEGGER ON DEATH

Iain Thomson

> No one believes in his own death. Or, to put the same thing in another way, in the unconscious every one of us is convinced of his own immortality.
>
> Sigmund Freud,
> *The Interpretation of Dreams*

> Is my death possible?
>
> Jacques Derrida, *Aporias* (p. 21)[1]

> Holding to the truth of death—death *is* always most/just [one's] own—shows another kind of certainty, more primordial than any certainty regarding beings encountered within the world or formal objects; for it is the certainty of being-in-the-world.[2]
>
> Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*

In this opening provocation, Freud and Heidegger make assertions which stand, *prima facie*, in extreme opposition to one another[3]—with Derrida situated, not surprisingly, somewhere in-*between*.[4] But between what? What is the philosophical significance of the cognitive relation one stands in with respect to one's own death? Between (1) Heidegger's assertion that holding onto the truth of death reveals the primordial certainty of being-in-the-world and (2) the universal, albeit unconscious conviction that *I will not die* which Freud diagnoses as a common feature of the human *psyche*, the skepticism Derrida's question expresses initially strikes one as very strange. But is it *unheimlich*? Is it capable of driving us from our home in the familiar? This remains to be seen.

Can we be certain of death? Not of what might happen after death,[5] but of the brute "fact" [*Faktum*] that each of us will meet with his or her own death? For Freud, none of us has such certainty. We all say "I know I am going to die," but deep down, behind the one-way mirror of the unconscious, the archival repository of the repressed, none of us believes it. (As though "bearing witness"[6] to Freud's claim, Antony Flew's *A Dictionary of Philosophy* contains under the heading "death" only the following entry: "*See* survival and immortality.")[7] For Heidegger, on the other hand, death is more certain—or better, is certain in a more "primordial" [*ursprüngliche*] way—than epistemic certainty (knowing that there is a computer in front of me, or even that, to paraphrase Moore, "this is a hand") or even cognitive certainty (that, for example, the sum of the interior angles of a triangle equals one hundred and eighty degrees). Heidegger is no skeptic; for him, "holding to the truth of death"—which as we will see means maintaining ourselves in the unconcealedness of the phenomenon of our own death—reveals a certainty which is absolutely basic to the totality of lived contexts constituting worldly intelligibility. As a being-in-the-world, Dasein dies; there is nothing more certain: "*More original than man is the finitude of the Dasein within him.*"[8]

If, accordingly, Heidegger and Freud are taken as providing two extreme characterizations of the cognitive relation one stands in with respect to one's own death, then it becomes easier to imagine why Derrida might ask such a strange—perhaps *unheimlich*—question; for this seems to be an irreconcilable opposition, an either/or of the type notoriously most vulnerable to Derrida's deconstructions. Thus, when Derrida asks, "Is my death possible?" he is not simply speculating as to whether one can be certain of death's obtaining; his is a more radical questioning: *Can I die?* Is it even possible for me to die? Can I meet with death? In what sense can death happen to me—can "it" "happen" to "me" at all?

Deconstruction: Tying the Knot Tighter[9]

Aporias, a recent addition in a long line of Derrida's interpretations of Heidegger's thinking, is surely best heard as speaking out of the rich heritage of that lineage.[10] It is thus not without reason that I use Freud to introduce a paper on the relationship between Derrida and Heidegger,

a relationship marked by differences which I take to be best characterized as *generational*. This assertion would surprise Derrida least of all, who describes his *Auseinandersetzung* with Heidegger as generational,[11] and thus as a generational *alter-cation*.[12] It should not be too surprising, then, that when Derrida turns to consider the possibility of "my death," it is Heidegger's thinking—Heidegger's ghost as well as his *Geist*—that he finds himself confronting. In an interview given to *The New York Times Magazine* (January 23, 1994), just after the English translation of *Aporias* was published, Derrida said: "All of my writing is on death. If I don't reach the place where I can be reconciled with death, then I have failed. If I have one goal, it is to accept death and dying."[13] Given the central role Heidegger's thought plays in *Aporias*, it is hard to avoid the conclusion that Heidegger has come between Derrida and his death.[14]

Thus, in the early pages of *Aporias*, before explicitly invoking Heidegger, Derrida writes, "concerning the threshold of death, we are engaged here toward a certain possibility of the impossible" (pp. 11, cf. 4). This "possibility of the impossible" is, of course, a paraphrase of the famous formula Heidegger repeats at several crucial moments in Division Two of *Being and Time* as a phenomenological definition of death. At what could be taken as the zero-point of his proximity to Heidegger, Derrida (re)defines "deconstruction . . . as a certain aporetic experience of the impossible" (p. 15).[15] It should escape no one's notice that this definition of deconstruction is nearly identical with Heidegger's phenomenological definition of death (as the "possibility of an impossibility"), with "aporetic experience" substituted for "possibility."[16] These generation *proxemics* turn, then, around Derrida's interpretation of the possibility of death as an aporetic experience.

Death as an Aporetic Possibility

Derrida's *Aporias* is a long and complex paper; its formal occasion was a July 1992 conference on border crossings.[17] Its central theme, the aporia, can be understood as one of the latest thematic refinements of the thinking embodied reflexively in his strategies of performative writing. His is less an explicit theory than a philosophy of implication; to articulate his own "aporetology or aporetography" (p. 15), Derrida hunts down basic "aporias," sites of "*impossible but necessary passage*" at the heart of Heidegger's existential analytic. As Derrida thinks *through*[18] the "aporias, paradoxes, or logical conundrums" of Heidegger's phenomenological analysis of death, he develops his own projects of thought "in the margins" of *Being and Time*, traveling back and forth between textual exegesis and self-elaboration.[19] Here Derrida follows Heidegger's thought-path with the rigor of a reflexivity so critical it seems at times almost to paralyze the logic of its own unfolding. Wittgenstein once said that philosophy is like a kind of bicycle race the point of which is to go as slowly as possible without falling off. Derrida's stylistic adagio is certainly graceful, but whether or not he "falls off" remains to be seen.[20]

As a critique of Heidegger's interpretation of death, *Aporias* extends a strategy familiar from 1968's "*Ousia* and *Grammê*," where Derrida called into question the distinction between authentic and common (or "vulgar") temporality, a question which he now reiterates and extends, asking:

> What if there was no other concept of time than the one Heidegger calls "vulgar"? What if, consequently, opposing another concept to the "vulgar" concept were itself impracticable, nonviable, and impossible? What if it was the same for death, for a vulgar concept of death? (p. 14)

If "the distinction between death [*der Tod*] or properly dying [*eigentlich sterben*]" and "perishing" [*verenden*][21]

> were compromised, weakened, or parasited on both sides of what it is supposed to dissociate . . . then (and you can guess that I am heading toward such a possibility) the entire project of the analysis of Dasein, in its essential conceptuality, would be, if not discredited, granted another status than the one generally attributed to it. (p. 31–32)

Note Derrida's fundamental ambivalence, never resolved, about the aims of his text. Will "the aporetic experience of death"—the experience of death as a limit that cannot but nevertheless must be crossed—"discredit" the existential analytic, or will it repose it, granting it another status?

Unlike Derrida, I will take a side as to which of the above aims *Aporias* in fact achieves. The more severe alternative—Derrida's claim that his deconstruction might "discredit" "the entire project of the analysis of Dasein"—is untenable, based as it is on the double misreading of a subtle semantic slippage and a modal fallacy.[22] On the other hand, I take it that the (less critical but more ambitious) alternative—that Derrida's "reading" grants to the existential analytic a status other than "the one generally attributed to it"—succeeds brilliantly, opening up a powerful and provocative new reading of *Being and Time*.[23] Explaining why Derrida's deconstruction fails in its aim to implode utterly "and lead to ruin" the architectonic structure of Heidegger's analysis, I will develop several threads of this *other* reading of the existential analytic.[24]

Different Possibilities

Derrida's deconstructive reading endeavors to "bring to light several aporias" in the phenomenological interpretation of death, as that interpretation is expressed in Heidegger's assertion that: "Death is the possibility of the very impossibility of Dasein."[25] Derrida writes that in *Being and Time*:

> There are several modalized occurrences of this nuclear proposition. It is often cited. However, its gripping paradox is hardly noted, and the importance of all the successive explosions that it holds in reserve, in the underground of the existential analysis, is probably not measured. . . . What can the possibility of an impossibility be? How can we *think* that? How can we *say* it while respecting logic and meaning? How can we approach that, live, or *exist* it? How does one testify to it? (p. 68)

It is indeed an intriguing assertion upon which to focus; for, as Heidegger says in another context: "The sentence is easy to read but difficult to think."[26] To begin with, what Heidegger means by "possibility" [*Möglichkeit*]—in "the possibility of an impossibility"—is by no means straightforward. Derrida recognizes that "a certain thinking of the *possible* is at the heart of the existential analysis of death" (p. 62)[27] and he is correct that Heidegger's understanding of death turns on his distinctive (and peculiar) understanding of possibility.[28] Nevertheless, his conclusion—that "one can turn what is thus at the very heart of the possibility of the existential analysis against the whole apparatus of *Being and Time*, against the very possibility of the existential analysis" (p. 77)—is based on a subtle but important misreading.

In this misreading, Derrida notes that "the essence of *Dasein* as entity is precisely the *possibility*, the being-possible (*das Möglichsein*)" (p. 63). From this he infers that "if being-possible is the being proper to *Dasein*, then the existential analysis of the death of *Dasein* will have to make of *this* possibility its theme" (ibid.).[29] By formulating this claim conditionally, Derrida expresses rhetorically a caution which I take to be portentous; for, failing to adequately characterize Heidegger's distinctive sense of "existential possibility," Derrida substitutes *Möglichsein* for *Seinkönnen*, a semantic *glissement* which then allows him to attribute to Heidegger an untenable reliance on the impossible experience of death *as such*.[30] This calls for some explanation.

Derrida claims that "two meanings of possibility co-exist in *die Möglichkeit*" (p. 62). The first is "virtuality" or "imminence," the second "ability," in the sense of *capability*, "possibility as that of which I am capable, that for which I have the power, the ability, or the potentiality" (ibid.). This characterization is insufficient and potentially misleading. Heidegger distinguishes his own use of possibility, *existential possibility*, from two other understandings of possibility common to the philosophical tradition, namely, logical and categorial possibility; as an *existentiale* of Dasein, possibility is *constitutive* of Dasein's being. Existential possibility is "the most primordial and ultimately positive way in which *Dasein* is characterized."[31] Here Heidegger has not simply inverted the millennium-old Aristotelian distinction according to which actuality is granted metaphysical primacy of place over possibility; according to Heidegger's thinking of "existential possibility," Dasein *exists* through the constant charting of "live-options," choices that matter. Existential possibilities are what Dasein forges ahead into: the roles, identities, and commitments which shape and circumscribe the reflexive comportment of Dasein as a "thrown project." Heidegger's distinctive sense of existential possibility is, he later says, best understood as en-

abling possibility, as "what enables" us to be what we are.[32]

Heidegger further specifies that existential possibility does not signify possibility in the Kantian sense of "capability": that which I could but may or may not choose to do.[33] Derrida's equation of existential possibility with "capability" is misleading, then, insofar as existential possibility does not describe—except in derivative "breakdown states"—our standing back in a detached theoretical pose, deliberating over which possible outcome to "actualize."[34] That Derrida has taken a wrong step becomes clear in another context when he asserts that "every relation to death is an interpretive apprehension and a representative approach to death."[35] Existential possibility, on the contrary, describes our ongoing non-calculative "charting the course" of live options in which we are always already immersed.[36] Even *imminence*, which Derrida does well to emphasize as an ineliminable constituent of the phenomenology of death, will be misunderstood if thought of as the theoretical grasping of an impending event rather than as the encroaching of an indefinite horizon within which we embody possibilities. *Living through* possibilities rather than grasping them theoretically, Dasein "*is* its possibilities as possibilities."[37] This is why Heidegger characterizes Dasein as a "being-possible" [*Möglichsein*].

Death and Futurity

Heidegger brings in Dasein's futurity to contrast this "being-possible" with Dasein's "ability-to-be" [*Seinkönnen*]: "As being-possible [*Möglichsein*] . . . Dasein *is* existentially that which, in its ability-to-be [*Seinkönnen*], it is *not yet*."[38] This difference between *Seinkönnen* and *Möglichsein* is elusive, but it is crucial for an adequate explication of Heidegger's phenomenological understanding of death. In the context of such an explication, Derrida's central exegetical claim—that "if being-possible [*Möglichsein*] is the being proper to Dasein, then the existential analysis of the death of Dasein will have to make of *this* possibility its theme" (p. 6)[39]—is misguided. Heidegger *does* privilege *Möglichsein* as "the most immediate [mode of] being-in"; in fact, Kisiel's recent historical research shows that this understanding of *Möglichsein* first guided Heidegger to his more general notion of *Seinkönnen*, "the universalized 'can be' of Dasein."[40] But, after the historical inception of *Seinkönnen* (in Heidegger's July 25, 1924 talk to the Marburg Theologians), it is this "ability-to-be" [*Seinkönnen*] *rather than* Dasein's "being-possible" [*Möglichsein*] that receives elaboration "in conjunction with the outermost possibility of death."[41]

Moreover, and this is the closely related modal fallacy Derrida commits, Heidegger does not assert that death is impossible, only that it is possibly impossible.[42] This difference becomes crucial when we remember Heidegger's claim that, "As being-possible [*Möglichsein*] . . . Dasein *is* existentially that which, in its ability-to-be [*Seinkönnen*], it is *not yet*."[43] Since it is "ability-to-be" [*Seinkönnen*] rather than "being-possible" [*Möglichsein*] that receives elaboration "in conjunction with the outermost possibility of death," Dasein embodies the possibility of an impossibility only as something which it *is not yet*. "Being towards one's ownmost ability-to-be [*i.e.*, death] means that in each case Dasein is already *ahead* of itself."[44] Heidegger holds that as being-toward-death I am ahead of myself, able-to-be what I am not yet. How is this to be understood?

In 1928, Heidegger is clear; this seemingly strange "being ahead of myself, able-to-be what I am not yet" is in fact simply an accurate phenomenological description of our basic experience of futurity:

> Expecting [*Gewärtigen*] is . . . ecstatic [from *ek-stasis*, "stepping out"]. Expectance implies a being-ahead-of-oneself. It is the basic form of the toward-oneself. . . . Expectance means understanding oneself from out of one's own *ability-to-be*. . . . This approaching oneself in advance, from one's own possibility, is the primary ecstatic concept of the future. We can illustrate this structure, insofar as this is possible at all, in this way (the question mark indicates the horizon that remains open):

Heidegger's implicit claim about the structure of futurity and its relation to possibility is that Dasein, through its ability-to-be, projects itself

Insert DIAGRAM

ahead of itself, opening the "horizon" of the futural "ecstasis," the phenomenal space within which we comport and understand ourselves futurally. The existential possibilities we "press forward into" or "project ourselves upon" (teaching class, making dinner, etc.) return back to us as who we *are* (a professor, a husband, etc.). Dasein's "disclosedness" is constituted according to this "ecstematic unity of the horizons of temporality."

However, it is a well known but little understood fact that in this implicitly tripartite structure Heidegger privileges futurity:[46]

> What do we mean by the *horizonal character* of the *ecstases*? . . . The being-carried-away as such . . . provides . . . futurity as such, i.e., possibility pure and simple. Of itself the ecstasis [futurity] . . . produces the horizon of possibility in general. . . . The horizon manifests itself in and with the ecstasis; it is its *ecstema*. . . . And, corresponding to the unity of the ecstases in their temporalization, the unity of the horizons is a primordial unity. This ecstematic unity of the horizon of temporality is nothing other than the temporal condition for the possibility of *world*.[47]

It is as gathering this "ecstematic" unity of the horizons of temporality that Dasein "exists" (from "*ek-sistere*") or "stands-out" into Being, and thereby comes to *have* an intelligible "world." But why does Heidegger call the futural *ecstema* "futurity as such, i.e., possibility pure and simple"? Perhaps it is because without death (signified appropriately enough by the question-mark in Heidegger's diagram) there would be no futurity, the possibilities we press into would not "come back to us," constituting us.[48]

Heidegger's underlying intuition—recalling the famous speech of Sarpêdôn in Homer's *Iliad*[49]—seems to be that futural possibilities would not *matter* to us if our embodiment was not thrown up against the limits of our own temporal finitude. In other words, death makes the future matter, and thus opens the horizon within which we "press-into" the possibilities which in turn constitute us. For Heidegger, then, death is not something we embody, but the ineliminable limit of our embodiment, the indefinite but irremovable horizon within which all embodied possibilities unfold.[50]

The Aporetic Threshold of Death

Derrida's objection focuses on and problematizes the idea of a "limit-line," "threshold," or border separating life and death, which he argues is an aporia implicit in Heidegger's existential analytic. For Derrida, since Dasein embodies its possibilities existentially, and death is "the possibility of an impossibility," embodying the possibility *of an impossibility* would seem to entail embodying an impossibility. Thus Derrida writes: "If death, the most proper possibility of Dasein, is the possibility of its impossibility, death becomes the most improper possibility and the most ex-propriating, the most inauthenticating one" (p. 77). What are we to make of this objection?

Obliquely recalling Kafka's "Before the Law" parable (from *The Trial*) and Blanchot's "The Madness of the Day,"[51] Derrida's reading appeals to "an experience" (pp. 14, 32) "where the figure of the step is refused to intuition, where . . . the identity of oneself and therefore the possible identification of an intangible edge—the crossing of the line—becomes a *problem*" (p. 11). For Derrida, Heidegger's phenomenology of death (the "authentic" conception of death or "properly dying" [*eigentlich sterben*]) tacitly relies on the crossing of this threshold (the "vulgar" or "common" conception of "perishing" [*verenden*]) and thus conceals an "aporetic structure" which, once exposed, threatens to tear apart the logical and performative cohesion of *Being and Time*.[52]

For Derrida, even the faithful must admit of the logical possibility—although we should not forget that Heidegger is talking about *existential* rather than logical possibility—that death is the end, the cessation of experience. But, to follow Derrida's logic: if this possibility should in fact obtain, if death turns out to entail the cessation of experience, and I cannot experience the cessation of experience, then, strictly speaking, my death does not happen to me. Derrida formulates this point provocatively: "here dying would be the aporia, the impossibility of being dead, the impossibility of living or rather 'existing' one's death" (p. 73). Simply put, we cannot eradicate the possibility that we cannot experience death.[53] This possibility clearly recalls Epicurus' maxim that "Death is nothing to us; since when we exist, death is not present, and when death is present, then we do not exist."[54] If death is the end of expe-

rience, and I cannot experience the end of experience (for to set a limit is to be in some sense already beyond it, Hegel teaches us), then I cannot experience my own death. Thus, even when I die, my death does not happen to me. I never *meet* my death.

Following Blanchot, Derrida tends to read this recognition (of the impossibility of my death's happening to me) not as leading to the contentment of Epicurean *ataraxia*, but rather as an agonizing form of damnation. This tragic impossibility of death leads to an existence which more closely resembles that of the cursed vampire (who cannot die) than the blessed Angel (who need not die). This "impossibility of being dead"—rather than conferring me with a kind of "mortal immortality" in an "eternal moment of the now" (as on Heidegger's reading of *Zarathustra*'s recognition that *it is never not now*)—leads to what Derrida calls "ruination," "the final impossibility of dying, the *disaster* that I cannot die, the worst unhappiness."

Why is this "mortal immortality" suffered or, at best, "endured" as a kind of disastrous ruin? The Heideggerian explanation would seem to be as follows. In the search for something that is uniquely my *own* (*eigen*), my relationship with my own death, in its "mineness" [*Jemeinigkeit*] and "irreplacability" (the fact that no one else can die in my place), seemed to hold out to me a last promise of "authenticity" [or "ownmostness," *Eigentlichkeit*]. But the recognition that I never meet with that which is uniquely my own leads the quest for authenticity toward a realization of the tragic impossibility of death, the tragedy—as "Blanchot constantly repeats"—"of the impossibility, alas, of dying" (p. 77). Not even my own death will be mine. This reading is dramatic and powerful, but is it compelling as a reading of Heidegger's text?

To recognize that it is a compelling reading, but not a convincing critique, it is important to be clear about something which Derrida does not make clear. Heidegger insists that: "Dying is not an event; it is a phenomenon to be understood existentially."[55] Heidegger treats death not as an occurrence that happens to us, but phenomenologically, in terms of its showing-itself as phenomenon. Phenomenologically, death is the unknown; like Being as such, death does *not* show itself directly. It is for precisely this reason that Heidegger writes in the *Beiträge*: "Death is the highest and outermost witness of Beyng [*das höchste und äußerste Zeugnis des Seyns*]."[56] Because Heidegger is doing a phenomenology of death, his existential analytic does not rely on the possibility of experiencing "the moment" of life's cessation. "When Dasein dies," Heidegger writes, "even when it dies authentically—it does not have to do with an experience [*Erleben*] of its factical demising [*Ableben*]."[57] But if *Being and Time* does not rely on our being able to experience the "instant" of death, then the existential analytic cannot be "brought to ruin" by the impossibility of experiencing this instant. Derrida's stirring ideas about the "disauthenticating," "disappropriating," impossible experience of death turns out to be Blanchotian themes read into Heidegger's text.[58]

Nevertheless, Derrida successfully opens a provocative new reading of *Being and Time* for us here; he raises poignant and moving questions which, though they do not undermine Heidegger's own existential analysis, certainly deserve to be much more fully elaborated as philosophical contributions in their own right. And, not surprisingly, there are moments in *Aporias* where Derrida clearly seems to recognize this. Thus, despite presenting what he takes to be a devastating critique, Derrida nevertheless acknowledges that there is something profound in Heidegger's phenomenological interpretation of death worth preserving. He finds, in the end, that Heidegger's existential analysis of death constitutes "a powerful and universal delimitation" (p. 80). Derrida's alternative to Heidegger's indefensible "privileging" of the ontological entails re-situating Heidegger's supposedly ahistorical existential analysis of death within "the Judeo-Christiano-Islamic experience of death to which the [existential] analysis testifies" (p. 80). In this way Derrida would historicize without dissolving the performative status of phenomenological attestation or testimony [*Bezeugung*] (the methodology of *Being and Time*), even taking such phenomenological testimony as a paradigm for the most defensible methodological strategy of reasoned justification available to post-Heideggerian thought.

Witness to Death

Derrida could thus be seen as initiating nothing less than a radical reconceptualization of "legitimation" *via* a promising renewal of an ancient

paradigm of ethico-political adjudication, a strategic methodology of argumentation which Derrida calls simply "testimony." It is in terms of Derrida's return to the richly evocative thematics of "the witness" that his reading of the impossibility of death casts a new and revealing light on Heidegger's thinking. As he made clear in his 1994 Irvine seminar, Derrida thinks of death as the instant that shatters the illusion of instantaneity (our feeling of existing in an "eternal moment of the now"), separating "the witness structure" into its two component parts or "moments," *witnessing* and *bearing* witness. I take it that here Derrida is interpreting Heidegger's notion of *Ereignis*, "en-ownment," the coming-together of Being and human being according to which human intelligibility "happens." According to Heidegger's thinking of *Ereignis*, beings become intelligible once tacitly interpreted *as* something; beings show up according to a pre-existing (ontological) understanding of Being ("the clearing") which tacitly filters their showing-up.

This originary doubling (or "fold")—in which things show themselves only after first being implicitly interpreted according to the dominant historico-cultural understanding of Being—is rechristened by Derrida as "ineviterability." Like Heidegger's understanding of "enownment" (upon which it is clearly modeled),[59] Derrida thinks of ineviterability as conditioning the very possibility of intelligibility. But, in the case of death, this originary doubling is shattered, and "the condition of possibility becomes a condition of impossibility." Here death is thought as "the last instant" which can be witnessed, perhaps, but not subsequently borne witness to—thus effectively splitting "the witness-structure" into its two "moments" ("discrepant," as he wrote in *Grammatology*, "by the time of a breath").[60] But it is precisely by thinking it *as* shattered against the impossible instant of death that this "structure" of enownment or ineviterability becomes visible. In this sense, Derrida's deconstructive alter-cation with *Being and Time* grants us access to the phenomenon which the later Heidegger calls "the gentle law of *Ereignis*,"[61] the inconspicuous occurrence of the tacit but constant interpretive filtering which constitutes the intelligible, and this is a great service indeed.[62]

ENDNOTES

1. The numbers appearing in parentheses throughout the text refer to Derrida's *Aporias: Dying—awaiting (one another at) the "limits of truth"* [*Apories: Mourir—s'attendre aux «limites de la vérité»* (Paris: Éditions Galilée, 1996)], trans. Thomas Dutoit (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1993).

2. "Das Für-wahr-halten des Todes—Tod *ist* je nur eigener—zeigt eine Andere Art und ist ursprüngliche als jede Gewißheit bezüglich eines innerweltlich begegnenden Seienden oder das formalen Gegenstände; denn es ist des In-der-Welt-seins gewiß." Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (New York: Harper & Row, 1962), p. 309; hereafter B&T, reference preceded by pagination to *Sein und Zeit* (Tübingen, Max Niemeyer Verlag: 1979); hereafter S&Z. S&Z 265/B&T 309.

   Heidegger punctuates—a Lacanian might say *punctures*—his claim that the certainty of death is the originary certainty of being-in-the-world with an odd statement: "*Tod* ist *je nur eigener*." I say "odd" because here death (*der Tod*), in the nominative masculine and without the definite article, does not directly implicate a subject. Stambaugh translates this as: "death *is* always just one's own" (*Being and Time* [Albany: SUNY Press, 1996], p. 244), and Macquarrie and Robinson (M&R) translate this as: "death *is* just one's own" (B&T 309; all subsequent B&T references are to this translation). This somewhat unfortunate use of "one's" here, of all places, bespeaks the difficulty of getting *das Man* out of what is—for lack of a better locution—most Dasein's own. If *eigener* is taken as "own" (*eigen* plus the strong ending *-er*), then this suggests a "one" (as in "one's own"). But strictly speaking, there is no "one" in this clause, no implication of a subject of death. Is this a denial in the midst of the boldest possible assertion of certainty? Far from it; death stands alone at the head of the interruption, without even the usual article (*der*) to cushion its impact. Granted, if *je* is used adverbially, it could intimate many cases of death (apparently the reading both translations rely on)—but Heidegger holds that the Stoic-sounding expression: "one dies," is itself a common form taken by our general cultural denial of death. How then are we to interpret—in the sense of the originary interpretation which underlies every translation (the über*setzung* of the *über*setzung)—this seeming syntactical indifference of death?

   In *Aporias*, Derrida pursues the irony implicit in the locu-

tion "one's death" into a promising realm of thought, pointing out the "non-relational" character of death; an authentic relation to death is supposed to "individuate" Dasein precisely from out of its having fallen in with "the one" (*das Man*), an ontologically bad crowd. This of course disregards Heidegger's infamously disingenuous protest to the contrary—Heidegger's claim that, for example, when he writes "vulgar" he doesn't mean to connote churlish and rude, but only *common.* One persuasive way to understand Heidegger on this point is that taken by Dreyfus, who has shown that the line between the baseline conformity necessary for a shared understanding of the environment bleeds quite easily into a "dangerous conformism" (H. Dreyfus, *Being-in-the-World* [Cambridge: MIT Press, 1991], pp. 154–62).

As Derrida explicates Heidegger's argument he cannot help but ask: What kind of *individuation* is death supposed to provide? Consequently, Derrida calls into question and (as we will see) even reverses Heidegger's claim about the potentially authenticating function of being-toward-death: "death becomes the most improper possibility and the most ex-propriating, the most inauthenticating one" (p. 77). (Here we could hear Derrida calling into question the legitimacy underwriting Heidegger's self-assured emphasis on the "*ist*" of "Tod *ist* je nur eigener.") Derrida also treats the escape from "*das Man*" via the irreducible mineness of death as opening onto a broader "problematic of the I." This prompts Derrida to broach some very important questions, such as: "How do we think the *mein* of *Jemeinigkeit* without the ego or the subject?" And what would be "the enormous consequences" of "a reinscription of the 'I' into a broader space?" (e.g., the "space" of the clearing) (5/4/94; dates in parentheses refer to Derrida's University of California Irvine Seminars, the tenth of which concluded in 1996).

Derrida's point is that post-Heideggerian thinkers cannot avoid asking what it would mean—ethico-politically, sexuo-corporally, physico-neurologically—to consistently think of beings *as clearings*. Can such a thought be thought? Case in point: Can Derrida's "auto-affection"—his initial "substitution" for the "carno-phallogocentrism" inherent in the history of substitutions of "self-identical subjects"—escape the problems concomitant with all previous attempts to think "the proper of the self" (a legacy gathered together by its acceptance of some version of Aristotle's God, "thought thinking itself")? Or does the series march on through Derrida, despite his reflexive vigilance: Aristotle's God; Descartes's *ego cogito*; the "core selves" of idealism—Kant's apperceptive unity, Fichte's "I = I"; . . . Derrida's auto-affection? How, e.g., does auto-affection differ from the neuroscientific thinking of a "proprioceptive unity" which would itself call for a supplementary complement in which "consciousness proper" takes place? (See, e.g., John Smythies, *The Walls of Plato's Cave: The Science and Philosophy of Brain, Consciousness, and Perception* [Aldershot: Averbury Press, 1994].) These are issues which, while extending far beyond the horizon of this essay, nevertheless call for further thought.

Let us return to the concrete question of the best translation of "Tod *ist* je nur eigener." If we employ a colloquialism, perhaps: "death *is* just always your own" sounds all right, although it still entails an unwarranted supplementary pronoun reference (which is why it sounds a bit too third-personal; the same problem befell M&R's translation of *das Man* as "the They"). And this and similar translations are called into question if Derrida is correct that "'ownmost' fails to define or translate the relation between *eigen* and *eigentlich*" (4/27/94) ("own," "ownmost" and "most its own" are M&R's translations of *eigen*). If, with this qualification in place, we go ahead and bring in what Derrida calls "the rage of the pure and the proper" (4/27/94)—taking *eigen* in the sense of the proper, property, and propriety (if not "purity")—then perhaps the most "proper" translation would be: "death *is* always proprietary"—it always gets what's coming to it (death as the indefatigable loan shark). Or maybe: "death *is* always only (its) own," even: "death *is* always only proper." All of these possibilities give pause for thought, but none strike me as quite *les mots justes*, the right words.

For these reasons I am tempted with the impropriety of suggesting that perhaps my awkward "death *is* always most/just [one's] own," the most ambiguous, polysemic, and least proper translation, precisely *as* essentially interrupted, unsatisfying, and incomplete, marked by multiple improprieties, is the "most just" "translation." "Most just," given that my inability to find *les mots justes*, my inability to choose (marked by the periphrasis, hyphenation and bracketing) whether to emphasize *je nur*, "always just", or the strange *eigener*, "own," "own-most," "most [one's] own," which itself stems from an antipathy toward hermeneutic violence and an attentiveness to the question of how to think and translate "*eigen*," this sememe which plays such a prominent role in some of Heidegger's most important "terms of art" (e.g., *Eigent*lichkeit, Er*eignis*) is thus arguably an inability to make a choice which in fact *should*

not be made, an inability stemming from the necessity of "keeping the ear open," and thus a principled refusal to give a simple directive as to how to hear: "Death *is* always most/just *eigener*."

If the intuition behind my (in)decision is right, Heidegger needs for us to try to hear the fullest resonances of *eigen*—the root of the polysemic syntagm "eigener." If a translator immediately confines the word to what may well be its dominant meaning—as the "proper" task of the translator no doubt calls on us to do—then its full range is not heard (which points to the subtle semantic legislation quietly effected by the work of translation). Derrida frequently illustrates the point that with thinkers such as Nietzsche and Heidegger, thinkers who (like Derrida himself) often write in several semantic registers simultaneously and thereby rely on a reader's "ear" for polyvalence and homology, it is often "important *not* to choose between these meanings" (5/4/94). Here Derrida is respecting Heidegger's general (but infinitely demanding) requirement of thoughtful translation, *viz.* that every "*über*setzung" rest on a prior "über*setzung*" (*Parmenides*, trans. Schuwer and Rojcewicz [Bloomington: Indiana University, 1992], p. 12; hereafter PAR), that, in other words, the carrying-across of meaning into the new translation depends on the translator's previously having been transported into the "indigenous" realm of meaning (which demands more than that we already under-stand what it is that we are translating).

3. Although I will not be pursuing these themes as they show up in Freud's work, I should mention that this "opposition" as stated is rather superficial. A Freudian could, for example, make the case that the primordial certainty Heidegger evokes is reconcilable with an unconscious belief in the impossibility of one's own death. But such a case seems fairly implausible, given the unrelenting antipathy Heidegger demonstrates in the *Zollikoner Seminare* (Frankfurt a.M.: Klostermann, 1987) toward Freud's conceptualization of the unconscious. In addition to his usual critique of the metaphysical underpinnings of "consciousness," Heidegger argues—rather unpersuasively—that Freud was forced to postulate the existence of an "unconscious" because of his "naive acceptance" both of the Cartesian assumption of an isolated ego (standing over-against an external world of objects) dominant in the nineteenth century philosophy of consciousness, and of the natural scientific paradigm's implicit demand that explanation take the form of a finitely delineable chain of cause and effect. Since the isolated ego so conceived cannot give a causally grounded account of its own acts and intentions, and since the two prior assumptions taken together necessitate that such a full explanation should be given, an "unconscious" is postulated to fill the gap between "consciousness" and agency (p. 260). However one may feel about Heidegger's quick dismissal of the unconscious (in retrospect, who was being naïve here?), the Heidegger-Freud *Auseinandersetzung* deserves more attention than most Heideggerians (following the lead of Heidegger himself) have given it. (See, e.g., the interesting initial explorations made by William Richardson in "Heidegger among the Doctors" in John Sallis, ed., *Reading Heidegger: Commemorations* [Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993], as well as the work of Charles Scott, Richardson, and others in *Heidegger and Psychology* [a special issue of *Existential Psychology and Psychiatry*, ed. Keith Hoeller, 1988]).

4. As Heidegger writes, in a passage with which Derrida is quite familiar: "The poet . . . is one who has been cast out—out into that *Between*, between gods and men. But only and for the first time in this Between is it decided, who man is and where he is settling his existence." Martin Heidegger, "Hölderlin and the Essence of Poetry," trans. Douglas Scott, in *Existence and Being*, ed. Werner Brock (Washington: Gateway, 1949), pp. 288–89. Note that it is precisely at this point in this much under-explicated piece that Heidegger brings in the famous citation from Hölderlin: "Poetically, man dwells upon this earth."

5. Perhaps we should acknowledge that we do not know what happens after death, that our knowing is limited to the what Levinas calls the "this-sidedness" of death. But this brings up an important point. When we explicate Heidegger's distinctive sense of "possibility," we will come to realize that Heidegger's definition of death as the "possibility of an impossibility" does not explicitly make the above acknowledgment. Heidegger is not saying that death is only possibly the end of experience; for Heidegger, it is certainly the end (to simplify: possibilities are embodied for Heidegger; interpreted phenomenologically, "death" marks or limits the end of embodied possibilities). But if we remember what Hegel has taught us about "the limit," we should recognize that death, as a limit, both does and does not belong to the ensemble that it delimits (and hence cannot be entirely purged of its "other-sidedness"). If Levinas often criticized Heidegger's existential analytic for privileging the "this-sidedness" of death over its "other-sidedness," Derrida's *Aporias* can be seen as fleshing out this criticism; for it is this ineradicable "possibil-

ity" (in the ordinary non-Heideggerian sense) that death, as the limit of life, does not belong entirely to life, that gives Derrida's critique its bite.

6. Derrida holds that a symptom cannot, properly speaking, bear witness. He conceded that one's bearing might, nevertheless, bear witness. This is a tension he explores at length in "*Geschlecht* II: Heidegger's Hand," trans. John P. Leavey Jr., in *Deconstruction and Philosophy*: *The Texts of Jacques Derrida*, ed. John Sallis (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), pp. 161–96.
7. Antony Flew, ed., *A Dictionary of Philosophy* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1979, Revised Second Edition, 1984), p. 84. Flew's dictionary is not exceptional in this sense; several others did not even list death as a heading. But given Flew's enthusiastic endorsement of Paul Edward's ridiculously uninformed condemnation of Heidegger's treatment of death (see *Monist Monograph* 1, 1979), it is particularly ironic. Flew's comments, quoted at length on the back of the monograph, read like a litany of *ressentiment*-driven vitriol: "Paul Edwards performs here an ideal hatchet job, patient, sympathetic, scholarly, exhaustive, sometimes very funny, yet in sum utterly devastating. For it is not his fault but his finding that in the end—despite all the pretentious buildup, the verbose appearance of profundity, the constant sounding chorus of devout adulation—Heidegger has here, and perhaps elsewhere too, absolutely nothing to say which is true and not truistic, important but not false." An ideal *hatchet job*? (Don't worry Anglo-American philosophers, Heidegger has *absolutely nothing to say*; you needn't bother reading him.)
8. Martin Heidegger, *Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics*, trans. Richard Taft (Bloomington: Indiana, 1990), p. 156.
9. The later Heidegger claimed that "only the way forward will lead us back"; Derrida asserts that the only way out of a bind is *to tie the knot tighter.* Martin Heidegger, "Dialogue on Language Between a Japanese and an Inquirer," in *On the Way to Language*, trans. Peter Hertz (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1971), p. 12; hereafter OWL. Derrida's remark comes from the 1995 Irvine seminar, where it was preceded by: "What philosophers do not understand is that. . ."
10. As I will argue, Heidegger and Derrida both provide answers to the question of the philosophical significance of death, and do so in ways that are both radically different and fundamentally connected (the latter building on a problematic but provocative interpretation of the former). However, to rigorously make the case for their difference within connectedness (we could say their identity and difference) one would have to treat not only Derrida on Heidegger on death (and thus borders, delineation, and finally argumentative justification itself), but Derrida's other important interpretations of Heidegger, on temporality and the tradition, on spirit, the earth, art and home, on the hand, subjectivism and animality, on hearing and the voice of the friend, on naming and negative theology, and, perhaps most importantly, on the pre-attunement of the *Zusage* more fundamental than (or, to take Heidegger at his word, already meant by) the "piety" of questioning (OWL, p. 72). Nevertheless, any serious reader of Derrida must come to terms with the profound influence Heidegger has had on Derrida before hoping to grasp the subtle but important distanciations Derrida effects *via* his immanent critiques.
11. Which makes Derrida a theorist of heritage, of the relationship to father, fatherland, and Law. Our cybernetic age of unprecedented reproductive technology—an era of intense struggle between prophylactics and promiscuity—has taught us that if each generation loses some of the resolution of its predecessor(s), it also picks up certain irreducible properties of its own. Derrida notes that "generation"—in its fullest possible polysemy—is arguably one of the better translations for the title of his series of essays on Heidegger, *Geschlecht* I, II, III (unpublished), and IV (see "Heidegger's Hand"). No single word will be able to capture the full gamut of meanings of *Geschlecht* (e.g., the organs of generation, sex, race, nationality, gender, engendering, etc.).

    If Derrida is now generally regarded as one of the most important post-Heideggerian thinkers on the contemporary philosophical landscape, less well recognized is the fact that he is also the philosopher who has done (and is still doing) the most to bring the Freudian and Heideggerian discourses into a profound *Auseinandersetzung*, an altercation extending far beyond the importance both grant to an experience of the *unheimlich* at the heart of the familiar. As he said during his 1994 Irvine Seminar: "Despite competition and incompatibility, both [Freud and Heidegger] are necessary. This is the necessity of two deconstructions in progress, two ways of transforming the space—the ethical, juridical, testimonial space—in which today we live and die, although we cannot ignore the determination of the 'day'; the phenomenology of the 'here, now' is precisely what these two interpretations are disputing. It is the *Zeitraum* that is being contested" (5/4/94).

12. I have chosen "altercation"—from the Latin *altercâr-ri*, "to contend with '*another* [*alter*]'"—to translate "*Auseinandersetzung*," and "alter-cation" to render the hyphenated "*Aus-einander-setzung*." A Heideggerian *alter-cation* is a critical encounter the goal of which is to "set-another-out," to *alter* or "make (an)other" that which it confronts and to "set-out" or establish that "(an)other." Like the German "einander" (which means both "another" and "an other"), the Latin *alter* contains within it an important "ambiguity" [*Zweideutigkeit*]; for, thought in terms of "similarity," *alter* means "another" or "a second," but, thought in terms of "difference," it means "other" or "changed."

13. There is much to be said about these remarkable words. That Derrida—a thinker famous for, among other things, subverting the privilege of speech over writing—*spoke* these words gives any careful reader pause for thought. Where might there be quotation marks, inflections, emphases? (These same considerations also apply to my citations from his Irvine lectures.) And what does it mean that all of his writing "is on death?" Is this the Derridean *Ungrund*, the "perhaps necessary appearance of ground" (Martin Heidegger, *An Introduction to Metaphysics*, trans. Ralph Manheim [New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987], p. 3) whereby the writings are founded on a paradox, the paradox of death which *Aporias* so painstakingly draws? Rather than guessing his intentions, arguably a very un-Derridean hermeneutic strategy, one would no doubt do best to tease out the full implications of the polysemic phrasing, tracing the links between these phonemes cast very publicly into the world.

14. How did Heidegger get in between Derrida and his death? If this paper were to focus on the ethico-political aspects of Derrida's reading of Heidegger, we would also have to ask (no doubt with less impropriety): How did death get between Heidegger and Derrida?

15. Variations on this definition can be found in many of Derrida's recent works.

16. The translation of *Aporias* injects an intriguing element at this point, for the ambiguity of the English word "certain" in Derrida's "certain possibility of the impossible" already anticipates the crux of Derrida's critique of Heidegger. Though in saying so I've already run out ahead of myself here, I will try to catch up to this fore-running (*vor-laufen*). Heidegger holds that we have always already run out ahead of ourselves; like the German soldiers charging from the trenches in World War I, we're constituted by the "always already ahead-of ourselves" revealed in the fore-running (*vorlaufen*) toward death. I will argue that the main mistake Derrida makes stems from thinking that Heidegger relies on an *overtaking* of death, a *crossing* of this ultimate horizon of possibility. If that were in fact the case, it would mean that, as Derrida alleges, Heidegger commits himself to an untenable reliance on a thinking or experience of "the impossible as such."

17. "*Le Passage des frontièrs*," at *Cerisy-la-Salle*.

18. A polysemy Derrida clearly intends. As he explained in response to a question I put to him during his 1994 Seminar on the witness and testimony: "Testimony is aporetic, which does not mean impossible. The aporia blocks the way, but this impossibility of going through is still the condition of walking, it is constitutive of the step [*pas*]. Undecidability is the condition of decision. Undecidability may seem to suspend any decision, any choice, but it is the condition of the possibility of choice. If you already knew there would be no choice. Choice requires that you go through the undecidability; the aporia is a necessary step" (4/12/94).

19. From this perspective, *Aporias* culminates in a self-consciously violent gesture whereby Derrida rhetorically subsumes the alterity of Heidegger's existential problematic, interpreting the phenomenological analysis of death as "one example among others . . . of the aporia" (p. 72). Ironically, this hermeneutic violence is undeniably Heideggerian in its style, its model being the interpretive subsumption and dismissal of Nietzsche characteristic of Heidegger's work *circa* 1940 (see esp. the forth volume of Heidegger's *Nietzsche*, trans. Frank Capuzzi [San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1982]).

20. Instead, the reader who follows Derrida through this maze of textual involutions bears witness to an ingeniously paradoxical rhetorical strategy calculated precisely to defy calculation. Derrida's resistance to metaphysics is embodied in this steadfast refusal to be captured by any calculus, caught in the noose of the theoreticist's dream of perfect systematicity. But such a refusal presents profound problems for an exegete. In *Aporias*, Derrida's continued deconstruction of the metaphysical presuppositions of *Being and Time* leads him once again along a precarious path between the theoreticist edifices of metaphysics and an abyss of meaninglessness.

21. Perishing names "the ending of that which lives" [*das Enden von Lebenden*]" (S&Z 247/B&T 291).

22. Such a "discrediting" is philosophically undermined—but also psychoanalytically motivated (since it is a "generational altercation" after all)—by the very prox-

imity of Derrida's "aporetology" to Heidegger's phenomenology of death, and thus the debt of the former to the latter, the gift calling for an even greater counter-gift (a structuralist theme that Derrida explores at length in *Given Time: I. Counterfeit Money*, trans. Peggy Kamuf [Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1992]).

23. Derrida writes: "I am thus increasingly inclined to read ultimately this great, inexhaustible book. . ." in a way which I begin to explicate below. (But how does one give an "ultimate" reading of an "inexhaustible" text? Wouldn't this be the very definition of hermeneutic violence?)

24. It should not escape our attention that here too Derrida repeats a well-known Heideggerian gesture; although it is the text *Being and Time* rather than (or, more precisely, as an example of) the metaphysical tradition which is to be subjected to a deconstructive reading, the end is similar: to facilitate the possibility of *(an)other* beginning. Heideggerian *alter*-cation, as a historicized version of B&T's "ontological destruction," is clearly the predecessor of Derridean deconstruction (see *e.g.* GA15 (Frankfurt a.M.: Vittorio Klostermann, 1986), p. 395.

25. *Der Tod ist ein möglichkeit der schlechthinnigen Daseins unmöglichkeit* (S&Z 250/B&T 294). We need to get clear about Heidegger's use of "possibility" in order to understand Heidegger's adjectival usage of *schlechthinnigen*; I have rendered it as "very," M&R and Stambaugh both misleadingly translate it as "absolute," and Derrida seems to want to say "as such." The point that I think all could agree on is that this particular "impossibility" is somehow definitive of impossibility for Dasein, it constitutes some sort of exemplar or privileged case of the impossible.

26. "Der Satz ist leicht zu lesen und doch schwer zu denken." Martin Heidegger, *The Question of Being*, trans. Kluback and Wilde (London, Vision Press: 1956), p. 73.

27. Apparently referring to Heidegger's assertion that it is the "relation to death in which Dasein's character as possibility lets itself be revealed most precisely" (S&Z 249/B&T 293), Derrida writes that "death is possibility par excellence." This too is more than a bit misleading.

28. We could extrapolate a further claim from this one; namely, that a failure to understand what Heidegger means by "possibility" will leave any exegesis of the phenomenological analysis of death (as the possibility of an impossibility) hopelessly convoluted.

29. My italics.

30. That Derrida is reading Heidegger this way is very clear in an aside he makes, where he glosses "the existential analysis of Dasein" as "that is, the 'as such' of death" (pp. 77–78).

31. "The Being-possible [*Möglichsein*] which Dasein is in every case is to be sharply distinguished both from empty logical possibility and from the contingency of something present-at-hand. . . . As a modal category of presence-at-hand, possibility signifies what is *not-yet* actual and what is *not at any time* necessary. It characterized the *merely* possible. . . . On the other hand, possibility as an *existentiale* is the most primordial and ultimately positive way in which Dasein is characterized ontologically" (S&Z 143–44/B&T 183).

32. OWL, p. 93.

33. "Possibility, as an *existentiale*, does not signify a free-floating potentiality-for-Being in the sense of the liberty of indifference (*libertas indifferentiae*). In every case Dasein, as essentially having a state-of-mind, has already got itself into definite possibilities" (S&Z 144/B&T 183]).

34. Explicit thematization is not paradigmatic of ordinary experience, but rather is primordially encountered and must be thought, Heidegger argues, as a break in the flow of involved experience (Heidegger criticizes the mistake of philosophers like Descartes who model their understanding of human life on such "break-down states").

35. Jacques Derrida, *The Gift of Death*, trans. David Wills (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), p. 45. Derrida published this text in 1992, the same year he delivered the lecture that forms the basis of *Aporias*.

36. Cf. Heidegger's *Heraclitus Seminar*, trans. Charles Siebert (University: Alabama University Press, 1979), pp. 11–13, where Heidegger persistently resists Fink's assertions that "steering" necessarily involves the calculative use of reason.

37. "As long as it is, Dasein always has understood itself and always will understand itself in terms of possibilities. Furthermore . . . the understanding does not grasp thematically that upon which it projects—that is to say, possibilities. Grasping it in such a manner would take away . . . its very character as a possibility, and would reduce it to the given contents that we have in mind; whereas projection, in throwing, throws before itself the possibility as possibility, and lets it *be* as such. Dasein *.is* its possibilities as possibilities" (S&Z 145/B&T 185).

38. S&Z 145/B&T 185–86.

39. My italics. Derrida makes this claim despite noting earlier, correctly, that "'properly dying' belongs to the proper and authentic *being-able* of Dasein."

40. See Theodore Kisiel's *The Genesis of Heidegger's* **Being and Time** (London: University of California Press, 1993), p. 504.
41. Ibid.
42. At the root of the modal fallacy Derrida commits is a subtle and in itself innocuous substitution. In B&T, as we have seen, Heidegger defines our phenomenological relationship to death as "the possibility of an impossibility." But in OWL—in an analysis which Derrida explores in *Aporias*—the "mortal" is defined (in contradistinction to "the animal") by the relation (presumably through language) "to death as such." Taking "mortal" and "Dasein" as equivalent expressions here (arguably a justifiable move, but one that as prominent a Heideggerian thinker as Reiner Schürmann argues against, and which would thus seem in need of some defense), Derrida implicitly puts the two definitions together—substituting B&T's "the possibility of an impossibility" for OWL's "death"—to yield the following: Dasein is defined by its relation to "'the possibility of an impossibility' as such." So far, no logical error. The problem arises when Derrida transforms this new definition by illegitimately shifting the scare-quotes, subtly rearranging these sentries at the borders of meaning. It is as if Derrida thinks that "(the possibility of an impossibility) as such" and "the possibility of (an impossibility as such)" were logically equivalent expressions; they are not. The former is the position supported by combining Heidegger's above two definitions (of "death" and of "the mortal"); the latter is the position with which Derrida's modal fallacy would saddle Heidegger, ascribing to Heidegger an untenable reliance on death as "the possibility of an 'impossibility as such,'" rather than simply as "'the possibility of as impossibility' as such." This subtle but untenable move is supported neither by modal logic nor by Heidegger's texts, and it is ironic that Derrida makes this kind of mistake, given the care with which he ordinarily treats such cautionary signs as square-quotes, parentheses, underlining, etc. See, e.g., Jacques Derrida, *Of Spirit: Heidegger and the Question*, trans. Geoffrey Bennington and Rachel Bowlby (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1989), p. 31. Cf. Emmanuel Levinas, *Time and the Other*, trans. Richard Cohen (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1987), p. 70, n. 43.
43. S&Z 145/B&T 185–86.
44. S&Z 191/B&T 236.
45. Martin Heidegger, *The Metaphysical Foundations of Logic*, trans. Michael Heim (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984, p. 206 (my emphasis); hereafter MFL.
46. We are interpreting Heidegger's claim that "the primary meaning of existentiality is the future" (S&Z 327/B&T 376).
47. MFL, p. 208.
48. This also helps explain why Heidegger does not think that the extension of "Dasein" includes "world-poor" animals; for he holds— "A thousand signs to the contrary," Derrida rightly objects—that animals lack a relationship to their own deaths (cf. *Aporias*, pp. 35–42; OWL, pp. 107–08).
49. "Ah, cousin, could we but survive this war/to live forever deathless, without age,/I would not ever go again to battle,/nor would I send you there for honor's sake!/But now a thousand shapes of death surround us,/and no man can escape them, or be safe,/Let us attack—whether to give some fellow/glory or to win it from him" (XII.288–95, Fitzgerald translation).
50. "In Dasein, as being toward its death, its own uttermost "not-yet" has been included—the not yet which all others lie before" (S&Z 259/B&T 303).
51. Derrida is well aware that Blanchot's "story"—"No, no stories, never again"—his *impossible* story, as Derrida calls it, points back to Kafka's famous "Before the Law" parable from *The Trial*.
52. "It is with regard to death that we shall approach this aporetic structure in *Being and Time*" (p. 32).
53. Derrida repeats the question in a 1990 interview: "Is it certain that the human *Dasein* can see death coming *as such*? What is the as such in the case of death?" Jacques Derrida, "*Istrice 2: Ick bünn all hier*" trans. Peggy Kamuf, in *Points*, ed. Elisabeth Weber (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995), p. 312.
54. Epicurus' Letter to Menoeceus, Diogenes Laertius 10.125.
55. S&Z 240/B&T 284.
56. Heidegger, *Beiträge Zur Philosophie:* (*Vom Ereignis*), GA 65 (Frankfurt a.M.: Klostermann, 1989), p. 284.
57. S&Z 247/B&T 291.
58. Derrida's final footnote, near the end of *Aporias*, in which he says that "it would now be necessary to re-read and cite [two of Blanchot's] texts from beginning to end" provides some confirmation of this thesis (see p. 87, n. 18).
59. See Charles Spinosa, "Derrida and Heidegger: Ereignis and Iterability," in Dreyfus and Hall, eds., *Heidegger: A Critical Reader* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992). The rhetorical-theological effect of Derrida's rechristening is worth further exploration. Cf. John Caputo, *Demythologizing Heidegger* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993), although Caputo's fondness for Derrida's

rechristened Heideggerianisms, combined with his desire for a Heidegger purified of Nazism, lead him generally to underestimate the pervasiveness of Heidegger's influence on Derrida.

60. In this case, a *last* breath. See Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, trans. Gayatri Spivak (London: John Hopkins University Press, 1976), p. 18.
61. OWL, p. 128.
62. This contribution is made greater by the fact that it is a short step from recognizing *Ereignis* to recognizing Being. For, acknowledging both that we tacitly interpret the intelligible according to metaphysically predetermined ontological parameters, and also that these metaphysical parameters pre-filtering "what-is" have a history, leads to a recognition of that which for the later Heidegger always exceeds and thereby makes possible each of these historical epochs of intelligibility (and the possibility of a non-nihilistic futural clearing), namely, Being, the "always-outstanding," the "never-autochthonous" (as Heidegger puts it in PAR).

    It seems especially fitting that reading Derrida on Heidegger should lead us here; for was not the recognition of Being the goal toward which Heidegger's "ontological destruction" in *Being and Time* (so influential on Derrida) was *on the way*? (Recall, e.g., Heidegger's famous claim that: "We understand this task as one in which, *taking the question of Being as our clue*, we are to deconstruct the traditional content of ancient ontology until we reach into and recover those primordial experiences in which we achieved our first ways of determining the nature of Being—the ways that have guided us ever since" [S&Z 22/B&T 44].) In retrospect, is not Derrida's facilitation of this recognition—both of "Being" (understood as the ineffable source of historical intelligibility) and of the phenomenon of "enownment" or "ineviterability" by which "Being" is tacitly interpreted and so made intelligible—Derrida's own *answer* to *Being and Time*'s "call" for an "ontological destruction"? Thus, while Derrida's deconstructions of Heidegger have undoubtedly responded critically to this call, they have nevertheless managed to respond so as to illuminate the texts to which they respond in surprising and important ways. (And, as Derrida likes to say, the response is the beginning of responsibility.)

University of California, San Diego, CA 2093–0119