

Autoimmunities

Derrida, Democracy and Political Theology

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Abstract

I argue that a distinction between three autoimmunities is implied in Derrida's *Rogues*. These are the autoimmunities of democracy as a regime of power, of democracy to come and of sovereignty. I extrapolate the relations between three different autoimmunities using the figure of the internal enemy in order to argue for an agonistic conception of democracy.

Keywords

internal enemy – stasis – agonistic democracy – sovereignty – the unconditional – biological metaphors

1 The Internal Enemy: Agonistic Politics

If a political theory is to be made out of Jacques Derrida's sprawling oeuvre, the figure of autoimmunity will have to play a central role. Derrida explains the use of this biological metaphor as follows: "Auto-immunization ... consists for a living organism ... protecting itself against its self-protection by destroying its own immune system. As the phenomenon of these antibodies is extended to a broader zone of pathology and as one resorts increasingly to the positive virtues of immuno-depressants ... we feel ourselves authorized to speak of a sort of general logic of autoimmunization."¹ The biological metaphor, then, is

1 Jacques Derrida, "Faith and Knowledge: The Two Sources of 'Religion' at the Limits of Reason Alone," trans. Samuel Weber, in Gil Anidjar, ed., *Acts of Religion* (London: Routledge, 2002), 80.

broadened to include a variety of political phenomena, which is possible because it signifies an enemy. This enemy, however, is not external. It is not a virus or some bacteria. Rather, the enemy is *internal* and, moreover, it arises out of the system that *protects* the organism. In fact, it is the protective mechanism that turns against its own body. The internal enemy and protection are two defining characteristics of autoimmunity that play a significant role in Derrida's account.

But why is autoimmunity so important for Derrida's politics? It is certainly possible to argue that autoimmunity belongs to a series of terms such as the trace, the supplement, and *différance* that Derrida has employed over the years to designate the deconstructive process.² But it is significant that Derrida opts for the term autoimmunity when talking about deconstruction in the political realm. It first appears in "Faith and Knowledge" in the context of discussing religion. This will inform the political theological presentation of sovereignty in *Rogues*.³ This theological political aspect is encapsulated in his assertion, repeated in different works, that "a pure sovereignty is indivisible or it is not at all," the reason being that indivisibility "links it to the decisionist exceptionality spoken of by Schmitt" (101).⁴ Derrida never abandons insisting on the decisionism and exceptionality inherent in the concept of sovereignty, despite relentlessly deconstructing political theology. The question I want to pose here is whether Derrida actually needs this sovereign indivisibility—the political theological—for his politics. This is a crucial issue for his politics because we will see that one of the, if not *the*, key problematic for Derrida is the choice or decision between democracy and sovereignty: the problematic that can be phrased as the dilemma "unconditionality or indivisibility."

The explicitly political use of autoimmunity occurs for the first time in the interview with Giovanna Borradori, "Autoimmunity: Real and Symbolic

2 I should note that, to add to the difficulty, Derrida also on occasion uses the text quite loosely. See, for instance, Derrida, *The Beast and the Sovereign*, vol. 2, trans. Geoffrey Bennington (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011). I will avoid discussing these references.

3 Jacques Derrida, *Rogues: Two Essays on Reason*, trans. Pascale-Anne Brault and Michael Naas (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005). All further references to *Rogues* will be given parenthetically within the text by page number.

4 For another formulation of this point, see: "But is not the very essence of the principle of sovereignty, everywhere and in every case, precisely its exceptional indivisibility, its illimitation, its integral integrity? Sovereignty is undivided, unshared, or it is not. The division of the indivisible, the sharing of what cannot be shared: that is the possibility of the impossible." Jacques Derrida, *Without Alibi*, trans. Peggy Kamuf (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002), xx. For a powerful analysis, see Jacques Lezra, *Wild Materialism: The Ethic of Terror and the Modern Republic* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2010), Chapter 2.

Suicides.”⁵ The interview was conducted in New York just days after the terrorist attack on 9/11. Derrida describes as a process of autoimmunity how the seemingly dominant position of the US post-Cold War contributed to the terrorist attacks. The most detailed and nuanced discussion of autoimmunity is contained in the first part of *Rogues*, entitled “The Reason of the Strongest (Are there Rogue States?).” This was presented at the Cerisy conference only a few months after 9/11, in July 2002, after Derrida had delivered the first set of lectures on sovereignty published as *The Beast and the Sovereign*.⁶ “The Reason of the Strongest” is also the text containing Derrida’s most detailed discussion of democracy to come and it will be my focus here. The development of autoimmunity coincides with—one is tempted to say: indelibly marks—Derrida’s most sustained engagement with democracy, whence its crucial place in Derrida’s political theory.

Two insights about Derrida’s use of the term autoimmunity are particularly important in bringing to the fore the political stakes raised by autoimmunity, as well as the function of political theology in Derrida’s conception of democracy: First, autoimmunity uncannily resembles what Polybius, in the second century BC, called *anakyklosis*. Anakyklosis, like autoimmunity, is a biological metaphor. It refers to the growth and decay of an organism. In Book 6 of his *Histories*, Polybius employs the term anakyklosis to refer to political change as reducible to the mutation between different constitutional forms.⁷ Thus, both anakyklosis and autoimmunity are biological metaphors that describe a cyclical process. Given the enormous influence of Polybius’s theory of anakyklosis both in antiquity but especially in early modern political thought since the reedition of the *Histories* in Florence in late fourteenth century, anakyklosis is indispensable for a genealogy—or even deconstruction—of Derrida’s own biological metaphor for political mutation.⁸ Second, there is not one, but multiple autoimmunitary processes described in *Rogues*. I will

5 Jacques Derrida and Giovanna Borradori, “Autoimmunity: Real and Symbolic Suicides”, in Giovanna Borradori, *Philosophy in a Time of Terror: Dialogues with Jürgen Habermas and Jacques Derrida* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 85–136.

6 Jacques Derrida, *The Beast and the Sovereign*, vol. 1, trans. Geoffrey Bennington (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009). These lectures were delivered in the fall and winter of 2001 and 2002, that is, after the interview with Borradori but before the talk at Cerisy.

7 Polybius, *The Histories*, trans. W. R. Paton (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1979), vol. III, Book VI.

8 For instance, for an argument about the importance of Polybius theory in arriving at the idea of the checks and balances of the constitution, see Kurt Von Fritz, *The Theory of the Mixed Constitution in Antiquity: A Critical Analysis of Polybius’ Political Ideas* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1954).

argue that Derrida identifies at least three distinct autoimmunities. These are the autoimmunities of democracy, of democracy to come and the sovereign autoimmunity. Admittedly, the distinction between the three autoimmunities is not highlighted by Derrida, but it becomes clear enough if we pay attention to what is subject to autoimmunity at each turn of the argument. I will argue that the different autoimmunities in *Rogues* ultimately refer to the relation between democracy and sovereignty that I schematized above in the formulation “unconditionality or indivisibility.” In other words, it is indispensable for interrogating the role of political theology in Derrida’s politics to recognize that autoimmunity does not refer to a single deconstructive logic but rather that there are autoimmunities that refer to the relation between democracy and sovereignty.

Both of these insights are absent from the secondary literature on Derrida. Thus, for instance, even though it is often pointed out that autoimmunity is a biological metaphor, no one—as far as I know—has linked it to the other hugely influential biological metaphor in the history of political thought, Polybius’s anakyklosis. And, even though there are some excellent articles on autoimmunity, the distinction between democracy and sovereignty is never drawn sharply enough. For instance, Samir Haddad’s *Derrida and the Inheritance of Democracy* is perhaps the best account of Derrida’s conception of democracy, and yet there is no thematization at all of sovereignty.⁹ Michael Naas in *Derrida From Now On* examines the autoimmunity of both democracy and sovereignty but his focus is on what they share—namely, the circular movement that Derrida calls ipseity—eliding the differences between the democratic and sovereign autoimmunities.¹⁰

The lack of attention to these two insights obscures two corresponding aspects of Derrida’s political thought. Let me take them in turn. First, the similarities between anakyklosis and autoimmunity go far beyond a simple use of biological metaphors. In addition, Polybius uses anakyklosis to confine political change to a cyclical movement between constitutions. Anakyklosis literally means rotation or re-volution—like the cycle of life and death characteristic of biological organisms. For Derrida too, the movement of the turn and the returning—this wheeling around—is an organizing figure of the entire first essay of *Rogues*. Most significantly, what propels anakyklosis and

9 Samir Haddad, *Derrida and the Inheritance of Democracy* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2013), see in particular chapter 3, which provides an insightful analysis of democracy to come in the context of autoimmunity.

10 Michael Naas, *Derrida From Now On* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008), chapter 7.

autoimmunity is an internal struggle or war, an internal enmity. Both point to something that is not directly opposed to a political entity but that undermines it from within. Or, more precisely, it is the self-undermining characteristic of any entity that seeks to secure its self-identity within a political field.

I do not have the space here to go into a detailed analysis of Polybius—I undertake that task elsewhere.¹¹ In summary, I should only point out the conceptual context of Polybius's theory of *anakyklosis*. One of the key ideas determining western politics since ancient Greece pertains to the perception of the pernicious nature of the internal enemy. For instance, Plato in *Republic* 470a famously extols the political virtue of war against external enemies while disparaging any civil war or stasis.¹² The same outright rejection of stasis occurs again within the context of the discussion of the different constitutions in the opening of the *Laws*. Polybius is receptive to this tradition. The causes of *anakyklosis* directly mirror the causes of stasis so that political movement at the end is propelled by internal enmity. Effectively, even though the entire tradition—including political theology—seeks to repress the figure of the internal enemy, still the internal enemy remains operative and in fact indispensable for an account of political change. *Anakyklosis* formalizes in a single metaphor the role of the internal enemy in political change.

The figure of the internal enemy permeates *Rogues*. In fact, the very term “rogue” or *voyou* is a figure of internal enmity. As Derrida puts it, the *voyous* are represented as “rebels, agitators, and insurgents” (67). The figure of the internal enemy is also crucial for autoimmunity. Autoimmunity is the turning of the protective immune mechanisms against the organism itself. If we transpose this biological process to the political domain, we can say that autoimmunity comes to describe the worse kind of enemy, that is, the internal one. In the context of explaining autoimmunity in a note added to the interview with Borradori, Derrida writes: “The worst, most effective ‘terrorism,’ even if it seems external and ‘international,’ is the one that installs or recalls an interior threat *at home* and recalls that the enemy is *also always* lodged on the inside of the system it violates and terrorizes.”¹³ We will see later the importance of the idea of the worst kind of violence in Derrida's extrapolation of sovereignty's autoimmunity, only noting here that this notion of the worst is explicitly related to something internal through the figure of autoimmunity.

11 For an analysis of Polybius's text within the context of internal enmity, see Dimitris Vardoulakis, *Democracy and Violence* (forthcoming).

12 On stasis, see Dimitris Vardoulakis, *Stasis Before the State: Nine Theses on Agonistic Democracy* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2017).

13 Derrida, “Autoimmunity,” 188.

The important point of the biological metaphor, as it is employed both by Polybius and Derrida—and ultimately, this is the most significant convergence between anakyklosis and autoimmunity—is that this internal enemy is not simply reducible to a “real” enemy. Rather, it is the figure that regulates the discourses about power, violence and force. In other words, internal enmity or stasis are not reducible to phenomenal manifestations, but come to disturb any manifestation of self-identity as that which makes a nation or a polity possible. In fact, what anakyklosis and autoimmunity both suggest—whence their radicality—is that more than all the processes of self-identity, *it is the internal enemy as the figure who is incommensurable with ipseity who determines both democracy and sovereignty.*

Why is this inscription of the internal enemy or stasis important within the context of political theory and of the conception of the political more generally? For this move, let me turn briefly to Nicole Loraux’s *The Divided City*.¹⁴ It is often said that at its more basic, or at its most “bare,” as Wendy Brown puts it, democracy denotes the rule of the people.¹⁵ According to this interpretation of its etymology, democracy means that the people (*demos*) has power or sovereignty (*kratos*). In this definition, the crucial term is taken to be “*demos*.” How *demos* is defined—e.g. genetically, in terms of citizenship, in relation to the participation in politics, and so on—determines the nature of the democratic or otherwise institution of the state. Contrary to this tradition, Loraux points out the importance of a different and in fact primary meaning of *kratos* in ancient Greek. *Kratos* means not simply constituted power, but rather the effect of overpowering as in a struggle. It does not simply signify a static constitution but it points to the struggle and discord unfolding so that constituting is possible in the first place.¹⁶

The repression of this meaning of *kratos* when it comes to the definition and the self-understanding of democracy—Loraux refers to it as a “fundamental forgetting”—has had profound implications for the western political and philosophical tradition. For instance, the castigation of *stasis* is an effect of the narrowing of the meaning of *kratos* to constituted power. The effects of Loraux’s move are multiple. Indicatively, if *kratos* as indicating stasis is the primary term of the compound word and the conceptual configuration of democracy, then the entire politics that strives for consensus appears problematic

14 Nicole Loraux, *The Divided City: On Memory and Forgetting in Ancient Athens*, trans. Corinne Pache and Jeff Fort (New York: Zone, 2006).

15 Wendy Brown, *Undoing the Demos: Neoliberalism’s Stealth Revolution* (New York: Zone Books, 2015).

16 For further analysis of Loraux’s position, see Dimitris Vardoulakis, “Stasis: Notes Toward Agonist Democracy” *Theory and Event* 20.3 (2017): 699–725.

as it represents the tendency to repress or to forget the meaning of *kratos* as discord or *stasis*. Conversely, by emphasizing the functional position of the internal enemy in how force or *kratos* is justified, autoimmunity can be seen as part of a struggle to counter the “forgetting of *stasis*” identified by Loraux as determinative of western political thought and practice—whence its importance for thinking about democracy. The family resemblance between autoimmunity and anakyklosis mobilizes and resists the entire conceptual framework repressing *stasis* that has been determinative for how the political has been understood in the West.

Moving registers to come to the second aspect I noted above, when *stasis* becomes the operative term in the definition and the understanding of democracy, then we already presuppose two conceptions of the political in terms of how each responds to force, power and violence. According to the democratic one that departs from *stasis*, internal enmity is crucial for democratic activity. In Derridean terms, the *voyou* or the rogue makes a crucial contribution to the democratic. Or, more accurately, the autoimmunitary process provoked by the rogue is indispensable to the democratic process because the *demos* is “never very far away when one speaks of a *voyou*. Nor is democracy far from *voyoucracy*” (64)—or, in my terms, the self-identity of a people is determined by the one who is positioned as its internal enemy. Opposed to this is a different response to force, power and violence, one that identifies them with the right of the strongest, and that justifies force in the name of the health and the protection of the polity. Derrida unambiguously identifies this trajectory with sovereignty in its theological provenance.

The earliest that Derrida clearly identifies a distinction between a certain unconditionality and sovereignty is in two texts, both delivered in 1999. The first, “Unconditionality or Sovereignty,” was delivered in June as Derrida’s address at the reception of the honorary doctorate from Panteion University in Athens.¹⁷ The second, “The University without Condition,” was part of the Stanford University Presidential Lectures Series and delivered a few months later.¹⁸ In both of these texts, a certain unconditionality associated with freedom is opposed to sovereignty. Invoking freedom may appeal also to a certain conception of the democratic, but the explicit confrontation between democracy and sovereignty will have to wait until *Rogues*, where Derrida writes: “When it comes to reason and democracy, when it comes to a democratic reason, it would be necessary to distinguish ‘sovereignty’ (which is always in

17 Jacques Derrida, “Unconditionality or Sovereignty: The University at the Frontiers of Europe,” *Oxford Literary Review* 31 (2009): 115–31.

18 Jacques Derrida, “The University Without Condition,” in *Without Alibi*, trans. Peggy Kamuf (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002), 202–37.

principle indivisible) from ‘unconditionality.’ Both of these escape absolutely, like the absolute itself, all relativism. That is their affinity” (xiii–xiv). This absoluteness explains why both democracy and sovereignty are autoimmune. The absoluteness consists in their respective attempts at self-identity, or what Derrida calls ipseity.

Derrida continues immediately from the above citation: “But through ... the experience that lets itself be affected by what or who comes ... by *the other to come*, a certain unconditional renunciation of sovereignty is required a priori. Even before the act of a decision” (xiv). This is a complex proposition. It alludes to the one who arrives and seeks hospitality, which is one of the major themes of Derrida’s ethics and which will prove indispensable in his analysis of the *demos* and the *voyou*. It also stages a distinction between renunciation and the decision alluding to the deconstruction of Schmitt’s conception of the enemy in *The Politics of Friendship*. All this is certainly in play but the most crucial aspect is that Derrida stages a *relation* of struggle between democracy and sovereignty. In other words, democracy and sovereignty are distinct but not separated. They remain related through their agonistic entanglements—theirs is a relation of *stasis*. In this entanglement, one is called by Derrida to take a stand in favor of democracy. At the end, I will question whether such a stance has to be taken “a priori,” as Derrida says, or whether the relation he himself describes provides reasons to renounce the political theological paradigm.

Let me summarize briefly the importance of the two insights about autoimmunity. The first one—the family resemblance of anakyklosis and autoimmunity—tells us of the importance of *stasis* for the political. For the *demos* to make sense, one has to explore the struggles (or, Derrida might say, the aporias) that constitute the space (or, the spacing, the *khora*) of the political. The figure of the internal enemy (or the rogue) is indispensable for this undertaking given how it impacts on the definition of the *demos*. This is only possible, secondly, if a relation is set up between two different registers of force, one democratic and one sovereign. This relation calls upon one to take a stand that according to Derrida has to privilege the democratic. Both of these insights offered by autoimmunity refer to the agonistic, but from two different perspectives. The first refers to the agonistic element *inside* the polity and the second to the agonistic element *about* the polity—the first brings *stasis* to the *demos*, the second inscribes *stasis* between two different senses of force. There is, in other words, a double register of *stasis*: *stasis* as discord *in* and *about* the political.

I refer in my work to this double sense of discord as agonistic democracy. I explore here how this agonistic democracy is operative through autoimmunity in “The Reason of the Strongest” and how it determines Derrida’s thinking

of the political.¹⁹ I will argue that the second sense of *stasis* is not developed enough in *Rogues*, even though the logic of the argument requires it.

2 Autoimmunities and Ipseity: Force, Power, Violence

Departing from these two insights let us now turn to *Rogues*. I will investigate how the internal enemy—*stasis*—allows us to identify *initially* three distinct autoimmunities: of democracy, of democracy to come and of sovereignty. These autoimmunities are not separate—they are distinct but related. This will lead to the question of the relation between these autoimmunities and subsequently to the relation between democracy and sovereignty. I will argue that this relation is intricately connected to Derrida's understanding of political theology.

The element that is common to all the different autoimmunities is ipseity. Derrida introduces the term “ipseity” (11) to highlight how the source of an identity is self-referential. The first section of “The Reason of the Strongest,” entitled “The Free Wheel,” is devoted to presenting aspects of this self-referentiality. Two are particularly important. First, ipseity pertains both to democracy and to sovereignty. For instance, Derrida talks of the “ipseity of the people (*demos*)” and immediately goes on to add that “this sovereignty is a circularity” (13). Admittedly, the democracy Derrida is referring to here is not “democracy to come.” It is rather a democracy as realized within a particular regime of power—something which democracy to come never is—and hence indissoluble from sovereignty. The ipseity of the *demos* will be constitutive of democratic autoimmunity, whereas the autoimmunity of sovereignty, as we will see, consist in its imperative to offer protection.

Second, the term “autoimmunity” is introduced in *Rogues* at the end of the discussion of ipseity in the section “The Free Wheel.” In Derrida's own words: “Perhaps we can later formalize ... this route that turns back on itself ... the law of a terrifying and suicidal autoimmunity, the wheels of suicide here engaging in a singular way a gyratory coincidence between force and law, force and justice, force and the reason of the strongest” (18). Autoimmunity,

19 I should underscore that I am using the term “agonistic democracy” in the specific sense outlined here, and which I have developed in more detail in a series of books and articles. This is not the sense of agonistic democracy as employed by a variety of other thinkers. Matthias Fritsch has written astutely on the differences between Derrida's position and Chantal Mouffe's agonistic politics in “Antagonism and Democratic Citizenship (Schmitt, Mouffe, Derrida),” *Research in Phenomenology*, 38 (2008): 174–97.

then, signifies the formalization of the inability of a source to define itself. It is the “suicidal” attempt at self-determination—even though, as we will see, Derrida later qualifies the suicidal aspect in an important way, leading to his discussion of “democracy to come.” This ipseity, or the return of the source to itself, is precipitated by force. Violence needs to be distinct from law, justice and the logic of sovereignty, and yet it cannot sustain this separation, lapsing into a self-destructive coincidence—whence its autoimmunity.

Thus, in the opening section of *Rogues* we discover autoimmunity as pertaining to both democracy and sovereignty, and in particular in the ways that they related to force. Ipseity is common to the different autoimmunities because of the way in which it mobilizes different modalities of force, power and violence such as to make the distinction between law, justice and constituted power waiver. But, thinking ahead, what is it that makes ipseity autoimmune? What is it that destabilizes self-identity? The answer will turn out to pertain to the rogue, that is, to the internal enemy or *stasis* inscribed in the political.

3 **The Suicidal Autoimmunity of Democracy: The Ambiguities of the *Demos***

In the following six sections, Derrida explores the suicidal autoimmunity of democracy. There are different examples that he cites, and a variety of articulations, but they all return, in one way or another, to a single problematic, namely, the definition of the *demos*. What is autoimmune in the regime in which the *demos* has sovereignty (*kratos*) is that any attempt to define the *demos* is ultimately deconstructable. The *demos* is never identical to its self-definition.

In section 3, titled “The Other of Democracy, the ‘By Turns’: Alterative and Alteration,” the fact that “democracy has always been suicidal” (33) is introduced through a powerful example, the 1992 Algerian elections. The Islamic party espoused anti-democratic views and if elected it threatened to dismantle democracy (30–31). In broader terms, the Algerian election presented “a transferring of power (*kratos*) to a people (*demos*) who, in its electoral majority and following democratic procedures, would not have been able to avoid the destruction of democracy itself” (33). At that point, the Algerian government suspended the elections to prevent the threat to democracy from the Islamic party. Derrida is not asking whether such a suspension was right or wrong. Rather, his concern is with the disturbing situation whereby democracy needs, by definition, to remain open to the “will” of the *demos*, even though it may express anti-democratic sentiments to the point of threatening the existence of democracy. In Derrida’s formulation: “The great question of modern

parliamentary and representative democracy, perhaps of all democracy, in this logic of the turn or round ... of the other time and thus of the other ... is that the *alternative* to democracy can always be *represented* as a democratic *alternation*" (30–31). Derrida's question is pragmatic and concerns how "the domestic enemies of democracy" (36) can be accommodated within the *demos* that holds sovereignty. The suggestion is that, given any definition of the *demos* as autoimmune, such an accommodation is impossible.

By why can't the domestic enemy be accommodated so as to prevent democracy's autoimmune suicide? Why is it that the *demos* cannot sustain its self-cohesion? Derrida returns here to a classic topos of democratic theory, namely, the contradictory demands placed on democracy by freedom and equality.²⁰ To express this in terms of the example of the Algerian elections, democracy by definition should give people the freedom to elect their representatives, while also by definition democracy is required to protect certain democratic rights that safeguard the citizens' equality, such as rights incompatible with a party aligned to a particular religious denomination. Or, as Derrida formulates this contrast in "The Other of Democracy": "the force of the *demos*, the force of *democracy*, commits it, in the name of universal equality, to representing not only the greatest force of the greatest number ... but also of the weak, minors, minorities, the poor ... who call out in suffering for a legitimately infinite extension of what are called *human rights*" (36). The exercise of *kratos*, then, is faced with two contradictory imperatives—freedom and equality—both of which pertain to how the *demos* is meant to hold *kratos*—either as its freedom of expression in processes such as voting or as its right to certain protections offered by the state to the *demos*.

In section 4, "Mastery and Measure," Derrida further dramatizes the aporias arising from the antinomy between freedom and equality—"that constitutive and diabolical couple of democracy" because it points to the very aporia of the "*demos* itself" (48). This antinomy consists in "that equality tends to introduce measure and calculation (and thus conditionality) whereas freedom is by essence unconditional, indivisible, heterogeneous to calculation and to measure" (48). The problem is that as soon as a political community is formed, as soon as there is a *demos*, the contradictory demands to freedom and equality contaminate each other, setting in motion democracy's autoimmunity. As soon as actions are taken to protect basic rights, the calculation characteristic of equality curtails the freedom of the *demos*. And, the other way round, as

20 For a discussion of these contradictory imperatives, both of which are nevertheless necessary for democracy, see Etienne Balibar, *Equaliberty: Political Essays*, trans. James Ingram (Durham: Duke University Press, 2014).

soon as political demands are made in the name of freedom, the political exigency to protect the community fades in the background. How has this pernicious problem been tackled?

One of the major avenues of mediating the antinomic demands of freedom and equality is to define—or, imagine—the *demos* as cohesive because of blood ties. There is a *demos* because its members are “brothers,” which is meant to ameliorate the antinomy between freedom and equality—for instance, are we not equal because of our birth ties, irrespective of social inequalities? Ultimately, brotherhood is meant to point to a sharing that is double, a sharing of birth and a sharing of the contradictory demands of freedom and equality. Derrida insists that such a solution forgets the possibility of a “brotherly spat” (49), that is, the fact that it is impossible to eliminate the internal enemy: “There is never any war, and never any danger for the democracy to come, except where ... the fraternity of brothers *dictates the law*, where a *political dictatorship* of fraternocracy comes to be imposed” (50). The problem pertains again to the definition of the *demos*. It is impossible to determine criteria, secured by law, to define the brother, to identify the “each ‘one’” of democracy (54). The more rigid the definition becomes so as to secure the determination of the brother, the more also each “one” loses their singularity and their unconditional freedom. The impossibility of mediating this problem presents both the “threat and chance” of democracy (52), where this “chance is always given as an autoimmune threat” (53). Thus, autoimmunity indicates here the threat of a “fraternocracy” against each “one’s” singularity that also threatens the entire structure of brotherhood. Thus, the attempt to secure the *demos* leads to failure.

4 Autoimmunity as Self-Critique and Perfection: The Force of Democracy to Come

I presented above the democratic autoimmunity to the extent that it is suicidal, which means, to the extent that it seeks to secure a self-identity of the *demos*, whereas an internal threat always destabilizes and unravels that identity. The autoimmunity of democracy contains within it, however, an important distinction, a hinge, that is totally lacking, as we will see, in sovereignty’s autoimmunity. Specifically, autoimmunity “consists not only in harming or ruining oneself, indeed in destroying one’s own protections, and in doing so oneself, committing suicide” (45). This is certainly one aspect that Derrida associates with democracy as a regime of power and with sovereignty. But there is another aspect to autoimmunity that contains a chance or promise, because, “in

threatening the I or the self, the *ego* or the *autos*, ipseity itself, compromising the immunity of the *autos* itself: it consists not only in compromising oneself but in compromising the self, the *autos*—and thus ipseity. It consists not only in committing suicide but in compromising *sui-* or *self-*referentiality, the *self* or *sui-* of suicide itself” (45). Thus, the most important aspect of autoimmunity, or more precisely of democratic autoimmunity, is not that it is suicidal, but that in threatening ipseity “it threatens always to rob suicide itself of its meaning and supposed integrity” (45). Thus the hinge consists in that autoimmunity becomes a positive determination for democracy to come. It is not simply that democracy to come is autoimmune without being suicidal, but more importantly that *democracy to come is determined through its autoimmunity*. This means that democracy is no longer reduced to an attempt to secure a determination of the *demos*, but is rather the unfolding of *stasis*.

As opposed to the attempt to secure the identity of the *demos*, Derrida speaks of another democratic imperative that “has wanted to open itself up, to offer hospitality, to all those excluded” (63). Against the attempt to secure the *demos* through birth, we have the equally democratic attempt to extend the freedom and equality to the other, which entails in principle welcoming the other within the state and incorporating the other in the *demos*. Unconditional hospitality is also a democratic imperative—one that treats the other as free and equal. But the moment this is recognized, then we move to “that pure ethics, if there is any, [which] begins with the respectable dignity of the other as the absolute unlike” (60). Such an ethics of hospitality is incompatible with the attempt to secure the identity of the *demos* with an appeal to birth and—or, rather, *because*—it points to “the border between pure ethics and the political” (60), a border that the threat of the other always challenges, autoimmunizing any attempt to secure a political identity through a pure openness to the other.

We translated this insight about the presence of the internal enemy in the autoimmunity of democracy to come into the vocabulary I introduced through the reference to *anakyklosis* and to Loraux’s insight about *stasis* by saying that democracy to come is open to the internal enemy. Or, democracy to come inscribes *stasis* in democracy. In Derrida’s terms, this means that heterogeneity—the encounter with the other—is inscribed in the self-referentiality of ipseity. Or, that the demand of unconditional hospitality to the other is taken seriously by democracy *because* it challenges the definition of the *demos*. This would not mean, of course, that the border between the ethical and the political collapses, as this would be nothing but to repeat, in yet another guise, the attempt to eliminate the internal enemy and *stasis* by immunizing the *demos* through a purportedly universal moral precept divorced

from the circumstances that condition it.²¹ Rather, it means that the contradictions between the ethical and the political, the demand for the openness to the other, are viewed as something positive because of the deconstruction of ipseity, despite the huge practical problems and contradictions that the complex relation between ethics and politics introduces. These themes are taken up in sections 7 and 8 of “The Reason of the Strongest.”

Section 7, titled “God, What More Do I have to Say? In What Language to Come?” opens in an unexpected way. Derrida finally tells us the question that is troubling him, as he indicated at the very beginning of the text. This does not have to mean that the preceding was merely prolegomena, but it does signal a significant shift to what is for Derrida the crucial issue. The question is formulated as follows: “can one and/or must one speak democratically of democracy?” (71). What is at stake in this question? There are two important aspects, both signaling a shift from an attempt to understand democracy from the perspective of the definition of the *demos*, focusing instead on incorporating within democracy itself the other, heterogeneity, or, as I prefer to call, the internal enemy.

The first of these important aspects is “the right to self-critique,” which Derrida immediately qualifies as “another form of autoimmunity” (72). It is *another* form because the autoimmunity presented here is no longer suicidal. This right to self-critique pertains to the historicity of democracy to the extent that democracy is “a word hollowed out at its center by a vertiginous semantic abyss” (72). The theoretical and material manifestations of democracy never manage to live up to the contradictory exigencies—to the autoimmunities—contained within the conjunctions of the two nouns, *demos* and *kratos*. The “mutations” of this term rob us of any sense of “continuity” about democracy “running through the history of the political” (72). Thus, democracy, in its semantic ambivalence and in its historicity, shows that it is an enemy to itself, it is autoimmune. And yet, this internal enmity, when confronted with the question about how “to speak democratically about democracy” (73) commits one to take a stand about democracy and to define it in a particular way within specific historical circumstances, being aware all along that the definition is a fiction, a phantasm—an awareness that arises from democracy’s self-critique. Differently put, the inscription of autoimmunity as self-critique in democracy

21 The reason that I regard the call for open borders as flawed is that it too easily folds the political into the moral. Ultimately, this leads to an all too precipitous and unproblematic embracing of sovereignty. Open borders require strong policing! I discuss this point in *Stasis Before the State*, see “Intermezzo 2.” Instead, I hold that the distinction between the political and the ethical needs to be maintained, despite their imbrication.

to come entails both the inability to give democracy a specific form, either semantically or politically, and the imperative to give it a form, every time anew, within different political circumstances.

The second important aspect pertains to the acknowledgement by Derrida that the idea that a true democracy has never really existed is in reality a common place, a *topos*, in political theory. Indicatively, Derrida cites the chapter on democracy from Rousseau's *Social Contract*. Significantly, the conclusion that Rousseau extracts from this unavailability of a stable definition and form for democracy—and it is a conclusion that is consonant with the majority of the philosophical tradition going all the way to Plato's critique of democracy—is the inherent risk of the democratic. As Derrida expresses it, it is “the permanent risk of ‘civil war’ and ‘internal agitations’” (74). In other words, democracy is exposed to the risk of internal enmity. In a crucial reversal of that tradition, Derrida presents this risk as a chance: “That is force regardless of forms. *If [si]* democracy does not exist and *if [si]* it is true that, amorphous or polymorphous, it never will exist, is it not necessary to continue, and with all one's heart, to force oneself to achieve it? Well, *yes [si]*, it is necessary; one must, one ought, one cannot not strive toward it with all one's force” (74). A democrat *cannot not* take force, violence and power as crucial aspects arising from the fact that democracy has no determinate form due to its autoimmunity. Note the double negative, betraying both a hesitation before the enormity of the task and an imperative that cannot be bypassed, a task that shows the perfectibility of democracy because of its complex proximity to violence. It is the double negative that signals the privileging of *kratos* over the *demos* in the thinking of democracy—a privileging that Loraux so powerfully extrapolates in her book *The Divided City*, as I noted earlier.

Self-critique and perfectibility as “the expression of autoimmunity” (87) are, says Derrida in the following section of the text, “welcomed” by democracy to come. The other is welcomed, where the other is not simply reduced to a flesh and blood stranger but also refers to any idea that is problematically related to any historically articulated manifestation of democracy, no matter how illusionary or phantasmatic. This constitutes, according to Derrida, the universalizable aspect of democracy to come: “Democracy is the only system, the only constitutional paradigm, in which, in principle, one has or assumes the right to criticize everything publicly, including the idea of democracy, its concept, its history, and its name. Including the idea of the constitutional paradigm and the absolute authority of law. It is thus the only paradigm that is universalizable, whence its chance and its fragility” (87). There is no essential definition of the *demos* that can be transferred across place and time, there is no source that allows democracy to secure its semantic content, and there is no regime of

power that can be called—by definition and/or in the way it exercises power—democratic. The only thing that remains in common and hence universal is the right to self-critique and to perfectibility. What is universalizable is the autoimmunity of democracy to come—which also means that what is universalizable is the inscription of the internal enemy within the democratic. Democracy is always divided, its universality consists in its divisibility. *Stasis* is inscribed within democracy to come.

5 Sovereign Autoimmunity: The Force of Protection

We have encountered, then, two forms of democratic autoimmunity. The first is the suicidal autoimmunity that seeks to define the *demos* in various ways, always failing to live up to its task. The second is autoimmunity as self-critique and as the perfectibility of democracy, which presents a risk since it inscribes violence within democracy, but it also presents its chance and its universalizable aspect. The transition to the discussion of sovereign autoimmunity in section 9, “(No) More Rogue States,” is forged through the contrast with the autoimmunity of the democracy to come.

After asserting that “a pure sovereignty is indivisible or it is not at all” (101), Derrida draws the conclusion that “sovereignty is incompatible with universality” (101). The two statements are strictly related, saying the same thing from two different perspectives. The fact that sovereignty is indivisible entails that at each historical place and time it is concentrated in the hands of one entity, the “mortal God” (Hobbes)—and it matters little here whether that entity is one person, *the* sovereign, or a political administration such as the executive branch of a government. Rather, what matters is that the articulation of this indivisibility can never be repeated across place and time. It is totally unique—a bit like Walter Benjamin’s concept of the aura. As unrepeatable, it is not universalizable.

Derrida expresses this by saying that sovereignty is “ahistorical” (101). This is not the same as Althusser’s claim that ideology has not history.²² Whereas Althusser bases his insight on the subject’s subjection to power through the operation of the unconscious, Derrida is pointing to sovereignty’s structure of the decision: “In a certain way, then, sovereignty is ahistorical; it is the contract contracted with a history that retracts in the instantaneous event of the deciding exception, an event that is without any temporal or historical thickness.

22 See Louis Althusser, “Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses (Notes Towards an Investigation),” in *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*, trans. Ben Brewster (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1971), 85–126.

As a result, sovereignty withdraws from language, which always introduces a sharing that universalizes" (101). The structure of the decision here is indebted to Carl Schmitt. The sovereign decision is concerned with the protection of the *demos* (100). A whole series of metaphors are associated with protection, a series that ranges from health to salvation to holiness (114). It is this entire series of terms originating in religion that Derrida deconstructs in "Faith and Reason" while introducing there also for the first time the figure of autoimmunity. What "infects" these terms, according to "Faith and Knowledge," is the reason of techno-science.²³ This reason functions as an "autoimmune power" that affects religion: "We are here in a space where all self-protection of the unscathed, of the safe and sound, of the sacred (*heilig*, holy) must protect itself against its own protection, its own police, its own power of rejection, in short against its own, which is to say, against its own immunity. It is this terrifying but fatal logic of the *auto-immunity of the unscathed* that will always associate Science and Religion."²⁴ This provenance accounts for sovereignty's indivisibility, the theological concept par excellence in politics.²⁵

This aspect of protection, related as it is to the holy, the healthy, and the pure, is responsible for the theological aspect of sovereignty—a point that Derrida shares with Schmitt: "I believe that the concepts of the political on which we live are secularized theological concepts."²⁶ Derrida is repeating here one of the cardinal theses of Schmitt's political theology, expressed in the opening sentence of Chapter 3 of *Political Theology*: "All significant concepts of the modern theory of the state are secularized theological concepts." There are two reasons for this. First, "because of their historical development—in which they were transferred from theology to the theory of the state, whereby, for example, the omnipotent God became the omnipotent lawgiver." And second "because of their systematic structure.... The exception in jurisprudence is analogous to the miracle in theology."²⁷ This theological element accounts for Derrida's description of the decision as a silencing. The sacred does not

23 For the most astute extrapolation of this important essay by Derrida, see Michael Naas, *Miracle and Machine: Jacques Derrida and the Two Sources of Religion, Science, and the Media* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2012).

24 Derrida, "Faith and Knowledge," 79–80.

25 It is for this reason that we can talk of a deconstruction of God, too. See Nick Mansfield, *The God who Deconstructs Himself: Sovereignty and Subjectivity Between Freud, Bataille, and Derrida* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2010).

26 Mustapha Chérif, *Islam and the West: A Conversation with Jacques Derrida*, trans. Teresa Lavender Fagan (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008), 52.

27 Carl Schmitt, *Political Theology: Four Chapters on the Concept of Sovereignty*, trans. George D. Schwab (Cambridge: MIT, 1985), 36.

communicate. It is not in the nature of the miracle—to return to Schmitt’s analogy—to explain itself, nor to lend itself to explanation.

At the same time, Derrida also insists that sovereignty is never pure. This consists in the inherent autoimmunity of protection:

To confer sense or meaning on sovereignty, to justify it, to find a reason for it, is already to compromise its deciding exceptionality, to subject it to rules, to a code of law, to some general law, to concepts. It is thus to divide it, to subject it to partitioning, to participation, to being shared. It is to take into account the part played by sovereignty. And to take that part or share into account is to turn sovereignty against itself, to compromise its immunity. This happens as soon as one speaks of it in order to give it or find in it some sense or meaning. But since this happens all the time, pure sovereignty does not exist; it is always in the process of positing itself by refuting itself, by denying or disavowing itself; it is always in the process of autoimmunizing itself, of betraying itself by betraying the democracy that nonetheless can never do without it. (101)

There are in fact two interrelated but distinct reasons for the autoimmunity of sovereignty. First, the protection offered by sovereignty relies on the decision not being subjected to scrutiny. The decision cannot be shared, and it has to be confined in the realm of silence, as we saw above. At the same time, Derrida holds that this is not possible. Reasons are always proffered. The decision is never disconnected from justification. Differently put, the sovereign is never absolute in the etymological sense of the term, *ab-solutus*, meaning separated, standing above everybody else. The sovereign is always linked to the other, to those on whose behalf and about whom the decision is made. Derrida insists on the political theological aspect of sovereignty—its indivisibility, its reliance on the decision and its protection—in order to distinguish it from the other suicidal autoimmunity, that of democracy as a regime of power, and in order to explain its autoimmunity.

Second, the sovereign decision may aspire to offer the maximal protection but in fact that protection is never enough and moreover it increases the threat against sovereignty. Derrida underscores this point in the interview with Borradori. The discussion there is framed in terms of the end of the Cold War, after which the USA emerged as the undisputed dominant world power, the “superpower.” This gave the impression that the USA could offer unassailable protection to itself and its allies. And yet, that protection was turned against itself. The airplanes used as weapons on 9/11 were part of the technological, administrative and economic machine that guaranteed the USA’s dominance

and protection. Its own immunity is transformed into the weapons to attack it. Further, the protection the USA offered to its allies, especially through its foreign policy in the Middle East, justified the attacks against it.²⁸ Those subjected to sovereign power function as an internal enemy infecting the decision and subjecting it to reasons. And sovereignty becomes an internal enemy to itself the moment its own protective mechanisms become the weapons against it.

We have seen, then, three senses of autoimmunity in *Rogues*. There is the suicidal autoimmunity of democracy, which consists in the impossibility of fixing the determination of the *demos*. The suicidal autoimmunity of sovereignty consists in the fact that the protection it offers to the *demos* can precipitate its own destruction. And finally we have the autoimmunity of democracy to come expressed through democracy's self-critique and perfectibility. What unites all three autoimmunities is an intricate and ineradicable connection to force, power and violence—a connection to the multiple meanings of the word *kratos*. And in particular to how force is articulated as internal enmity, as *stasis*.

6 The Worse to Come: Sovereignty as Divisible

If we juxtapose the main characteristics of democracy to come and sovereignty as presented in *Rogues*, it appears as if Derrida sets them up deliberately as opposites to each other. Summarily, democracy to come is self-critical, divisible, shared and universalizable. Sovereignty is silent, indivisible, relies on the decision, and it is not universalizable. The perfectibility of democracy to come, as we saw, both subjects it to the threat of “civil war” and also offers a promise that marks its historicity and its futural dimension denoted by the “to come.” Sovereignty is indivisible because its theological provenance makes it ahistorical. If we look at this list of contrasting characteristics, democracy to come is ultimately juxtaposed to sovereignty because of the latter's political theology.

To understand Derrida's attitude toward political theology we need to recall that to secure his conception of the decision and exceptionality Carl Schmitt insists on the definition of the political as the identification of the external enemy. According to *The Concept of the Political*, the decision is possible because the enemy is external and hence can be identified as an existential threat to the state, legitimizing the sovereign to overstep any normative criteria so as to fulfill its protective function.²⁹ The designation of the external

28 Derrida and Borradori, “Autoimmunity,” 94–100.

29 Carl Schmitt, *The Concept of the Political*, trans. George D. Schwab (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996).

enemy proved, nonetheless, hard to maintain, forcing Schmitt to return to it many years later. *The Theory of the Partisan* is subtitled *A Remark on the Concept of the Political* as if it is an addendum or corollary to the *Concept of the Political* but is in fact a significant reworking of the concept of the enemy.³⁰ Even though Schmitt introduces a strict historical context in introducing the concept of the partisan, the concept ultimately amounts to a simple point: so long as the internal enemy is aiming for the assumption of sovereignty, the internal enemy becomes a partisan and is a legitimate political figure. In *The Politics of Friendship*, Derrida shows that despite his best efforts, Schmitt fails to secure a clear demarcation between the politically relevant external enemy and the partisan, and the apolitical internal enemy.³¹ The effect of this failure is the destabilization of the structure of the decision. In *Rogues*, Derrida repeats the same point in the context of arguing that sovereignty is never pure. Examining the concept of war after 9/11, Derrida holds that the terrorist attacks were neither “inter-national war in the classical sense,” nor “civil war, since no nation-state is present as such,” nor, finally, can it “be a question of ‘partisan war’ (in the unique sense Schmitt gives to this concept), since it is no longer a matter of resisting territorial occupation” (106). This means that sovereignty is deconstructable because it cannot secure the definition of the enemy. Sovereignty is autoimmune. In a sense, there is nothing new thus far in *Rogues*.

Soon, Derrida introduces a significant novelty in the deconstruction of political theology. Specifically, 9/11 shows a structure of violence according to which the worse is yet to come: “if there was a trauma on that day [September 11], in the United States and throughout the world, it consisted not ... in a wound produced by what had effectively already happened ... but in the undeniable fear or apprehension of a threat that is *worse* and still *to come*. The trauma remains traumatizing and incurable because it comes from the future” (104). The first point to note is that the worse is not precipitated by an enemy who is distinct from one-self. Rather, the worse is the internalization of enmity. As Leonard Lawlor puts it, “The worst violence occurs ... when the other to which one is related is completely appropriated to or completely in one’s self.”³² The worse is the phantasmatic—which means, all the more powerful, all the more

30 Carl Schmitt, *The Theory of the Partisan: A Commentary/Remark on the Concept of the Political*, trans. A. C. Goodson, *The New Centennial Review* 4.3(2004): 1–78.

31 Jacques Derrida, *Politics of Friendship*, trans. George Collins (Verso: London, 1997).

32 Leonard Lawlor, *This is not Sufficient: An Essay on Animality and Human Nature in Derrida* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), 23.

irresistible—threat created internally. And this means also that the worse is not simply a flesh-and-bone internal enemy, or the internal enemy reduced to presence. The worse is the internal enemy as that which regulates the operation of the political. The worse is the internal enemy to come.³³

This structure of the trauma that is to come, the worse, cannot be confined only to a “unique” event such as 9/11, but is rather characteristic of any event as such. Derrida underscores this as inherent in the structure of autoimmunity: “An event always inflicts a wound in the everyday course of history, in the ordinary repetition and anticipation of all experience.... There is traumatism with no possible work of mourning when the evil comes from the possibility to come of the worst, from the repetition to come—though worse. Traumatism is produced by the *future*, by the *to come*, by the threat of the worst *to come*.”³⁴ A traumatic event, which means an event in which violence is possible—and does anything happen without any trace of violence?—inflicts a wound, says Derrida, “always” in terms of an anticipated further wound. The worse is inscribed in the future, it is to come, and this has *always* been the case. Trauma is an inherent possibility structuring experience. As a consequence, there never was war, civil war, and even partisan war without being overlaid with, without being overdetermined by the worse. Or, differently put, there is no political without the internal enemy.

Derrida’s own argumentation requires the inference about the worse structuring the experience of violence, power and force—that is, structuring the political event that he analyzes in *Rogues* in terms of autoimmunity. But Derrida touches on this point briefly, and does not fully develop its consequences.

33 Fear is also fundamental in Hobbes’s argument about the formation of the social contract and the transfer of right that establishes the sovereign. See, for instance, Carl Schmitt, *The Leviathan in the State Theory of Thomas Hobbes: Meaning and Failure of a Political Symbol*, trans. George Schwab and Erna Hilfstein (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1996); and Leo Strauss, *The Political Philosophy of Hobbes: Its Basis and Its Genesis*, trans. Elsa M. Sinclair (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1963). I note that this fear is not simply present at hand. Like Derrida, it is refer to a sense of a future threat. As Hobbes puts it in his memorable turn of phrase, to explain this fear: “On going to bed, men lock their doors.” Thomas Hobbes, *On the Citizen*, ed. Richard Tuck and Michael Silverthorne (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 1.2. They do not lock the door because of an imminent threat, but because they fear that there might be a threat in the future. It is this fear that necessitates, according to Hobbes, the granting of the right to protect to the sovereign. A more detailed study of the function of fear in Hobbes and of the worse to come in Derrida is needed, but I do not have the space to undertake it here.

34 Derrida and Borradori, “Autoimmunity,” 96–97.

What are these consequences? Lawlor views in the operation of the worse the invigoration of political theology: “The worst is a relation that makes ... out of a division, an indivisible sovereignty.”³⁵ Through the worst, sovereignty can assert its unity, its ipseity, annulling any multiplicity that may arrive from the heterogeneity of the one. Lawlor points out the political and ethical effects of the worst understood as a hyper-realization of political theology. It is as if the worst becomes the immune that protects sovereignty itself from any possibility of divisibility.³⁶ This is an inference affirmed by how the government of the USA responded to 9/11, both externally by unilaterally invading Iraq without the endorsement of international institutions, and also internally by introducing Patriot Act limiting civil liberties.

Note that the worst, as Lawlor reads it, repeats the move whereby the internal enemy is treated as the most pernicious aspect of the political—albeit with the addendum that the worst is identified with the function of indivisible sovereignty. What happens to the worse if we reverse this structure and inscribe stasis in democracy? In that case, the worse emasculates sovereignty by stripping it of its indivisibility. How does the worse undo the indivisibility of sovereignty? What is at stake in this is nothing less than the political theological standing of sovereignty. Derrida does not explicitly pursue this question, but it does not take a lot to recognize that the worse is inherently opposed to the indivisibility of sovereignty. Because the worse is to come, its structure requires that one calculates that such a threat is possible in the future. But the effect of this calculation is to infect the sovereign prerogative to decide—that is, to act without the giving of reasons. *One* fears about future threats because one *calculates* about the future—no matter how much this ratiocination is

35 Lawlor, *This is not Sufficient*, 23.

36 I also need to point to Leonard Lawlor’s important new book *From Violence to Speaking out: Apocalypse and Expression in Foucault, Derrida and Deleuze* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2016). One of the key concepts in this book is that of the worst, that Lawlor takes from Derrida but develops it in new ways and makes it his own. My difference from Lawlor is that, whereas he sees the worst as requiring the indivisible sovereign even if Lawlor deconstructs this through the introduction of the ethical, I emphasize how the worse requires divisibility and sharing, thereby precluding the possibility of indivisible sovereignty *ab initio*. Differently put, whereas Lawlor accepts political theology in order to criticize it, I hold that even that is giving up too much, and that the political needs no recourse to political theology. Our difference can be pin-pointed also to a lexical divergence. Whereas Lawlor always writes “the worst” in the superlative that instigates the sovereign reaction to violence, I am much more concerned with the “worse to come” as necessitating a shared space of communication and divisibility and hence as presupposing “the people.”

determined by psychic process and unconscious determinants. (There is no unconscious without consciousness.)

Further, as part of the trauma of the event, we saw that the worse belongs to the structure of political experience. Without the worse, there is no event, according to Derrida. Every event contains the possibility of trauma and hence of the worse. If we combine this with the insight that the worse comes from a calculative processing about the future, we can draw the inference that any conceptual no less than practical articulation of protection as a sovereign prerogative always needs ratiocination and hence is subject to giving reasons. To put this point in the vocabulary of “Faith and Knowledge,” any sacred sense of protection requires techno-science as its supplement. Consequently, there is not, and there never was, such a thing as the sovereign decision nor the indivisibility of sovereignty. Differently put, the fact that the worse points to a shared experience, to a communicable fear about the future, the worse undoes the capacity of sovereignty to remain indivisible. The decision always requires a *communicable* calculation. Sovereignty always needs to justify its violence. Such communicability shows that sovereignty presupposes the people. The historical facts also support this claim. The USA *was* required to justify its actions, and it did so—often unsuccessfully, as, for instance, it did not manage to get the support of the Security Council for the invasion of Iraq. Further, the domestic laws were subjected to severe criticism, despite—and *because*—they were passed by the two Houses of representatives.³⁷

But if the worse is always operative, this calls into question the entire project of political theology. The worse shows that there is a danger of shadow boxing if you accept, on the one hand, the worse, and, on the other, the indivisibility of sovereignty. If the deconstruction or the “renunciation” of sovereignty requires the unconditionality of democracy to come, then what is the function of the indivisibility of sovereignty, its decision and its exceptionality? The operative presence of the worse would always infect—it would always autoimmunize—the decision with the giving of reasons, and it will precipitate the sharing of fear thereby undoing sovereignty’s control over the exception. From this perspective, the indivisibility of sovereignty appears gratuitous, since it presupposes the divisibility of the “people.”

37 I analyze the various ways in which sovereign violence was justified in the aftermath of 9/11 in *Sovereignty and its Other: Toward the Dejustification of Violence* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2013).

7 The Worse or Political Theology?

After exploring how the internal enemy or *stasis* organizes Derrida's discourse on the discord *in* the polity, we now have to return to the issue of the discord *about* the polity. This pertains to the relation between democracy and sovereignty, and it can be configured as the choice "unconditionality or indivisibility," thereby raising the question of political theology in Derrida's conception of the political. In other words, we now need to return to interrogate the relation posed in the strategic statement about what is at stake in *Rogues*—a statement that I cite here again: "it would be necessary to distinguish 'sovereignty' (which is always in principle indivisible) from 'unconditionality.' Both of these escape absolutely, like the absolute itself, all relativism.... But through ... the experience that lets itself be affected by what or who comes ... by *the other to come*, a certain unconditional renunciation of sovereignty is required a priori. Even before the act of a decision" (xiv). Three elements are of particular importance in this statement: the a priori, the absolute and unconditionality. I will deal with them in turn in the context of what we have found out about the worse. In particular, we need to keep in mind how the worse reconfigures the relation between democracy and sovereignty.

Derrida essentially poses the dilemma: democracy or sovereignty. Or, as I reframed it to allude to the function of political theology in Derrida's discourse: unconditionality or indivisibility. This needs to be settled a priori, asserts Derrida. But what happens if the dilemma is reframed in light of the worse as "the worse or political theology"?

Either the worse, or the sovereign decision. Either there is a futural dimension inscribed in the unfolding of the political by virtue of its divisibility, or the political draws its source from an ahistorical and sacred source that can be deconstructed only *après coup*. Either the justification of violence, despite the various ideological and hegemonic processes, or the pure decision beyond all need for justification. Either the worse, or indivisible sovereignty. Either, or—but you cannot have both. You cannot have both because the worse is subjected to justification whereas the decision is not. But the moment the dilemma is posed, justification is assumed. This means that the decision is made within a contextual framework. It means that the event is never "signed" by a single political authority, the sovereign, but it is subjected to the matrix of interpretation and interpretability that the giving of reasons arising from the worse entails. The choice—the worse or political theology—cannot be made *a priori*. If that were the case, there would be no worse, and hence no dilemma in the first place. So, the choice is not "a priori," as Derrida says, but one that allows for the taking of a stand between democracy and sovereignty.

Or maybe—and this is perhaps the most cogent possibility, given the historicity and structure of *stasis* that we have been considering—it is not so much an either/or relation, but rather a relation in which the political theological represses the worse, which nevertheless cannot be eliminated and comes to infect the indivisibility of sovereignty from the beginning. In other words, the worse is the trace or supplement that cannot be accommodated within the logic of indivisible sovereignty but without which sovereignty does not exist. In which case, the relation outlined here means that it is not possible for both democracy and sovereignty to be absolute. Sovereignty may appear as absolute, but in fact only democracy is absolute.³⁸ This is a point that Spinoza is well aware of, since for the *Political Treatise*, only democracy is the “completely absolute *imperium*.”³⁹

As soon as the political theological aspect of sovereignty is seen as nothing but the product of the repression of the worse—the repression of the giving of reasons—then we return to Loraux’s thesis about the repression of *stasis* in Western political and philosophical thought. At that point the worse and the indivisible cannot be separated, they are mutually determined in such a way that the two suicidal autoimmunities—the sovereign and the democratic—move close to each other. In fact, this is not surprising. They do actually share a number of salient features. Thus, protection, the safe and the healthy belong both to the series of sacred characteristics that denote the theological heritage of sovereignty and also are essential to the self-cohesion of the *demos* and the autoimmunity of democracy. For instance—to recall Derrida’s example—the blood ties that can bind the *demos* have definite theological roots.⁴⁰ Or, if we consider the logic of protection: It is *for* its protection that the *demos* requires *kratos* as instituted power, instigating the autoimmunity about the impossibility of defining the *demos*. But this means that protection, when linked to the political through the figure of the *demos*, is always *for* something, it is always related to the giving of reasons, and any sovereignty that exercises *kratos* to fulfil this protection is *ab initio* involved in the giving of reasons and hence divisible—recall here the example of the suspension of the Algerian elections for the good of, for the health of democracy. The political demand for the health, safety and protection of the *demos* forges the insoluble and insolvable link between the two suicidal autoimmunities. As soon

38 I discuss the deceiving *appearance* of sovereignty as absolute in *Sovereignty and its Other*.

39 Spinoza, *Political Treatise*, in *Complete Works*, trans. Samuel Shirley, ed. Michael L. Morgan (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2002), 11.1.

40 Cf. Gil Anidjar, *Blood: A Critique of Christianity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014).

as health, safety and protection are implicated with the *demos*—which is to say, the moment that they become political and hence subject to autoimmunity—then sovereignty only exists, as Derrida puts it, by betraying the *demos* so as to posture as if it is indivisible. And this essentially means that at that moment, there is no longer any indivisibility. Thus, suicidal autoimmunity points to what I would like to call democratic sovereignty.

Democratic sovereignty is the political constellation that combines the democratic autoimmunity arising from the *demos* and the sovereign autoimmunity arising from protection afforded by the indivisibility and the decision of the sovereign. I am not suggesting that we collapse the two autoimmunities—we should be mindful of their differences so as to be able to deconstruct them. Thus, the autoimmunity of democracy starts from the calculable—the *demos*—which nonetheless always has an incalculable supplement—for instance, the other seeking hospitality. By contrast, sovereignty starts with the incalculable—or, it is absolute, as Derrida says—which accounts for its indivisibility and the decision of the sovereign that are however contaminated by the calculable, such as the worse to come. The introduction of the calculable breaks up the absolute and introduces a shared experience of fear and of justification of violence, thereby destroying indivisibility—a topic which Derrida treats in detail in “Faith and Knowledge,” where autoimmunity is introduced to talk about the techno-science that undoes the sacred. Significantly, then, whereas the deconstruction of the *demos* leads to the ethical, the deconstruction of the political theological paradigm of sovereignty—that is, its indivisibility and decisionism—leads back to the *demos* as the site or figure that allows for the sharing of the fear to come and which demands the introduction of justification of violence. There is no pure decision—the decision is always shared and justified within a community.

Democratic sovereignty—the entanglement of the two autoimmunities of democracy and sovereignty—has significant implications for political theology. It means that *sovereignty is divisible, or it is not political at all*. Sovereignty is divisible because of its determination by the protection it offers to the *demos*, thereby presupposing the *demos* and hence democratic autoimmunity. And this has a significant implication for what has come to pass as political theology since Carl Schmitt, which can be expressed as follows: All significant political theological concepts are transfigurations of the attempt to define the *demos*. This has a structural element, namely, the operative presence of the figure of the internal enemy. Given that the *demos* is infected in its determination by the internal enemy, or differently put, given the autoimmunity of democracy as a regime of power, we can also say: *All significant concepts of political theology are manifestations of the internal enemy*. From this perspective, the

two suicidal autoimmunities can be treated as one. They point to the justifications of violence necessary for the health, safety and protection of the *demos*.

How can we trace the historicity of the idea that all political theological concepts are transfigurations of the attempts to define the *demos*? I would suggest that this is possible by turning to the historicity of the interminable struggles to define the *demos*, which is in fact the historicity of the interminable self-critique of democracy to come. Derrida refers to this historicity as coming both from the semantic ambiguity of the term democracy and from the indefinite contestability of its potential manifestations. There is a historicity to political theological concepts because of the internal enmity that leads to democracy's interminable self-critique. It is the historicity of this question that structures, according to Derrida, the entire "Reason of the Strongest," namely, the historicity of the question as to how it is possible to speak democratically of democracy. Or, differently put, it is the historicity of the injunction to scrutinize and deconstruct the giving of reasons. It is the historicity of the inherent and impassable divisibility—the *stasis*—of and in the political.

This entails that the historicity of the suicidal autoimmunity is in fact the historicity of the autoimmunity of the democracy to come. Differently put, this entails that the ethical cannot be eliminated from the political. The political and the ethical are imbricated. Derrida is well-aware of the great difficulty both in distinguishing the ethical from the political and in resisting their separation. In fact, one of the key ideas about democracy to come is its welcoming of alterity. The "to come" does not indicate only the openness of democracy such as it can never be realized in a specific regime. It indicates, in addition, and just as importantly, the other that can come and that calls for unconditional hospitality. You will recall that at the beginning of *Rogues* Derrida stresses the need to *unconditionally* renounce sovereignty in the name of the other to come. This relation between democracy to come and democratic sovereignty—the relation between autoimmunity and suicidal autoimmunity—indicates the imbrication of the ethical and the political. The other describes a relation that is always subject to giving reasons—even though, or rather *because*, the ethical comportment to the other is ethical and hence unconditional. The worse already inscribes democracy within sovereignty.

I refer to this relation between democracy and sovereignty that no longer requires the "a priori" renunciation of sovereignty, that treats democracy as the only political absolute, and that recognizes the unconditionality of democracy—which is to say, its link to the ethical—as the primacy of democracy over sovereignty, and I analyze it in *Stasis before the State* through the figure of agonistic monism. The effect of agonistic monism is that the renunciation of sovereignty is only ever possible as the relation, as the agonistic

engagement, with the justifications of violence that characterize any political theology. Such renunciation has no secure criteria—it is to come—but it is not a priori because it is always engaged agonistically with suicidal autoimmunity. To put it differently, the renunciation is the transition—never complete, always provisional and perfectible—from the suicidal autoimmunities to the autoimmunity of democracy to come. It is carried out as the democratic imperative to dejustify any form of political violence, force and power.⁴¹

What does the primacy of democracy or agonistic monism entail about the number of autoimmunities? I identified initially three autoimmunities, which can be viewed as two as soon as the two suicidal autoimmunities are recognized as complicit. But the suicidal autoimmunities can also be shown to be an effect of democracy to come. Does this mean that there is, in reality, only one autoimmunity? I think that this is the wrong line of reasoning. What matters is not how many autoimmunities there are. From one perspective we can say that there is an infinite number of autoimmunities since suicidal autoimmunity can take an indefinite number of forms. From another we can say that there are no more suicidal autoimmunities because their historicity shows that the political is determined by the self-critique characterizing democracy to come. This framing is inadequate. Agonistic democracy asks this question, but, in addition, focuses on the relations of discord that pertain between suicidal autoimmunity and democracy to come. This is the discord between sovereignty and democracy *about* the conception of the polity. It is the agonistic democratic relation that *stasis* designates.

41 For more details, see Vardoulakis, *Stasis Before the State*.