



Book Reviews

Jimenez, Marta. *Aristotle on Shame and Learning to Be Good*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020, 224 pp. \$77.00 ISBN 978-0198829683.

Marta Jimenez's *Aristotle on Shame and Learning to be Good* offers a thorough treatment of Aristotle's account of how people become virtuous that centers the role of shame (*aidōs*) in the process. Aristotle offers a few scattered remarks in the ethical works on the characteristics the learner of virtue must possess and the kinds of practices they must engage in, but he offers no sustained treatment of the issue. Jimenez's work is a thoroughgoing reconstruction of Aristotle's thought on the topic that draws together these comments in a compelling picture of the epistemic and motivational capacities the learner of virtue must possess so as to make progress towards genuine virtue. Jimenez's central contention is that, for Aristotle, shame equips such learners with the required capacities and tendencies of thought, feeling, motivation, and action. In her own words, shame is a "proto-virtue" that "equips learners [of virtue] with the seeds of virtue" by giving learners the proper "orientation and receptivity to the moral value characteristic of virtuous people" (2).

Before going into detail on some of the important contentions made in the book, an overview of its contents is in order. The book is divided into six chapters. In chapter one, Jimenez argues that there are good textual and philosophical reasons for thinking that, on Aristotle's account, learners of virtue must already possess "something of" the characteristics of the fully virtuous agent. The difference between the learner of virtue and the fully virtuous agent is a matter of degree rather than kind. In the second chapter, following Burnyeat, Jimenez argues that one of the essential characteristics the learner of virtue must possess is the ability to take pleasure in virtuous activity. The third chapter is devoted to a careful and engaging reading of Aristotle's discussion in *NE* III 8 of the pseudo-forms of courage. The upshot of examining the ways in which agents can fail to perform actions properly—with knowledge of what they are doing, acting for the right reasons, etc.—is that it allows us to better appreciate the conditions that lead to genuine virtue. In chapter four, Jimenez argues for a strong connection in Aristotle between acting for the sake of honor and acting for the sake of the noble (*to kalon*) such that the former is often constitutive of the latter; and therefore shame (*aidōs*), given its orientation towards honor, bears within itself an orientation towards the noble. Chapter five offers a detailed discussion of Aristotle's seemingly ambivalent treatment of shame, which is held to be a praiseworthy possession in young persons but inappropriate for adult individuals. Jimenez argues that Aristotle's ambivalence is due to the "mixed" nature of shame—it is an emotion (*pathos*) that resembles a disposition (*hexis*) in certain respects.¹ In the sixth and final chapter, Jimenez argues that due to shame's mixed nature it is uniquely equipped to fulfill the requirements of thought, feeling, and motivation required for the learner of virtue. It gives learners the motivational resources to restrain their appetites and orient their conduct towards the noble.

¹ This claim will be examined in some detail below.

One of the central contentions of Jimenez's monograph is that learners of virtue must possess certain characteristics definitive of the virtuous agent *before* they are in a position to make progress towards virtue. This claim is essential to Jimenez's argument since it is these requirements that shame (*aidōs*) is meant to fulfill. Accordingly, a good portion of the book (chapters 1-3, especially) is dedicated to building up, piece by piece, the textual and philosophical evidence for this claim. The crux of the issue is how we are to interpret Aristotle's claim that we are made virtuous by performing virtuous actions and the connected issue of how we are to understand Aristotle's response to the "priority objection"—the claim that there is something paradoxical about the requirement that learners perform virtuous actions *before* they are virtuous themselves.

In chapter one, Jimenez argues, convincingly in my view, that we need to understand Aristotle's claim about the priority of virtuous action over a virtuous disposition by attending to an important distinction in Aristotle's text between virtuous actions and performing actions *virtuously*. Based on a careful reading of *NE* II 4, 1105a17-b5, Jimenez argues that the latter adverbial phrase, but not *mere* virtuous action, requires that an action be performed (1) with knowledge of what the agent is doing, (2) for the right reasons, and (3) with some level of consistency. In Jimenez's phrasing, learners of virtue must not only perform virtuous actions (actions that produce the right outcomes), but they must perform these actions "well." Jimenez applies this distinction to the process of becoming virtuous to argue that only actions performed in the manner that the virtuous person would perform them (i.e., *virtuously*) contribute to the development of a virtuous disposition. This means that, on Jimenez's account, in order for learners of virtue to make progress, they must already possess some amount of the capacities and tendencies for thought, feeling, motivation, and action that the fully virtuous person possesses. Acting *virtuously* does not give rise to these capacities and tendencies *ex nihilo*. Rather, acting habitually in such a manner refines, strengthens, and stabilizes these nascent capacities and tendencies until they become settled dispositions of the soul—i.e., genuine virtues.

Jimenez argues that Aristotle's reply to the "priority objection" in the case of learning to be virtuous should be understood from his discussion of an analogous learning-by-doing puzzle at *Metaphysics* IX 8, 1049b29-1050a2. Briefly put, the priority objection involves the claim that there is something paradoxical about, say, a student of science learning by *actually doing* those activities constitutive of the science itself. By definition, the student of science *does not yet* possess the knowledge of the genuine knower. The paradox, then, is something like the following: either the student of science already possesses the required knowledge and skillset for performing those activities constitutive of science, in which case she would not be a *learner* but already a knower; *or* the learner lacks the knowledge and skillset of the knower, in which case they would not be able to perform the activities constitutive of the science. Aristotle's response to this challenge is to point out that the learner is in a process of *becoming* in relation to the object of science which means that in some respect the learner must have *already* undergone change with respect to this object. Therefore, it is reasonable to claim that the learner must already possess "something of the knowledge" (*ti tēs epistēmēs*) that would allow them to engage in the activities constitutive of the science. Applying this idea to the case of the learner of virtue, Jimenez argues that the learner of virtue will possess "something of" virtue that will allow them to engage in virtuous actions in the manner required to develop the corresponding disposition. This "something of" virtue will not be virtue itself, but instead will consist, according to Jimenez, "in perceptions, memories, notions, true beliefs, desires or emotions that are significantly related to the virtue which the learner aims to acquire" (47).

Compared to other commentators, Jimenez's position places relatively high demands on the learner's capacities and tendencies not only to perform virtuous actions but to do so virtuously. This being so, it might seem as though Jimenez's position is liable to a slightly modified version of the "priority objection." Is there not a worry that Jimenez's position grants too much to the learner of virtue to the point that the problem becomes not so much how a learner so constituted becomes virtuous—a problem that is now rendered somewhat trivial, even though practical difficulties remain—but rather how the *learner* herself comes about? But this latter problem is precisely what Jimenez's monograph seeks to articulate and then address. Jimenez's argument in the first half of the book shifts the problem in this direction, drawing our attention to the preconditions required for the learner of virtue to make progress towards the attainment of genuine virtue. As I hope my brief overview of Jimenez's position has indicated, there are good philosophical and textual reasons for thinking that Aristotle thought such preconditions as Jimenez discusses—namely, the need for the learner of virtue to act with knowledge, for the right reasons, and with some level of consistency—were indeed necessary conditions for the learner of virtue.

The sixth chapter of the book is where Jimenez discusses the specific characteristics of shame that allow it to play an essential role in the acquisition of virtue. Drawing from Aristotle's discussion of shame in *NE* X 9, Jimenez identifies three such characteristics that give shame the ability to make the learner of virtue receptive to ethical arguments: (1) a healthy sense of shame makes the learner of virtue attentive to the nobility and shamefulness of their actions; (2) shame allows learners to "directly experience" the nobility of their actions, which gives them an appreciation of the intrinsic value of noble action; and (3) shame gives learners of virtue the ability to enjoy "the proper (true) pleasure of the noble" (176). These characteristics push the learner of virtue to value ends other than those involving personal gratification.

It is unclear, however, in Jimenez's discussion of shame as a proto-virtuous *pathos-cum-hexis* whether we should take shame to be the ground of the learner of virtue's love of the noble, or in some sense identical to this love, or a helpful aid in cultivating this love in the right way. That is, I was left wondering if shame and a love of the noble are two distinct *pathē-cum-hexeis* or if they are two sides of a single characteristic. At various times in the discussion, I got the sense that it was each of these things in turn. The issues raised by Jimenez's discussion of shame go to the heart of Aristotle's moral psychology. It would have been helpful, in my view, if this discussion had been prefaced with a broader treatment of Aristotle's moral psychology that drew attention to the role of affect (*pathos*) in motivation.

To conclude, Marta Jimenez's *Aristotle on Shame and Learning to be Good* is an excellent treatment of the subject matter. It is essential reading not only for those interested in Aristotle's account of how people become virtuous but also those interested in Aristotle's ethics, moral psychology, political philosophy, and theory of emotions. Jimenez's scholarship is immaculate, and their mastery of the source material and the surrounding debates is on full display in every chapter.

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Aho, Kevin. *One Beat More: Existentialism and the Gift of Mortality*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 2022. 176 pp. (HB) \$64.95 (PB) \$22.95 ISBN: 978-1509546893.

As a fellow professor who works primarily in the medical humanities, I've followed Kevin Aho's work for a long time. Aho is known in that circle for his lucid prose and especially his ability to make difficult concepts from thinkers like Heidegger and Nietzsche concrete and accessible. Without discounting his already important contributions to the field, including his recent edited volume *Existential Medicine*² and his recent monograph *Contexts of Suffering*,³ I believe that Aho's *One Beat More: Existentialism and the Gift of Mortality* is his finest contribution to medical humanities to date. Aho interweaves philosophical concepts from various existentialist thinkers with his own personal experience of suffering a massive heart attack at the ripe age of 48 and his narrative of the uphill recovery he faced thereafter. The book is an honest, well-written, and—above all else—*deeply personal* account of the ways in which existentialism is applicable to life, particularly in our later years.

Existentialism tends to be a philosophy that elicits support from younger persons, particularly those in their teens. The emphases on individuality, freedom, authenticity, and social criticism seem to strike a perfect chord with the sense of alienation commonly experienced in adolescence. Indeed, I've argued that existentialism is best embodied in youthful anti-establishment mentalities.⁴ Yet, Aho makes a convincing case that “the twenty-year-old may grasp the existential questions intellectually, but without the nearness of death and a deep reservoir of life experience to draw from, he or she has not yet learned how to ‘live the questions’” (7). In fact, backing his narrative with empirical research and patient narratives, Aho argues that “it is often easier to be inauthentic and to live in a state of self-deception when we're young and healthy” (10). Our very vitality and the seemingly boundless opportunities that are open to us in this stage of life allow us to live as if death did not apply to us. Even in concretely experiencing the death of another, we tend to respond with “Well, he's dead but I'm alive!”⁵ as Tolstoy masterfully chronicles in *The Death of Ivan Ilych*, thus living in a denial of our own finitude. As Heidegger puts it, “The dying of others is not something which we experience in a genuine sense.”⁶ Using his recovery from the heart attack as the personal background, Aho employs a wide range of existentialists ranging from Kierkegaard to Beauvoir to show how a confrontation with death can open oneself up to a life lived with a renewed sense of urgency and purpose, a sense Kierkegaard called “earnestness” (*alvor*) and Heidegger referred to as “resoluteness” (*Entschlossenheit*).

Perhaps most impressive in *One Beat More* is the way in which Aho seamlessly integrates concepts of existentialism to explain not only his confrontation with death, but also timely topics in the field of medical humanities, including medical stigmatization (i.e., a mark of shame tied to being dependent on a medical device), the objectification of the medical gaze (i.e., treating patients as if they were objects and not persons), ageism, the cultural denial of death, and the experience of social isolation of elderly persons, especially in nursing homes during the

² *Existential Medicine: Essays on Health and Illness*, ed. Kevin Aho (London and New York: Rowman & Littlefield International, 2018).

³ Kevin Aho, *Contexts of Suffering: A Heideggerian Approach to Psychopathology* (London and New York: Rowman & Littlefield International, 2019).

⁴ Casey Rentmeester, “Early Punk and the Dionysian Lion-Child,” in *Punk Rock and Philosophy*, ed. Joshua Heter and Richard Greene (Chicago: Open Universe, 2022), chapter 12.

⁵ Leo Tolstoy, *The Death of Ivan Ilych and Other Stories* (New York: Penguin, 1960), 95.

⁶ Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time* (New York: Harper & Row, 1962), 282.

COVID-19 pandemic, among other topics. In his *Existentialism: An Introduction*, Aho argues that “existentialism centers around two of the most fundamental of moral questions there are[:] What should I do? How should I live?”⁷ As it turns out, due to their recognition of their own vulnerability and the realization that their time is limited, older adults tend to answer these questions differently than their younger counterparts in that “they are often more willing to let go of their defenses, allowing for a more intimate, tender, and honest mode of communication with others” (93). In leaning in on their vulnerability and shedding the façade of the security of being rugged, independent individuals—what is sometimes referred to as the myth of being “nuclear selves [that are] self-defining and self-contained”⁸—persons are more capable of genuine relations with others. Aho himself explains this shift in his own sense of self-identity since his heart attack that made him feel “as if the ground beneath [him] was collapsing as [he] confronted the reality that [he] was no longer the person [he] used to be” (28). Instead of the active, athletic, productive middle-aged professor, he experienced a sense of dependence and vulnerability that was initially met with horror but eventually allowed him to interpret his mortal life as a gift that should be met with “a sense of not holding back and of being wholly present with others” (98). This is why he subtitles the book “Existentialism and the Gift of Mortality”: his near-death experience allowed him to interpret his life as a gift for the first time. He learned, as he puts it, “to choose yourself and exist in a way that is genuine and true to the things that matter to you as an individual” (31) since your time on earth is limited and your life is uniquely yours.

One Beat More is a fitting complement to Aho’s essay “Notes from a Heart Attack: A Phenomenology of an Altered Body,” which I’ve taught in my phenomenology of healthcare course for several years now. In that work, Aho talks through the ways in which “the visceral awareness of the frailty and vulnerability of [his] body and the recognition of [his] fundamental dependency on others have trashed the illusions of [his] own strength and autonomy.”⁹ In teaching that text, I’ve tried to get my students to empathize with their patients by understanding what their patients might be going through in facing a recovery from a heart attack or other life-altering health-related episode. *One Beat More* provides the other half of that story, as it showcases the wisdom that can come with accepting one’s vulnerability and inevitable dependency: “as we grow older, we become more flexible, more comfortable with change and ambiguity, and this deepens and broadens our sense of who we are” (81). Somewhat paradoxically, it is through facing our frailty that we become empowered, thus showing us the “brightside” of the otherwise dark topic of our own mortality. I think this is a much-needed message, especially for young students who have not had much confrontation with death.

In all, Aho’s narrative provides a strong philosophical defense of the social psychologist Laura Carstensen’s groundbreaking work in socioemotional selectivity theory that shows that people prioritize meaningful, intimate relationships more than information-seeking and social status when they have less perceived time left on the planet.¹⁰ It also echoes Atul Gawande’s masterpiece, *Being Mortal*, which chronicles “what it’s like to be creatures who age and die, how medicine has changed the experience and how it hasn’t, [and] where our ideas about how to deal

⁷ Kevin Aho, *Existentialism: An Introduction*, Second Edition (Cambridge and Medford, MA: Polity, 2020).

⁸ Charles Guignon, *On Being Authentic* (London and New York: Routledge, 2004), 43.

⁹ Kevin Aho, “Notes from a Heart Attack: A Phenomenology of an Altered Body,” in *Phenomenology of the Broken Body*, ed. Espen Dahl, Cassandra Falke, and Thor Eirik Eriksen (London: Routledge, 2019), 189.

¹⁰ Laura Carstensen, “Social and Emotional Patterns in Adulthood: Support for Socioemotional Selectivity Theory,” *Psychology and Aging*, vol. 7, no. 3 (1992): 331-338.

with our finitude have got the reality wrong.”¹¹ Thus, Aho’s book is more than simply an excellent contribution to existentialism or philosophy but has implications well beyond that sphere to the medical humanities at large. Indeed, anyone who wonders how aging or a confrontation with mortality might shift one’s answer to the two time-honored questions of existentialism—“What should I do?” and “How should I live?”—will find great value in this book.

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Trumbull, Robert. *From Life to Survival: Derrida, Freud, and the Future of Deconstruction*. New York: Fordham University Press, 2022. 224 pp. (HB) \$105.00 (PB) \$30.00 ISBN: 978-0823298730.

It is perhaps fitting that a certain kind of haunting hovers over *From Life to Survival: Derrida, Freud, and the Future of Deconstruction*, Robert Trumbull’s valuable and insightful contribution to the body of scholarship reconstructing Jacques Derrida’s engagement with Freud. In key moments, it connects the figures of *la vie la mort* (life death) and *survivance* (surviving, survival), which Trumbull identifies as embodying both Derrida’s explication of Freud’s text as well as the project of deconstruction, to that of spectrality, which Derrida is known—and in some quarters, infamous—for recovering. As such, *From Life to Survival* invites the reader to become attuned to other events that, in keeping with Derridean *hantologie*, are neither present nor absent but nonetheless shape the horizon against which Trumbull’s work appears and can be regarded as informing the legibility of his study.

The first of these spectral events, I would suggest, is that of Derrida’s own death, underscored by a brief reference in the book’s central third chapter to Derrida’s last interview that was conducted with Jean Birnbaum and published in *Le Monde* less than two months before he died, in which Derrida confesses to a fear that “two weeks or a month after [his] death *there will be nothing left*. Nothing except what has been copyrighted and deposited in libraries.”¹² This fear expressed by Derrida, or what in a psychoanalytic idiom would be called an annihilation anxiety, provokes questions about how to think about death and loss from the standpoint of deconstruction, if not also about Derrida’s own relationship to the fundamental lessons of deconstruction—whether it is possible to avoid loss, whether it is ever possible to actually possess something to lose, what, exactly, is lost following death, how an archive of works can somehow protect against there being “nothing left,” and how Derrida himself identified with the archive, which he so painstakingly worked to submit to deconstructive critique, as Trumbull at one point reviews as he assembles his own archive of Derrida’s engagement with Freud.

The second event that haunts *From Life to Survival* is the emergence of the SARS-CoV-2 virus and the global pandemic to which it has given rise. Published against the backdrop of the COVID-19 global pandemic, it is difficult to imagine readers of Trumbull’s book not being

¹¹ Atul Gawande, *Being Mortal: Medicine and What Matters in the End* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2014), 9.

¹² Jacques Derrida, *Learning to Live Finally: The Last Interview*, trans. Pascale-Anne Brault and Michael Naas (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 34, original emphasis. Cited in Robert Trumbull, *From Life to Survival: Derrida, Freud, and the Future of Deconstruction* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2022), 69.

confronted by its emergence, especially as Trumbull reviews the figures of *la vie la mort* and *survivance* in relation to Derrida's conception of autoimmunity as the paradoxical condition in which a living entity attacks the very defenses designed to protect itself against the other that (it feels) threatens it. That autoimmunity and its place in Derrida's reading of Freud—Freud's conception of the death drive, specifically—appears to offer a useful interpretive mechanism for understanding the paradox of individuals alternatively denying their vulnerability to COVID-19 in the name of so-called individual freedom, only to have that denial result in their increased vulnerability to the virus, actually seems quite apt. The fact that the COVID-19 global pandemic is now enveloped within a global denial of its still ongoing existence only thickens the haunting atmosphere that surrounds Trumbull's book.

Both of these events, I would submit, not only haunt Trumbull's treatment of the figures of *la vie la mort* and *survivance* in Derrida; in so doing, they also bolster, even if unintentionally, the questions that frame his study: namely, how to take the measure of Derrida's contribution to contemporary thought and how to see deconstruction as possessing a normative force pointing to what ought to be done in the wake of its critique of Western metaphysics and ontology. Trumbull presents these questions in the book's introduction, asking what relevance deconstruction might still have in the landscape of contemporary Continental philosophy given recent theoretical trends abandoning the preoccupation with language that characterized the linguistic turn of 20th-century Western philosophy (and with which deconstruction is typically identified) for so-called revived forms of materialism announced by such names as speculative realism, object-oriented philosophy, new materialism, and posthumanism (1). By focusing on Derrida's conceptualization of *la vie la mort* and *survivance* and how they testify "to life and the basic structure of living" as the matter of deconstruction, Trumbull argues for both its continued relevance in relation to critical thought's recent turns as well as its normative force within the social-political order (8-9).

From Life to Survival takes advantage of the recent English translation of Derrida's *La vie la mort* seminar from 1975-76 to tie Derrida's early writings to the later seminars that had been translated previously into English, specifically *The Death Penalty* (1999-2001) and *The Beast and the Sovereign* (2001-2003).¹³ Unfolding over the course of five chapters, the book dedicates its first three chapters to laying its theoretical foundation by reconstructing the emergence of *la vie la mort* from Derrida's early writings, the transformation *la vie la mort* undergoes from Derrida's encounter with Freud, and the formation of *survivance* Derrida develops from out of that encounter. The book's fourth and fifth chapters pursue what Trumbull describes as the social-political implications of Derrida's conceptualization of *la vie la mort* and *survivance* and the normative force he claims deconstruction embodies as a result of these implications. *From Life to Survival* thus treats the concept of *la vie la mort* and the encounter with Freud as a key for unlocking one of the more vexing questions of Derrida's oeuvre: how to reconcile Derrida's engagement with problems that would be considered typically the province of social-political philosophy, if not applied ethics, and that therefore suggest a normative dimension of his thought—animal rights, the death penalty—with the type of "aporetic" writings for which he, rightly or wrongly, is more commonly known. By identifying *la vie la mort* and

¹³ Jacques Derrida, *Life Death*, trans. Pascale-Anne Brault and Michael Naas (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2020); *The Death Penalty, Vol. 1*, trans. Peggy Kamuf (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2014); *The Death Penalty, Vol. 2*, trans. Elizabeth Rottenberg (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2017); *The Beast and the Sovereign, Vol. 1*, trans. Geoffrey Bennington (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009); *The Beast and the Sovereign, Vol. 2*, trans. Geoffrey Bennington (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011).

survivance as concepts around which the project of deconstruction coheres, *From Life to Survival* offers a new image of the Derridean archive for critical consideration.

Trumbull's centering of the engagement with Freud in Derrida's formulation of *la vie la mort* is one way he says *From Life to Survival* departs from but also adds to existing scholarship on Derrida's theorizations of life (3). Another way is in terms of the normative dimensions of deconstruction that he seeks to bring forth from this centering (3-4). After stating these points in the opening of the book's introduction, Trumbull proceeds to outline the basic contours of each of the book's five main chapters.

The first chapter, "From Grammatology to Life Death," returns to Derrida's works from 1967—*Voice and Phenomenon*, *Of Grammatology*, and *Writing and Difference*—and recovers in these works what might be called proto-conceptions of *la vie la mort* that Trumbull argues are formed in intimate relation to some of Derrida's guiding concepts, including arche-writing, trace, and *différance*. Life, Trumbull shows, has been a question for deconstruction since its inception. From Derrida's attention in *Voice and Phenomenon* to Husserl's concept of the "living present" (*lebendige Gegenwart*) as an event that requires its deferral (which is to say, as a movement of *différance*), to the appearance of the trace (*la trace*) in *Of Grammatology* as the name for the necessary gathering and incorporation of the other within the ontology of the Same, the foundational (i.e., "ultra-transcendental") concepts of deconstruction arise out of a confrontation with the question of life, and life, in turn, becomes a question of its relation to its other, which is to say death (13-14). Citing *Of Grammatology*, Trumbull writes, "Life, here, is thought in terms of what Derrida calls 'the economy of death'" (14-15).¹⁴ As Trumbull goes on to show, it is upon the basis of this conception of the economy of death that Derrida is propelled into the encounter with the Freudian death drive and that he unfolds the concepts of *la vie la mort* and *survivance*.

After reviewing how the question of life emerges in *Voice and Phenomenon* and *Of Grammatology*, chapter 1 devotes the main part of its discussion to how the question manifests in "Freud and the Scene of Writing," Derrida's first reading of Freud, which was published in *Writing and Difference*. Freud's image of the mystic writing pad, and the figure of writing in general, is of course a means through which Derrida is able to draw forth the trace structure of Freud's conception of *Nachträglichkeit* (deferred action). However, as Trumbull recounts, insofar as the trace and *différance* speak to the movement of life as an economy of death, the ultimate question of how this movement may also be at work in Freud's conception of (psychic) life as such comprises a specific focus of Derrida's reading. Working deliberately through Freud's early formulations of the pleasure principle (in addition to *Interpretation of Dreams* (1900), he reviews Freud's *Project for a Scientific Psychology* (1895) and "Note on the 'Mystic Writing Pad'" (1925)), Trumbull also works through Derrida's examination of those formulations uncovering the principle's paradoxical requirement that pleasure be both pursued *and deferred*: the imperative is to realize pleasure (the release of excitation or tension that threaten the organism's equilibrium), but doing so fully, accomplishing complete expenditure, would result in the death of the organism. Thus, some excitation or tension—some threat to the life of the organism—must be maintained (27-29).

This paradox of the pleasure principle, Trumbull explicates, is seen by Derrida as an opening of *la vie la mort* in Freud's text—the conception of life as harboring a necessary exposure to death, life as *la vie la mort* (27-29). Yet, as Trumbull also explains, while Freud may have made this discovery of *la vie la mort*, its paradox becomes an obstacle for his thought,

¹⁴ See Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976), 69.

which causes him to suppress, perhaps even deny, its discovery (33-34). This unconscious of Freudian thought, Trumbull argues, will nonetheless become generative for deconstruction and ultimately central for its project (34).

In Chapter 2, “Interrogating the Death Drive,” Trumbull traces the next step in the development of *la vie la mort* in Derrida’s thought by continuing his deep dual engagement with both Freud’s text and Derrida’s reading of Freud. The works with which the second chapter is concerned include Freud’s *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920), Derrida’s *La vie la mort* seminar, and Derrida’s essay “To Speculate—on ‘Freud,’” published in *The Post Card* (1980).

The importance of *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* for Derrida’s *la vie la mort* lies in the fact that this is the primary text where Freud posits his theory of the drives and, more specifically, the existence of the death drive as a possible solution to the paradox posed by the pleasure principle. As Trumbull shows, though, the death drive is not a solution at all; it instead intensifies the intimate entanglement of life and death. Emphasizing Freud’s characterization of the pleasure principle as “noisy” and the death drive as “mute,” Trumbull explains that the death drive’s very muteness renders it inaccessible to speculation, which means it is through his very attempt to theorize the death drive that Freud fuels its resistance to theorization (48). After his careful reconstruction of Freud’s theory of the drives, Trumbull reviews how Derrida seizes upon this “failure” of Freud’s text in order to view this failure as the writing of life itself—beyond the idea of *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* as having autobiographical elements and instead the idea of life itself (*bios*) as an event of writing, as auto-bio-graphy (49). Freud’s “failure” to theorize the death drive is an unintentional—indeed unconscious (50)—sign of his text’s attunement with it as a movement of writing, with the trace structure of *la vie la mort* and its “*différential*” essence (57).

While Freud’s failure is predicated on his fidelity to the logic of opposition and non-contradiction (57), it is nonetheless a productive one, for, as Trumbull proceeds to argue, it allows Derrida to elicit the “expropriative” nature of *la vie la mort*, the revelation that one’s “proper death” is always-already imbricated in a relation to the other, to the improper (58). In place of the dualistic (i.e., metaphysical) logic of opposition that blinds Freud to the trace structure of *la vie la mort* in his theorization of the drives, Derrida brings out well the logic of “stricture” that he finds in Freud’s conceptualization of the binding relation between the pleasure principle and the death drive (58-64). As Trumbull emphasizes from Derrida’s engagement with Freud’s theory of the drives, the logics of expropriation and stricture are essential to any possibility of life at all. Life, if it is to be possible at all, must entail the exposure to alterity named by *la vie la mort*, otherwise, it would not be possible for life to unfold in any kind of becoming whatsoever. It would instead be pure identity, pure stasis, and therefore not life at all (64).

The power of Trumbull’s methodical analyses of Freud and Derrida in the book’s first two chapters take on full force in Chapter 3, “Survival as Autoimmunity.” Moving fully into Derrida’s corpus, Trumbull traces how the concept of *la vie la mort* matures into the concept of *survivance* in Derrida’s thought. Threading these concepts through such works as *Specters of Marx* (1993), *Archive Fever* (1995), and *Rogues* (2003), as well as essays such as “Faith and Knowledge” (2001) and “Autoimmunity: Real and Symbolic Suicides” (2003), it is in this chapter that the degree of Trumbull’s command of Derrida’s oeuvre comes impressively into view.

In addition to building upon the analyses from the first two chapters, this chapter sets up the arguments of the fourth and fifth chapters, which are aimed at elucidating the normative force

Trumbull contends is contained within Derrida's conceptualization of *la vie la mort* and in the project of deconstruction generally. The third chapter prepares the ground in two ways: first, by connecting the death drive and *la vie la mort* to Derrida's concepts of *survivance* and autoimmunity, and secondly, by emphasizing the collective reach of the concept of autoimmunity to open up the social-political implications, and thus normative force, that Trumbull holds follow from Derrida's transformative engagement with Freud.

Derrida's conception of autoimmunity follows the phenomenon as defined in medicine; as noted previously, it describes the moment that an organism's immune system attacks itself instead of protecting it against outside infection. Where in the medical context the autoimmune response is always regarded as a pathological condition, Derrida expands the metaphor to the idea of a community as social organism or ego and that organism's tendency to mobilize its defenses against perceived others to such a degree that it actually results in self-inflicted harm, which, as suggested, evokes events such as the existing "response" (which effectively has been a non-response) to the COVID-19 global pandemic. This is the limit of the autoimmune metaphor in the medical sense, however, for as Trumbull indicates, the autoimmune response is not a pathological condition in the social organism. Or rather, it both is and isn't: in order for the social organism to survive, as in *sur-vive* or "live on," it must open itself up to alterity. Otherwise, it would collapse into itself as an ego cut off from the world, from difference. "Autoimmunity, then, is inevitable," writes Trumbull, "because it is necessary, insofar as it describes, from a philosophical perspective, how the living entity has to compromise its self-protection in order to live in time and space" (73). Rather than pathological, autoimmunity offers a non-theological, i.e., non-metaphysical, image of community that is open to difference and becoming, not a false image where it transcends and is thereby immune to them (77). The theological image of community is a metaphysical defense against existence, a denial of life as *la vie la mort*.

Derrida's conception of autoimmunity inspires questions about its relationship to the psychoanalytic concept of the ego defenses, as well as Nietzsche's critique of nihilism. While Trumbull acknowledges these questions at relevant points, he does not pursue these connections directly. Staying within the Derridean frame, he instead outlines the "phantasms" that Derrida traces as defenses against the fact of autoimmunity, which Trumbull inserts into the overall tableau of what he calls Derrida's "radical conception of finitude" (70). These phantasms, which Trumbull notes are not unlike but nonetheless distinct from what psychoanalysis calls fantasies (111-18), are the foundational metaphysical assumptions of institutions like the death penalty. Chief among these is the phantasm of "superlife," an onto-theological image of life untouched and protected against the reality of *la vie la mort* to which human beings alone (as opposed to the non-human animal) are regarded as having exclusive access and in the name of which human beings speak (104-05). As Trumbull argues in the book's final two chapters, working through Derrida's seminars *The Beast and the Sovereign* and *The Death Penalty*, deconstruction not only works to critically undermine such phantasms; by exposing them as phantasmatic, deconstruction also submits that they *ought* to be undermined, that they need to be undermined, if the truth of *la vie la mort* is ever to be acknowledged.

While all of the chapters comprising *From Life to Survival* are carefully argued and meticulously researched, the last two take the most risk in putting forth the claim of deconstruction's normative force, a position not readily embraced by Derrida scholars for the simple fact that it is difficult to imagine making any kind of normative claim that would not expose itself to deconstruction's critique. In an interesting move, Trumbull seeks to dispel such hesitation by describing deconstruction's critique—and what he calls its "weak" normative force

(111; 118-26)—as a making visible of those phantasms that are meant to remain invisible (109). The fifth chapter, devoted to Derrida’s critique of the death penalty, reconstructs Derrida’s effort to make visible the phantasms of superlife, as well as the mastery, that “ground” the metaphysical certainty espoused by both defenders and detractors of the death penalty.

From Life to Survival is a valuable contribution to the scholarship on Derrida’s relationship to Freud. While other studies on this relationship have also recently appeared, such as Elizabeth Rothenberg’s *For the Love of Psychoanalysis: The Play of Chance in Freud and Derrida*,¹⁵ *From Life to Survival* pursues the connection through a focused treatment of *la vie la mort*. It thus offers another compelling way to encounter and understand not only Derrida’s relationship to Freud, but in its deliberate reconstruction of Derrida’s writings, his oeuvre overall. As impressive as this is, I did find myself wanting to read more about the early works, especially *Voice and Phenomenon* and *Of Grammatology*. Although I found their treatments useful, they were briefer than I expected. While the question of writing as it appears in those early works was certainly present in Trumbull’s analyses and touched on at different points throughout the book, I cannot help but feel that if the question of writing had been allowed to come through more forcefully, it may have caused Trumbull to reconsider the tack he takes at the outset of the book, which is to argue for the relevance of Derrida’s thought in light of the so-called material turns of contemporary critical thought. Rather than accept the premises of these turns (most immediately, their definitions of materiality), I would have liked to hear what Trumbull thinks the imbrication of writing and *la vie la mort* in Derrida can expose by way of the phantasms animating them. But this question is perhaps another way that the archive announces itself in the wake of Derrida’s death and testifies not to what is lost, as he feared, but what remains to be recovered in the *la vie la mort* of “his” text.

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¹⁵ Elizabeth Rothenberg, *For the Love of Psychoanalysis: The Play of Chance in Freud and Derrida* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2019).