

In Dignity: Worthy of the Name of Michael Naas

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A promise that goes by the name "Derrida"... (p.187)

A number of things happened when Derrida died in 2004. Five years have passed since that event, but no real measure, I think, has yet been taken of that departure that was anything but a disappearance. In my own case, what I have tried more than once since then to describe as a "militant melancholia," – hoping to draw some strength from some of Derrida's own remarks (also quoted by Michael Naas here in *Derrida From Now On*) about the "ethical" protest of melancholia against "normal" mourning – that "militant melancholia", no doubt by some inner force (or weakness) of melancholia itself, has lost some of its brave-faced militancy and settled into a quieter but more depressive sadness that I have tried on occasion to align with what Derrida calls here and there (mostly in the 1970s) "demi-deuil," half-mourning, a mourning marked by an internal interruption or disruption of its teleological fulfillment and narcissistic recovery. What I habitually and perhaps a little naively call "work," my ongoing, outgoing, busy projects, my work as intrinsically work of mourning, for example the ongoing seminar publication and translation project, with all its narcissistic investments, its satisfactions and disappointments – this "work" works uneasily alongside such melancholic sadness, and has often flirted with a looming sense of the pointlessness of it all. Sometimes, however – in my case rather rarely I'm afraid – the rather gloomy and droopy self-regard that can result is interrupted by some event that shakes it, rouses it to some response, and awakens in it some renewed desire for thought, some revived sense of responsibility. For me, Michael Naas's book has been one such event.

What I hope to do today is less to attempt any kind of global reading of the rich and diverse chapters that make up this wonderful book, which I read in constant admiration and only the most occasional slight “murmur,” as Derrida might have said, and more to follow, or pull, one thread that runs more or less discretely, especially through its earlier chapters, and that leads me to use in the title of this talk the word “dignity,” a word I think Michael Naas uses only once “in his own name” in his book (211),¹ and does not thematize as such. This thread, has at least obliquely to do with the issues of mourning, melancholia and narcissism I have just briefly evoked, and that are themselves the object of some commentary by Naas in the book’s penultimate chapter. Here, as part of a powerful and original account of Derrida’s use of the word and concept “phantasm,” Naas transitions from an account of a “first phantasm,” namely “the phantasm of a self purely present to itself” (193), via a relating of that phantasm of self-presence as hearing-oneself-speak, and hearing-oneself-speak as bespeaking a kind of ownership of one’s so-called mother tongue, to a slightly displaced or extended version of that same phantasm:

Beyond or just beyond this first phantasm of a self that believes it can speak and hear itself in a natural language, in a mother tongue, would be a self that believes – that desires – that it can bring what it engenders back into its orbit. In “Passions” [...] Derrida argues:

The infinite paradoxes of what is so calmly called narcissism are outlined here: suppose that X, something or someone (a trace, a work, an institution, a child) bears your name, that is to say your title. The naïve rendering or common phantasm [*fantasme courant*: common illusion] is that you have given your name to X, thus all that returns to X, in a direct or indirect way, in a straight or an oblique line, *returns* to you, as a profit for your narcissism. (“P,” 11-12) (Naas, 193-4)

Although Naas’s point in commenting on this passage is to insist on a kind of dogged persistence of this phantasm even in the face of its inevitable failures, I am here going to be more interested in what he refers to in a concessive clause (again briefly quoting Derrida) as its *a priori*

¹ The context is not insignificant, as we shall see a little later: “... the other as phenomenon compromises the phenomenon of the mother as phantasm, that is, as an essentially “masculine” phantasm, the mother as unique, natural, organic, beyond history, the source of a life beyond life, a divinity, the source of a priceless dignity of life, of a life to be sacrificed in the name of what goes beyond life, and so on.”

frustration. In Naas's gloss, that *a priori* frustration of narcissism is a frustration by "the *phenomenon* of narcissism, since we *are not* our name or our title or our children" (194). "We are not our name," and the gap that this fact opens up between the name and that of which it is the name is where I want to dwell for a while today.

This gap, which is one way of formulating the very principle of *différance* as it both generates and disrupts the apparently self-same, and which can be related readily enough to the thematic of the signature in Derrida, whereby what I sign as mine is simultaneously appropriated and expropriated, ex-appropriated, separates itself from me and goes off on its own, quite indifferent to my well-being or continued survival² – this gap appears, or so it seems to me, in a number of different guises in Derrida, and here in Naas's Derrida.

This configuration I'm interested in shows up first in idioms such as "in the name of." The gap between name and bearer or object of that name is obviously at work here: if I do something in the name of Michael Naas, for example (as I am to some extent doing here today), I do so to the extent that I am obviously *not* Michael Naas, but have some relation (perhaps one of representation, but thereby always potentially one of usurpation and even imposture), or at least *claim* to have some relation to Naas, whether or not he approves of my so doing, and whether or not what I do in his name tends more towards the satisfaction or the frustration of his narcissism (assuming the two are so clearly separable). I imagine Michael is right now somewhat inhabiting this structure, with its various pleasures and anxieties to do with the joys and risks of *exposure* in all the senses of that word. (The more so in that I was inconsiderate enough not to have finished this in time to send Michael a copy in advance.) And this configuration would hold too for the relation of Naas to Derrida in his book: *Derrida From Now On*, saliently in the inscription of the name "Derrida" in its title, announces that it is doing

² Derrida's explication in *Passions* continues: "But as you *are not* your name nor your title and as, as the name or the title, X precisely does perfectly well without you, and your life, namely the place toward which something could *return*, as that is the definition and very possibility of every trace, every name and every title, your narcissism is *a priori* frustrated of that from which it profits or hopes to profit." (French edition, p. 32)

something “in the name of Derrida,” and must be prepared to negotiate that structure as best it can, with all the responsibilities that entails. The emphasis in a case such as this is less on the extent to which there is expropriation, and more, always within the general structure of expropriation of course, of a certain, not exactly reappropriative, appropriateness of what then ensues.

Within this general and already quite complicated structure, or perhaps in a parallel, related structure, I am interested in cases where the name in question, the name of that in the name of which something is said or done, is not the so-called proper name of a person and more especially an author, but the name of a concept or an idea. Let me quote from Naas’s first chapter, entitled “*Alors, qui êtes-vous?*”, to illustrate a kind of transition from the relation to the name of an author to the kind of case I am hoping to approach:

Alors, qui êtes-vous? In a sense, that is the question Derrida asked of everyone he read, not in order to evaluate, assess, or define once and for all, not so as to learn or speak the truth of Plato or Hegel or Heidegger, but in order to bear witness to the singularity of a proper name and the promise it bears. Between two equally imperious laws: to read a text in the terms the text itself lays out, as if in response to the ontological question “Who or what are you?” to read according to all the respected and time-honored protocols of interpretation and good scholarship, emphasizing the historical context, the original language of the text [Naas is here glossing, perhaps, and perhaps not entirely uncontroversially, what Derrida’s earlier work typically calls “commentary”], the hidden assumptions and presuppositions, and so on [what that same early Derrida often calls “interpretation”], but then [now moving to what the final chapter of *Speech and Phenomena* calls “reading through” the text, neither commentary nor interpretation] to try to discover another logic organizing the text, beyond the intention or self-conscious presentation of the author, something that would *not* be a truer, more definitive answer to the question *Alors, qui êtes-vous?* “Who are you, Plato?” or “Who are you, Heidegger?” but an open question that would invite us to rethink the tradition and countersign it in our turn. *All in the name*, [my emphasis] as Derrida would put it, of a promise or a secret sealed in the name, *in the name* [my emphasis again] of what within the tradition resists every answer to the question *Alors, qui êtes-vous?* – something like the event, or, perhaps especially today, *life*. (29-30)

In this general characterization of what Derrida does or invites us to do, then, the second aspect of reading involves an “in the name of” structure which is what releases reading from mere commentary or interpretation and gives it a relation to the future which is, however, dictated by something in the name, a promise or a secret sealed in the name (Naas has a lot of good things

to say about sealing and unsealing), such that our reading (in this aspect of its activity at least, beyond commentary and interpretation, where reading really *is* reading) – such that our reading is done in the name of something about the name, in the name *of* the name and its secret or promise. And this would perhaps be a succinct way of redescribing what Naas’s earlier book called, in its very title, “Taking on the Tradition.”

Of course, nothing says that doing or saying something in the name of someone or something makes it a *good* thing to say or do. If I was mentioning what I imagine to be Michael’s anxiety a moment ago, that is because what I say in his name always might go horribly wrong in some way. Indeed in his book, other examples of things done in the name of something are not always reassuring at all: for example, in the chapter entitled “Derrida’s *Laïcité*,” Naas quotes one of the few as yet published pieces by Derrida on the death-penalty, and explains that in the exemplary cases of Socrates, Jesus, al-Hallâj and Joan of Arc, the death-penalty was invoked by the state and “each was thus condemned *in the name of* a certain transcendence for worshipping or claiming a relationship with another transcendence or a counter-transcendence.” (67) [I’ll skip a couple of further examples.] And just a little later, Naas glosses the point further, writing “Rather than simply opposing the theological, the state wishes to have a monopoly over it. It thus uses the death penalty not so much to protect the lives of its citizens as to take or sacrifice natural life *in the name of* an excess or hyperbolization of life, that is, *in the name of* a certain transcendence.” (*Ibid.*) Or more generally, helpfully unpacking the mysteries of Derrida’s late interest in the question of life, “it is this emphasis on sovereignty and life, on superabundant life, on what can easily become sacrifice *in the name of* that life, that has to be questioned if not countered, I believe Derrida believed, by a relentless, vigilant, and affirmative interrogation of the way in which life as such is only ever possible in relation to death.” (60)

In the time that I have today, I want to try to relate this specific kind of relay-structure (“X in the name of Y”) to another pervasive Derridean idiom that has interested and puzzled me

for several years, and that will finally begin to justify, I hope, the title that I have given to these remarks. This is the idiom, “an X *digne de ce nom*,” usually translated as “an X worthy of the name,” or “worthy of this name.”³ Naas himself often picks up or inherits this idiom, uses it in Derrida’s name, as it were, but also in his own, more especially in the earlier chapters of his book. And he helps us see how it might be related to the “X in the name of Y” structure I have just been talking about. In his first chapter on hospitality, he writes the following, as part of an explication of the difficult relation in Derrida between conditional and unconditional hospitality:

Even though absolute or unconditional hospitality becomes conditioned the moment it is codified, the moment it is put into practice or law, the moment it becomes effective [...], this unconditional hospitality remains that which draws and inspires all effective hospitality, and it remains the only hospitality *in the name of which* [this time Naas’s emphasis] any hospitality can be offered. (24)

And now let me quote a slightly earlier moment in the explication to show the link between this “in the name of” and the “worthy of the name:” “If unconditional hospitality is impossible, or *the impossible*, it is the only hospitality that can give any meaning to the concept of hospitality itself and, thus, the only possible hospitality, the only one *worthy of this name*” (22, my emphasis). One page later, now stressing the “impossible” in this unconditional hospitality, so that on the one hand hospitality “makes no sense” without this unconditional aspect, but on the other “makes *no sense* [this time Naas italicizes “no sense”]” without a number of specificities that compromise that unconditionality, we get an apparently slightly different construal of what a hospitality “worthy of the name” would look like: “Indeed there would seem to be no hospitality *worthy of the name* in a general invitation or welcome that is not extended by some particular host with a name and an identity to some particular guest...” (23, my emphasis). So it seems on the one hand that unconditional hospitality is the name or gives the name in the name of which

³ In her very recent *Animal Lessons* (Columbia University Press, 2009), Kelly Oliver also draws attention to Derrida’s use of this idiom, and relates it to his use of the concept of purity. Oliver’s appeal to the idea of a “homeopathic” structure is related (though not identical) to what I argue later about interruption and disruption.

any hospitality makes sense (almost by definition it is the only hospitality worthy of the name in that it is hospitality *itself*, unfettered as it were, unconstrained by any limits or conditions); but that on the other hand any hospitality worthy of that name, any actual act of hospitality carried out in the name of that unconditional hospitality and seeking to be worthy of its name, must accept conditions and limits if it is actually to be an act of hospitality. The one hospitality (the unconditional one) is worthy of the name because it just is itself, coincides with what the name names; the other (the conditional and conditioned) is worthy of the name in the sense that it is done *in the name* of the other, unconditional hospitality, and thereby exhibits the kind of gap or relay-structure I alluded to earlier. An act of hospitality is worthy of the name not because it simply coincides with its name but because it is done *in the name* of what it never quite is, so that Naas can go on to say that “I would thus like to believe – though, of course, this must remain a matter of belief and can never be proven or justified – that I received a hospitality *worthy of its name* in the seminar of Jacques Derrida that day in 1988...” (27, my emphasis).

The worthiness or dignity in question here is complex, then. A little further on again, Naas says that “the law of unconditional hospitality ‘inspires,’ ‘draws,’ and ‘guides’ the many conditional laws of hospitality. It is thus *in the name* [Naas’s emphasis] of the law of unconditional hospitality that conditional laws are made effective and are inscribed *in history*, even if those conditional laws inevitab[ly] betray the law of the unconditional and even if they not only expose the perfectibility of this law to pervertibility but sometimes hinder its progress and even lead to its regression” (25). What are we to make of the relation between the apparently absolute and almost tautologous dignity or worthiness of the unconditional and the apparently inevitable betrayal of that dignity, the unworthiness of the conditioned and conditional?

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In a short paper I wrote in the Spring of 2000 for a London conference entitled “Derrida’s arguments,” in which Derrida himself participated, I drew his attention to his recent frequent use of the idiom “an X worthy of the name, *digne du nom*.”⁴ I was puzzled at the time (and still am) by this appeal to worthiness or dignity in contexts where the most obvious feature being brought out might seem to be a necessary failing or falling short. I was thinking about the logic of “necessary (im)possibility,” which seemed to entail that any X worthy of its name has to be thought of in intimate relation with what seems to threaten its very possibility even as it makes it possible. So, for example, no performative (or indeed any other speech act) worthy of the name is not structurally threatened by the necessary possibility of misfiring, and that standing possibility is a structural or necessary possibility to the extent that it does not supervene accidentally or contingently on a prior immaculate ideal structure, but constitutes the most “ideal” case from the start, and defines it as what it is, through its necessary failure to be itself. Success in general is haunted by the necessary possibility of failure, and that necessary possibility does not go away in actual cases of apparent success. The letter that duly arrives at its destination continues, famously, to be “tormented by a kind of inner drift” that just is the ongoing, structural, “necessary-possibility-of-non-arrival” that is not simply absorbed by the *de facto* arrival of the letter in question. The most worthy seemed to me always to be thus marked by a kind of inner unworthiness, the most dignified by a kind of inner indignity. My initial hypothesis in this context was (and I think still is) that the question (or at least the idiom) of being “*digne de son nom*” emerges only when deconstructive attention is turned less to those concepts that were constitutively marginalized or secondarized by metaphysics (the sign, writing, metaphor, and so on), as was the case in “classical” deconstruction, and more to a kind of deconstructive retrieval of those concepts that might appear to be more favorably looked on by metaphysics (presence, for example, or God). (In fact, I’m going to stick my neck out and

⁴ See my “... you meant,” in *Other Analyses: Reading Philosophy* (ebook from bennington.zsoft.co.uk, 2004), 83-94. This question was subsequently the object of public discussion between us at conferences in New York (2002) and Coimbra (2003).

claim that Derrida *never* uses this idiom “in his own name” in any of the classic texts up to and including the three books published in 1972 and probably later.)⁵ The gesture still seems to be one whereby the “old name” is taken from metaphysics, according to the logic of what Derrida used to call paleonymy (laid out by Michael Naas on p. 84 of his book, and memorably described by him there as “the practice of reinscribing an old name in the name of a *promise* or even a *secret* harbored within that name” (84)). But once the “old name” taken from metaphysics is not a term that was systematically being abased or belittled or at least secondarized, then it makes a kind of intuitive sense to take that name from metaphysics (as one must, because of the irreducibility of inheritance in general, the necessity of starting “in a text already”) and, as it were, say back to metaphysics, “OK, this is your idea, let’s see what it has to be to live up to its promise and to be worthy of the name you have given it.” And the deconstructive demonstration would seem to involve showing first that these concepts (let me say by way of a slight provocation these *sovereign* concepts, as opposed to the secondarized and supposedly servile concepts that were the initial “way in” taken by deconstruction in the 60s and 70s), if they are to be worthy of their name (if we are to take them at all seriously as putatively sovereign, with all the *dignitas* that sovereignty implies) always fall foul of aporias and paradoxes, succeed only in failing or in falling, and that their “dignity” is therefore a little overblown in the metaphysical construal of them.

At the time, Jacques confessed that he had never really noticed that he was using the idiom so much, and would think about it. A couple of years later, after the Cerisy conference of 2002, he sent me some notes he had made on the subject as part of a projected sequel to “Circumfession.”⁶ Some of you will recall that in *Rogues*, written for the Cerisy event, he writes (this is part of an extremely tricky and complex rhetorical and conceptual sequence near the

⁵ In my 1997 essay “Forever Friends” I briefly address Derrida’s use of this idiom of saying something “in one’s own name” (117-20).

⁶ These notes are the object of forthcoming work.

beginning of the text, that I cannot here reconstitute) that his use of the expression “démocratie à venir” might look self-indulgently indeterminate,

comme si j'avais accordé la préférence à bien des indéterminations, à bien des équivoques. Comme si j'avais cédé à la vertu apophatique de quelque théologie négative qui ne dit pas son nom, au lieu de commencer par une définition rigoureuse de ce qu'est proprement et de ce que signifie présentement la « démocratie ». Cette défaillance serait perceptible *là où je ne sais pas*, et ne sais surtout pas si cela relève d'un savoir, ce que veut dire proprement et ce que serait présentement une démocratie digne de ce nom. Ni ce que veut dire « digne de ce nom », locution dont je me sers si souvent et qui appellera un jour, de ma part, une longue justification.

[...as though I had given preference to many indeterminacies, many equivocations. As it I had given in to the apophatic virtue of some negative theology that does not speak its name, instead of beginning with a rigorous definition of what « democracy » properly means and what it currently signifies. This failing would be perceptible *where I do not know*, and especially do not know if this is a question of knowledge, what a democracy worthy of this name means and what it would currently be. Nor what “worthy of this name” means, that locution I use so often and which will one day call for a long justification on my part.]

(V, 27-8 ; the idiom « digne de ce nom » reappears in *Voyous* on pp. 66, 120, 123, 173, 189, 198, 205, 210 : 8 more times, then.)

That promised or threatened “long justification” never came, of course (and the notes he sent me, whatever their interest, certainly do not amount to that justification). But I'd like to suggest in conclusion the possibility of a complex kind of “second-level” reinscription of dignity *itself* in its relation to its name, or in the “worthy” relation anything whatsoever might have to its name. So not just: what is it for an X in general to be worthy of its name, *digne de son nom*, but more abyssally: what is a *dignity* worthy of its name? *Qu'est-ce qu'une dignité digne de ce nom?* And this I think is related to the promissory dimension of Derrida's work that Naas brings out so beautifully in a number of the chapters of his book, and has to do with the very future of deconstruction and the “from now on,” the *désormais*, that gives Naas his title and keeps him and us going, keeps us reading, for example here today. The initial deconstructive attention to the supposed dignity of metaphysical concepts locates in all of them a kind of constitutive indignity, a failing to live up to their promise. What is thereby brought low, so to speak, is not however the promise *itself*, the promise or secret sealed in the name, but its specific metaphysical instantiations, which leave the promissory dimension open. Thinking *through* the

aporias thus brought to light, it seems as though the problems we saw with a hospitality that is *digne de ce nom* only by being in some ways never *digne de ce nom* still leave us with a *promise* of hospitality that has some guiding virtue with respect to the situations in which an always conditional hospitality is being always more or less unworthily and even undignifiedly exercised, and in light of which the always unworthy hospitality can always also aspire to an impossible worthiness or dignity. This “promise” is naturally enough *itself* subject to the “worthy of the name” logic, in that it is part of a promise worthy of the name to include the necessary possibility (the threat, the promise) of non-fulfillment of various types (for example in what Derrida calls “perjury”). The relation we can have to *this* further complicated dignity of the promise itself (a quick way of summarizing it is to say that it just is the “justice” appealed to in *Force of Law* as the undeconstructible condition of deconstruction, the “justice of thought,” as *The University Without Condition* has it, *in the name of which* we are still making our more or less melancholy way: and this is confirmed by some of Derrida’s comments in an interview that Naas quotes in a note⁷) – the relation we can have to this further dignity, always to-come, like democracy, can look as close as can be to the relation we can have to the Kantian regulative idea, which also might be taken to “inspire,” “draw,” and “guide” our more or less feeble empirical efforts to achieve greater things. It is my hypothesis that when in *Rogues* Derrida merely promises one day to explain himself as to his use of the *digne de son nom* idiom, he actually

⁷ “The undeconstructible, if there is such a thing, is justice. Law [*le droit*] is, fortunately, deconstructible: it is infinitely perfectible. I would be tempted to see *justice* as the best term, today, for what will not let itself be deconstructed, that is, for what gives deconstruction its movement, for what justifies it. It is the affirmative experience of the coming of the other as other: it is better for this to arrive than the contrary (the experience of the event that will not let itself simply be translated into an ontology: that something should be, that there should be something rather than nothing). The openness of the future is worth more; that is the axiom of deconstruction, that on the basis of which it has always set itself in motion and which links it, as with the future itself, to otherness, to the priceless dignity of otherness, that is to say, to justice.” (*Negotiations*, 104-5; partially quoted by Naas, p. 248 n15.) It is perhaps worth pointing out, partly in response to something Derrida writes in his notes about finding the Greek etymology of “dignity,” that according to the OED, one sense of “dignity” is an “[Erroneous or fantastic rendering of Gr. *acioma*, ‘honour, worth, dignity’, also ‘first principle, axiom’.] A self-evident theorem, an axiom.”: the “axiom of deconstruction” would then just be its dignity.

displaces some of that explanation onto the much longer and more careful treatment of the Idea in the Kantian sense, to which he is prepared to concede all kinds of virtue (all kinds of dignity), while nonetheless taking pains to distinguish what he is doing from it.

This hunch or suspicion of an intimate but potentially conflictual relation between the “digne du nom” structure and the regulative Idea can readily find some textual support: near the end of the first essay in *Voyous* (the Cerisy piece, then), returning to the expression “démocratie à venir,” Derrida tracks some of the occurrences of that expression in his earlier work, and notes that each time it comes up he seems concerned to distinguish it from “a regulative Idea in the Kantian sense” (V, 122). (So just as, in general, as I’ve argued elsewhere,⁸ critique is what deconstruction perhaps most looks like but most urgently is not [this in fact being one of those rare tiny murmurs provoked in me by Michael Naas’s book, which regularly uses the word “critique,” in a way the French might describe as *sans complexes*, to describe what Derrida does (cf. *Passions*, 48-9), whereas I am myself pretty *complexé* about this], so “regulative Idea in the Kantian sense” is what democracy-to-come (and by extension the other unconditionals – justice in general, if you like, openness to the other as other) most looks like and from which it must most urgently be distinguished.) Before going into some (still, however, somewhat elliptical) detail as to why the tempting assimilation with the Kantian Idea is to be resisted, Derrida writes this strange and oddly dense sequence:

Il reste que, faute de mieux, si on peut dire « faute de mieux » à propos d'une Idée régulatrice, l'Idée régulatrice reste peut-être une ultime réserve. Ce dernier recours a beau risquer de devenir un alibi, il garde une dignité. Je ne jurerais pas de ne jamais y céder. (V, 122)

[Let me translate this a little awkwardly, but a little more literally than Michael Naas and Pascale-Anne Brault’s own very fluent version : “The fact remains that, for want of something better, if one can say “for want of something better” about a regulative Idea, the regulative Idea remains perhaps an ultimate reserve. This last resort may well risk becoming an alibi, it retains a dignity. I would not swear never to give in to it.]

« Il garde une dignité, » it retains a dignity, or perhaps it preserves, or even guards, a dignity.

⁸ See my “Almost the End,” in *Interrupting Derrida* (London: Routledge, 2000), 141-52.

Something about dignity, the very dignity of dignity, can be preserved by the regulative Idea (so long as it does not become an alibi) whence the strange, multiply negative sentence that follows the mention of dignity here: I would not swear never to give in (or yield) to it, I would not swear that I never give in to it, or perhaps, as Michael Naas and Pascale-Anne Brault translate boldly, but perfectly plausibly, “I cannot swear that I will not *one day* give in to it.” (*Rogues*, 83, my emphasis).

There would be a good deal more to say about the pages that follow, and Derrida’s three sorts of reasons for wanting to separate “*démocratie à venir*” from the regulative Idea and its residual or retained dignity (the first reason to do with the affirmation of the impossible as part of the structure of the *à-venir*; the second to do with refusing the notion of “rule” lurking in the name “regulative;” the third to do with a reticence about buying into the whole architectonic of Kantian critique more generally).⁹ And it would be possible to pursue this issue into the second essay in *Voyous*, where the very gesture of “saving the honor” of reason is evidently not to be separated from this question of dignity (see especially p. 169).¹⁰ This second essay further explicitly addresses the concept of dignity itself, still in Kant, by suggesting that the irreducibility of reason to the merely rational in the sense of the calculable shows up in Kant’s *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals* in the concept of *Würde*, usually translated as dignity, which is incalculable, beyond equivalence and therefore beyond any market price or assignable value, and explicitly wants to “continue to accompany this Kantian concept of

⁹ The question of the relation of deconstruction to the Kantian Idea seems to return again and again, as though it obeyed something of the logic of the transcendental illusion itself: deconstructive unconditionals cannot help but look like Kantian Ideas, even when we (and Derrida) know that they are really quite different. My own first attempt to bring out that difference dates from 1988: “A very common misconception of what Derrida is about [...] assumes that *différance* just is the postponement to infinity of the Kantian Idea” (“Deconstruction and the Philosophers (The Very Idea),” in *Legislations: the Politics of Deconstruction* (London: Verso Books, 1994), 11-60 (p. 40).

¹⁰ « Sauver l’honneur de la raison. » L’honneur de la raison, est-ce la raison ? L’honneur, est-ce raisonnable ou rationnel de part en part ? Question dont la forme peut se transférer analogiquement vers tout ce qui évalue, affirme ou prescrit la raison : préférer la raison, est-ce rationnel ou, ce qui est encore autre chose, raisonnable ? La valeur de la raison, le désir de raison, la dignité de la raison, est-ce rationnel ?

incalculable dignity,” although that dignity is of course limited by Kant to humans in a way Derrida does not accept.

So as not to go on too long, let me simplify a little and say that in all these cases the point seems to be to recognize or concede a certain measure of dignity, a certain dignity of dignity in these more or less traditional (and especially Kantian) formulations (and if I had the time to look at some passages from the *Origin of Geometry* introduction and from *Speech and Phenomena*, I could also show a regular association of this concept of dignity with the motif of the Idea itself, at least as Husserl deploys it, and would try to argue that dignity in this traditional guise is always teleological, always the dignity of a *telos*), but then, after that recognition or concession, also to try to open that dignity up, to make dignity *itself* a “dignité digne de ce nom” (that, remember, being my final question here) by registering in it a necessary falling short or, rather, a necessary interruption or disruption with respect to any achieved dignity at all. Dignity in its metaphysical and even Kantian formulation is not exactly worthy of its name, not so much because it is simply undignified, but almost in that it is trying to be too dignified, too sovereign. Dignity in general, it seems, would be worthy of the name only if it was ongoing, as it were, not given or achieved, so only if it is a little less than dignity, a little inglorious perhaps, worthy by being somewhat unworthy, dignity in-dignity: *demi-dignité*, I’d be tempted to say, by analogy with the *demi-deuil* I mentioned at the outset, where *demi-deuil* is the only possible *deuil* (it’s impossible) and *demi-dignité* the only possible (impossible) dignity.

What seems most saliently to operate this interruption or disruption (I really want to say this *scattering*) of the supposed dignity of the teleological (sovereign) fulfillment of dignity itself, however, is still marked by the “digne de ce nom” idiom. Because if there is one “thing” of which Derrida most regularly and consistently uses this idiom, and which appears most radically to resist construal in terms of the “Idea in the Kantian sense,” it is “the event.” An event worthy of the name, with its now familiar predicates of absolute unpredictability, unprogrammability and unprojectability, with its specific impossibility – an event worthy of the name “event” also

(as the post 9-11 interviews suggest) must question the very applicability of that name “event.” An event worthy of the name would explode and scatter the name of which it is worthy, in being worthy of it. And (this is my hypothesis, at any rate), this eventness in general (in its singularity), openness to the coming of which seems in Derrida to be the only truly unconditional good, the “non-ethical opening of ethics,” the very thing that will prise unconditionality away from sovereignty, is what affects the “digne de ce nom” structure in general with the structures of interruption and always-necessarily-possible indignity that I have been struggling to bring out, and that dictate the thought of a “demi-dignité” I was just mentioning. This kind of halfness or at least not-wholeness is, I think, I believe (but I’ll have to leave this for discussion), the situation of both irreducible *belief* or pre-religious *faith* the irreducibility of which in later Derrida Michael Naas brings out so clearly, a faith worthy of the name that is not knowledge, *and* of the strong sense of *reading* that Naas here defends and illustrates so beautifully. And this, I think, is what shows through in a strange, and I am tempted to say, brave and dignified (not to say a little optimistic), passage from his

Introduction:

While Derrida’s death in October 2004 must thus be lamented and his absence mourned, it must also be understood as a unique opportunity for his work. [That sentence is the strange bit.] It is perhaps now possible as it never was before to read that work on its own terms, to think and speculate about it, without the specter – indeed, as I argue at the end of this book – the *phantasm* – of Derrida’s presence at some colloquium or other, in some new book or other, coming to confirm our hypotheses about it. In other words, it is perhaps now possible as it never really was before to read his work without the phantasm of an author or a father coming to master our reading. The question remains, of course, whether we are ready for such a reading, whether we really can read him from now on without trying to bring him back, whether we really can from now on read without him, or rather, since I hope never to read without him, without the phantasm of him. (9-10)

From now on reading him with him without the phantasm of him: I hope (and can only hope) for that too. A reading that would be worthy of the name “reading” in not being merely commentary or interpretation, a reading worthy of the name, worthy of being done in the name of “Derrida” without henceforth any assurance of approval, of paternal or avuncular endorsement. That’s what, in dignity, this book, worthy of the name of Michael Naas, will have

helped us get started on, and given us a sense of how to proceed, from now on.