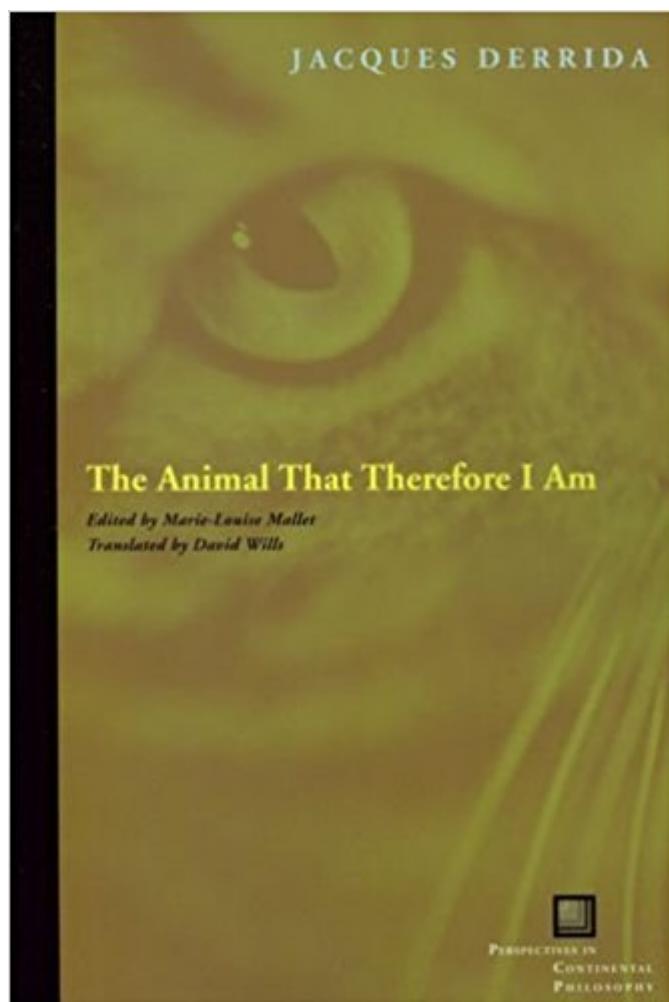


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The Animal That Therefore I Am (Perspectives In Continental Philosophy)



Synopsis

The Animal That Therefore I Am is the long-awaited translation of the complete text of Jacques Derrida's ten-hour address to the 1997 Crisy conference entitled The Autobiographical Animal, the third of four such colloquia on his work. The book was assembled posthumously on the basis of two published sections, one written and recorded session, and one informal recorded session. The book is at once an affectionate look back over the multiple roles played by animals in Derrida's work and a profound philosophical investigation and critique of the relegation of animal life that takes place as a result of the distinction-dating from Descartes-between man as thinking animal and every other living species. That starts with the very fact of the line of separation drawn between the human and the millions of other species that are reduced to a single the animal. Derrida finds that distinction, or versions of it, surfacing in thinkers as far apart as Descartes, Kant, Heidegger, Lacan, and Levinas, and he dedicates extended analyses to the question in the work of each of them. The book's autobiographical theme intersects with its philosophical analysis through the figures of looking and nakedness, staged in terms of Derrida's experience when his cat follows him into the bathroom in the morning. In a classic deconstructive reversal, Derrida asks what this animal sees and thinks when it sees this naked man. Yet the experiences of nakedness and shame also lead all the way back into the mythologies of man's dominion over the beasts and trace a history of how man has systematically displaced onto the animal his own failings or bises. The Animal That Therefore I Am is at times a militant plea and indictment regarding, especially, the modern industrialized treatment of animals. However, Derrida cannot subscribe to a simplistic version of animal rights that fails to follow through, in all its implications, the questions and definitions of life to which he returned in much of his later work.

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Customer Reviews

This book assembles the entirety of Derrida's 1997 Cerisy address on the topic of that conference (dedicated to discussing his work) "The Autobiographical Animal." That said, it still remains an unbelievable unfinished work. While humorously (and seriously) talking about a cat seeing him naked in the morning in the bathroom, or watching a TV show on a cat, or entering the bedroom while Derrida is with a woman, Derrida outlines the paths along which he might problematize the philosophical (and common-sense) regard for the animal--paths that one can plainly see would have been followed (or, at least, outlined) more extensively in a fuller, lengthier discussion (especially with respect to Heidegger). Nevertheless, Derrida here accomplishes almost too much, giving one a feel for the immensity of the problem of animality within our discourses while at the same time actually modifying elements of those discourses along immensely interesting lines. Those familiar with Derrida's corpus will find many issues or half-thoughts made elsewhere elucidated here--most notably those regarding mechanization or technology, autobiography, sex (both in terms of the erotic act and sexual difference) and life (all somewhat intertwined through a discussion of Descartes' animal-machine)--while one can imagine those more unfamiliar (or those only familiar with *either* the "early" Derrida or the "late" "ethical" Derrida) would find much of interest: keeping with the autobiographical theme of the conference, Derrida recalls much of his corpus and relates what is going on here quite explicitly to all of it.

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