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WYSCHOGROD'S HAND

SAINTS, ANIMALITY, AND THE LABOR OF LOVE

Virginia Burrus

In his lecture "Heidegger's Hand (*Geschlecht II*)," Jacques Derrida announces his topic as follows: "We are going to speak then of Heidegger. We are also going to speak of monstrosity. We are going to speak of the word *Geschlecht*."¹ The slippage from *Heidegger* to *monstrosity* to *Geschlecht*—*Geschlecht once again, a second time*, moreover—is not merely provocative but downright stagy. "I will not reopen today the question of Heidegger's 'politics,'" Derrida asserts subsequently. "But everything I will try to do now will maintain an indirect relation to another, perhaps less visible, dimension of the *same* drama. Today, I will begin then by speaking of . . . monstrosity. This will be another detour through the question of man (*Mensch* or *homo*) and of the 'we' that gives its enigmatic content to a *Geschlecht*."² Indeed, this question of *man*, of *humankind* or the human *race*, will here animate and focus Derrida's close reading of two Heideggerian texts, namely, the first lecture in *Was heisst Denken?* and the lecture on the poet Trakl in *Unterwegs zur Sprache*. It is in the former that the hand makes its appearance,³ marked as distinctly and exclusively *human*—marked, that is, by its capacity to point and, precisely in so doing, to designate the "enigmatic content of a *Geschlecht*."

Derrida prepares us for this appearance of the hand by dramatizing it in advance, calling to mind an archive of photographs of the German philosopher that once came into his *own* hands. "The play and the theater of hands in the album would deserve an entire seminar," he enthuses. "Were I not to renounce this project, I would stress the deliberately craftsmanlike staging of the hand play, of the monstration and demonstration that is exhibited there, whether it be a matter of the handling of the pen, of the wielding of the

cane, which points rather than supports, or of the water bucket near the fountain."⁴ However reluctantly, Derrida has, then, renounced engagement with Heidegger's politics and also with his photographs, so as not to have to renounce his current project. Yet each of these apophatic gestures is itself crucial to the framing of that project, it would seem. Heidegger's politics and Heidegger's photographed hand haunt Derrida's readings—the latter "the only thing that overflows the frame" on the cover of the album, as we are told. If, as Derrida argues, the doubly monstrous figure of the Heideggerian hand is the icon of a humanity that refuses animality absolutely, what is the cost of this refusal? Heidegger's own hand in politics hovers just outside the frame of Derrida's query.

Derrida's lecture, delivered in 1985 and first published in 1987, was picked up swiftly by Edith Wyschogrod. Her 1990 *Saints and Postmodernism* devotes several pages to its engagement, in a section of a chapter entitled "Thinking, Animality, and the Saintly Hand."⁵ Here I want to trace the path of Wyschogrod's reading of Derrida and, through him, of Heidegger, with regard to the hand. It will be precisely in the slippages of her reading that we shall most easily detect Wyschogrod's own hand at work. That hand gives us both saints and animals where we might not have expected to find them—in a Levinasian ethics.⁶ It gives us an innovative theory of imitation and excess that bypasses nomianism while also challenging the constraints of narrativity. Wyschogrod's saintly hand finally gives us more than a hand; it gives us the embrace of arms, of a womb, indeed of a whole body laboring in pain on behalf of so many other bodies-in-pain.

These gifts are lavish. But certain questions will press. Has Wyschogrod inadvertently closed

the distance of alterity, by appealing not to a common humanity but to a shared animality that may (or may not) add up to much the same thing? Or does her thinking of sanctity and animality together finally allow us to engage the question of *Geschlecht*, of *man*, of *monstrosity*, differently? Near the end of this essay, I shall try to circle back to these issues through a brief reading of a fourth-century Christian work, Jerome's *Life of Paul*. I hope thereby also to honor Wyschogrod's own emphasis on hagiography as a primary site of ethical reflection.

Consider the Hand

Wyschogrod initially invokes the figure of the hand outside of, and slightly prior to, the context of her explicit engagement of Derrida and Heidegger. As in the photograph described by Derrida, the hand overflows the frame. Or, rather, Wyschogrod places the hand—without yet identifying it as *Heidegger's* hand—in a larger frame from the start.

Consider the hand that engages the world in a complex process of altering what it finds in accordance with some goal, one which need not be preset but may be modified as the hand feels its way about in completing its task. Just as consciousness is the exerting of an effort to assume the interval, so the hand strives to master the materials it finds. Objects can, of course, be viewed as separate from the hand, but when they are so interpreted, they are not oriented toward a task's completion. Instead, they are simply objects existing side by side with only external spatial relationships linking them to one another. But once hand and world are orchestrated teleologically, coordinated into an enterprise, the world is subjected to a system of significations imposed by the act of work.⁷

Consider the hand, Wyschogrod instructs us. And, in their way, her words are as visually evocative, and as theatrical, as Derrida's teasing descriptions of the photographs. *The hand feels its way about in completing its task. . . . It strives to master the materials it finds. . . .* The hand that we are urged to consider is above all a hand that *works*, and that works, ultimately, by *signifying*. This is terrain that Wyschogrod has already

marked as distinctly ambivalent by establishing a dichotomy of everyday *work* and saintly *labor* that associates the former with objectification and commoditization, parsimony, and the suppression of alterity, the latter with creative transformation, extravagant expenditure, and an opening onto alterity. She now asks, however, "whether there are some characteristics of the manual shaping of the world that have been overlooked and that would link the hand to saintly labor." It is here that she invokes Derrida's essay, suggesting that it "offers strategic clues for such a transvaluation of the function of the hand."⁸

Rhetorically, her argument is at this point both condensed and fast-paced. Following Derrida, Wyschogrod focuses initially on Heidegger's insistence that only humans have hands and that the hand is "bound up with thinking." It is worth backtracking to the relevant passage in Heidegger, though Wyschogrod does not cite it directly or paraphrase it in full:

We are trying to learn thinking. Perhaps thinking, too, is just something like building a cabinet [*das Bauen an einem Schrein*]. At any rate, it is a craft, a "handicraft" [*Handwerk*]. . . . The hand is a peculiar thing. In the common view, the hand is part of our bodily organism. But the hand's essence can never be determined, or explained, by its being an organ which can grasp. Apes, too, have organs that can grasp, but they do not have hands. The hand is infinitely different from all grasping organs—paws, claws, or fangs—different by an abyss of essence. Only a being who can speak, that is, think, can have hands and can be handy in achieving works of handicraft [*Werken der Hand*].

Heidegger elaborates further on the work proper to the hand:

But the craft [*Werk*] of the hand is richer than we commonly imagine. The hand does not only grasp and catch, or push and pull. The hand reaches and extends, receives and welcomes—and not just things: the hand extends itself, and receives its own welcome in the hands of others. The hand holds. The hand carries. The hand designs and signs, presumably because man is a sign. Two hands fold into one, a gesture meant to carry man into the great oneness. The hand is all this, and this is the

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true handicraft. Everything is rooted here that is commonly known as handicraft, and commonly we go no further. But the hand's gestures run everywhere through language, and in their most perfect purity precisely when man speaks by being silent. And only when man speaks, does he think—not the other way around, as metaphysics still believes. Every motion of the hand in every one of its works carries itself through the element of thinking, every bearing of the hand bears itself in that element. All the work of the hand is rooted in thinking. Therefore, thinking itself is man's simplest, and for that reason, hardest, handiwork, if it would be accomplished at its proper time.⁹

There is much to discuss here, to say the least, and much that has been discussed. For her part, Wyschogrod briskly makes note of Derrida's play on "monstration" (or "showing") and "monstrosity" (or the "grotesque") with reference to Heidegger's designation of the hand as a sign for the signifying work that is distinctly human. She does not, however, pause to comment directly on either Derrida's *Wortspiel* or Heidegger's *Handwerk*—the latter of which is, for Heidegger, to be contrasted, rather than identified, with "activity (*Beschäftigung*) oriented by trade (*Geschäft*), commerce, and the taste for profit," as Derrida points out¹⁰—that is, with "everyday work" in Wyschogrod's sense, or so one might have thought.

Rather than following through on her promise to uncover clues in Derrida's reading for a "transvaluation of the function of the hand," Wyschogrod pounces on a problem that Derrida has missed: "Derrida does not refer to a difficulty that arises in connection with Heidegger's assertion about the necessary accord between the craftsman and his material"¹¹—precisely the feature that, for Heidegger, distinguishes *Handwerk* from other kinds of work.¹² The difficulty for Wyschogrod is this: if a builder were truly to confirm the wood's essence, he (and *he* seems the relevant pronoun here) would leave it untouched; handiwork is just another form of utilitarian activity, she suggests. In fact, Derrida has arguably gestured toward just this difficulty by playfully endowing Heidegger with not one but two hands

(while stressing Heidegger's own preference for "this monster, a single hand"):¹³ "on the one hand, but also higher, on the side of what is best, handiwork (*Handwerk*) guided by the essence of the human dwelling, by the wood of the hut [*la hûte*] rather than by the metal or glass of the city," writes Derrida, epitomizing Heidegger; "on the other hand, but also lower, the activity that cuts the hand off from the essential, useful activity, utilitarianism guided by capital." And (as Heidegger acknowledges and Derrida underlines) the *one* hand is always in danger of being contaminated—or cut off—by the *other*, the higher by the lower, *Handwerk* by mere *Beschäftigung*. In short: "The hand is in danger," Derrida observes, returning to the singular.¹⁴

Perhaps Wyschogrod seems to overlook this passage in Derrida's lecture because in it she misses what she is looking for: for her Heidegger has only one hand, only one kind of work, but it is not the hand or the work that he claims it is. Heidegger's hand—the *Handwerk* of his thought—uses tools (a pen, a cane, a bucket, perhaps), indeed, it *is* a tool, conforming the world to its own purpose, and it does so precisely by invoking the assumption that it is inherent to humanity to be "at home in the world." "Craft domesticates technique by subordinating the object to what is most essential to man as one who dwells," Wyschogrod asserts.¹⁵ Promising to return "shortly" to the problem of the hand that unites thinking and building "through the mediating influence of dwelling"—a point "of cardinal importance" to her analysis, as she puts it¹⁶—she first calls us back to Derrida's lecture.

Consider the Animal That Has No Hand

"Consider again Derrida's discussion of the animal in Heidegger's thought," Wyschogrod instructs us, "the ape that has organs for grasping (*Greiforgane*) but no hand (*Hand*) and, as such, lacks the capacity for thought, language, and the bestowing of gifts." *Consider the hand . . . Consider again . . . the animal that has Greiforgane but no hand. . . . Er hat keine Hand.* Here Wyschogrod steers more directly into Derrida's argument, noting that for Heidegger "the superordinate character of the human is estab-

lished by excluding animality from the essence of man.”¹⁷ Indeed, Derrida himself highlights the larger stakes quite emphatically:

I believe, and I have often believed I must underscore this, that the manner, lateral or central, in which a thinker or scientist speaks of so-called animality constitutes a decisive symptom regarding the essential axiomatic of the given discourse. No more than anyone else, classic or modern, does Heidegger seem to me here to escape this rule when he writes: “Apes, for example . . . have organs that can grasp, but they do not have hands.”

Derrida continues, “In its very content, this statement marks the text’s essential scene. It marks it with a humanism that . . . inscribes—between a human *Geschlecht* that one wants to withdraw from biologicistic determinations . . . and an animality that one encloses in its organic-biological programs—not *some* differences but an absolute, oppositional limit.”¹⁸

Having invoked Derrida’s critique of Heidegger’s exclusion of animality, Wyschogrod seems to underline his point:

Heidegger refrains from commenting on the significance of this exclusion: animal existence characterized by sentience, brute need, and repletion; feelings of hunger, thirst, and pain; and an impulse to procreate—whatever the animal’s construal of these may be. Derrida observes that Heidegger does not think through the meaning of the hand in connection with need because need lies outside the hand’s functions of giving and welcoming.¹⁹

Here is another point of slippage. Derrida does not in fact address Heidegger’s neglect of *need* in the terms that Wyschogrod suggests. Rather, he interrogates Heidegger’s absolute opposition between (human) *giving* and (animal) *taking*, which is also to say between *thinking* the (ever withdrawing) *thing* and *grasping* the *object*. “Nothing is less assured than the distinction between *giving* and *taking*,” Derrida counters. Following Heidegger’s thought through, however, he reframes the opposition as one “between giving/taking-the-thing *as such* and giving/taking without this *as such*, and finally without the thing itself.”²⁰ In other words, from Heidegger’s perspective, as Derrida represents it, what the ani-

mal lacks is the *as such*—the ability to relate to the thing as “subsisting and independent object” rather than as “maneuverable tool.”²¹ This is a framing of Heidegger’s thinking to which Derrida will return in a posthumously published lecture: “The animal doesn’t know how to ‘let be,’ let the thing be such as it is. It always has a relation of utility, of putting-in-perspective; it doesn’t let the thing be what it is, appear as such without a project guided by a narrow ‘sphere’ of drives, of desires.” Thus far, Derrida’s revoicing of Heidegger. He here arrives at his punchline: “One of the questions to be raised, therefore, would be to know whether man does that.” He goes on to suggest an alternative “strategy” that “would consist in pluralizing and varying the ‘as such,’ and, instead of simply giving speech back to the animal, or giving to the animal what the human deprives it of, as it were, in marking that the human is, in a way, similarly ‘deprived,’ by means of a privation that is not a privation, and that there is no pure and simple ‘as such.’” The stakes are high, he acknowledges with a flourish: “they concern the whole framework of Heideggerian discourse.”²²

I have followed Derrida outside the frame of the essay in question in order to allow his argument to become more explicit. It is clear that in highlighting Heidegger’s exclusion of animality qua bodily need, Wyschogrod has strongly recast Derrida’s critique, if not simply misrepresented it. One can assume, then, that the point is important to her. She goes on to elaborate as follows:

The striking entailment of this position is that the hand, bound up with the welcome for the Other and gift-giving, is divorced from need and destitution. Thus the gift is not, for Heidegger, grounded in lack, need, or desire, but is the result of an overflow of the self’s good feelings about itself. Gift-giving is bound up with the hand that works, and that, Heidegger declares, clears a path to genuine thinking. It is counterintuitive to divorce the hand from gift-giving, but Heidegger’s analysis neglects what is primordial in gift-giving. The saintly gift is a response of the saint’s total being to the sheer animal destitution, the vulnerability, of the Other. The hand of the saint that gives, welcomes, blesses, heals, and redeems is, by synecdoche, a condensation of the total charismatic power of the saintly

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body.²³

Here we seem to arrive at the heart of Wyschogrod's argument with regard to the hand, yet it is an argument that proves curiously difficult to parse, due primarily to a persistent ambiguity regarding the relations of giving and taking. What *is* the proper relation of the giving hand to "need and destitution," according to Wyschogrod? It is a responsive one, it seems, though this is not altogether clear until we near the end of the passage: the hand gives in the encounter with the "lack, need, or desire" of *another*. The hand as both giver and gift is grounded elsewhere than in itself, then: this is what Heidegger's analysis misses, Wyschogrod insists. Heidegger's working hand may give out of its own overflow, but Wyschogrod's laboring hand gives in response "to the sheer animal destitution, the vulnerability, of the Other." Moreover, it gives out of the power of its whole body—that is, the saint, he or she, gives of him- or herself. But is the animal always the Other—the Other who does not give but takes? If so, has Wyschogrod not simply repeated Heidegger's exclusion of animality from the hand—whether his working or her laboring one? Fully bodied, the saint's *Geschlecht* may now be differentiated, but how well does that human difference hold up, over against the "absolute oppositional limit" of the animal, which, according to Derrida, inevitably "leads back to the homogeneous"?²⁴

Consider the Bird That Has No Home

It becomes clear that Wyschogrod has not simply transposed Heidegger's particular humanism into a Levinasian key when she turns, following more closely in Derrida's tracks, to another Heideggerian animal, namely the *Zugvogel*, or migratory bird. "Not only does Heidegger exclude the animality of the ape from functions derived from the hand, Derrida claims, but Heidegger also sets men apart from another kind of animal, migratory birds," notes Wyschogrod, adding an emphasis that is, again, more hers than Derrida's:

This exclusion returns the analysis to a point stressed earlier, Heidegger's inclusion of dwelling

in the human essence. . . . Animals do not dwell; to the contrary, their taking shelter is a response to some need. Having no history apart from species continuity, they develop simple, unmediated relations to their environment. Without stretching the term too much, they can be said to labor rather than to work. I stress Heidegger's account of dwelling because rootedness has generally been taken for granted as that which is distinctly human whereas nomadic existence is considered aberrant in Western philosophical and literary tradition. On the contrary, it is the absence of dwelling that becomes a central feature of many hagiographic accounts. To accept corporeal vulnerability by divesting oneself of home and history so far as possible is to transcend the essence of man through its underside by taking on sheer animal sentience. The forest wanderers in Hindu and Buddhist traditions, the desert nomads of Christianity, and the exilic motif in the tales of Jewish sages attest the wide dispersion of the nomadic theme in accounts of saintly existence.²⁵

Here Wyschogrod quite explicitly identifies the saint—whether Hindu, Buddhist, Christian, or Jew—as one who takes on "sheer animal sentience" and is thereby enabled "to transcend the essence of man."²⁶ The saint is the other, animal.

Perhaps Wyschogrod has exchanged a hand with which to build a dwelling or shape a world of thought, for wings and winds on which to "draw toward what withdraws," thereby invoking Heidegger's own framing of the animal thought while disavowing his disavowal of its animality.

What withdraws from us, draws us along by its very withdrawal, whether or not we become aware of it immediately, or at all. Once we are drawn into the withdrawal, we are—*only completely differently from the migratory birds*—drawing toward what draws, attracts us by its withdrawal. And once we, being so attracted, are drawing toward what draws us, our essential nature already bears the stamp of "drawing toward" [*auf dem Zuge zu*]. As we are drawing toward what withdraws, we ourselves are pointers pointing toward it. We are who we are by pointing in that direction—not like an incidental adjunct but as follows: this "drawing toward" is in itself an essential and therefore con-

stant pointing toward what withdraws. To say “drawing toward” is to say “pointing toward what withdraws” [my emphasis].²⁷

Yet the withdrawal of the (“subsisting and independent”) Other whose very withdrawal draws us is not Wyschogrod’s focus. Her saintly nomads, to the extent that they have become animals in their corporeal vulnerability, do not seem to respond to others *as such* any more than they build houses. Rather, the saint *takes on* need and destitution, becomes other than herself, in a sacrificial self-giving that occurs in advance of, and independent of, any encounter with another’s need. The need to which she responds, simply and without imposing herself any more than necessary, would seem to be her own, or possibly that of her species (*Geschlecht?*). Thus it is that she truly labors without working toward any goal—not even one defined by the “sheer animal destitution” of the Other, it would seem.

If there is contradiction here, Wyschogrod does not acknowledge it. She subsequently brings the chapter to a close with the following performative summation: “I interpret animality as bound up with the alleviation of need and as related to labor whereas I see work, although distinguishable from violence, as showing structural affinities with it.”²⁸ Here ambiguity is reinstated: animality is *bound up with* the alleviation of need, it is *related to* labor, but it is no more (or less) bound up with the saint who labors than with the other to whose need the saint responds. Perhaps animality is precisely what *binds* and *relates* saints and all the other others. If so, how does Wyschogrod sustain her emphasis on the alterity of the Other? Only by loosening its absoluteness, it seems. Animality may constitute a field of mutual vulnerability that is infinitely differentiated and differentiating, if it does not confront the limit of an opposing hand that always gives and never begs or takes. To put it another way, echoing Derrida, perhaps there is no pure and simple “as such” for Wyschogrod after all; perhaps *there are no humans*, only saints and other animals.²⁹ On the one hand, we work to meet our needs—for shelter, for example. On the other hand, we expose ourselves needlessly,

beyond either reason or law. But how and why do we do this?

Consider the Lions with Feet

Ancient Christian hagiography does not offer easy confirmation of Wyschogrod’s dictum that a “saintly life is defined as one in which compassion for the Other, irrespective of cost to the saint, is the primary trait.”³⁰ Many of the subjects of hagiography expend enormous energy trying *to get away from others*—a movement that typically draws those others to them all the more powerfully. Literary saints also engage extensively in deliberately pointless activity, which by definition benefits no one. However, an excessive, sought-after, importuning vulnerability is indeed pervasive in the Lives of Saints, I would suggest³¹—and is partly (though only partly) the effect of both withdrawal from society and the eschewal of efficient and productive work. In the light of Wyschogrod’s argument, it will not, then, seem mere coincidence that saints’ lives frequently feature non-human animals in contexts that blur the lines between saint and animal. Indeed, the recent work of scholars of ancient Christianity here seems to converge with Wyschogrod’s insight. As Patricia Cox Miller suggests, when ancient writers compare saints to both animals and angels, this works less to oppose the body to the spirit than to suggest that flesh is itself the site of ascetic transformability and thus of transcendence: the saint “existed with the animals in the world like water in water, in an intimacy so profound that the animal and angel were one.”³²

Jerome’s *Life of Paul* is one of the most richly animalistic, as one well as one of the earliest, of the ancient hagiographies.³³ Its narrative swiftly charts the path of the young Paul’s withdrawal, in the face of persecution, to a cave in the desert—no *Handwerk* necessary for the crafting of this dwelling. “Regarding his abode as a gift from God, he fell in love with it, and there in prayer and solitude spent all the rest of his life,” we are told.³⁴ The rest of his life turns out to be of no small duration, for when the action resumes, Paul is 113 years old, almost a century of uneventful living having been swallowed into narrative si-

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lence. Interrupting the silence, and opening up time, is the torturous approach of another aging ascetic, none other than the 90-year-old Antony. Having received a revelation in the night that the desert harbors a monk far better than he, Antony sets off the next morning to find that monk—Paul, of course—though he has no idea in what direction he should head. He just walks. Many hours have passed in the sun-scorched desert when he is interrupted by an unexpected arrival.

All at once he beholds a man mixed with a horse, called by the poets hippocentaur. At the sight of this he protects himself by marking the sign of salvation on his forehead, and then he exclaims, “Hello! Where in these parts is a servant of God living?” The centaur gnashes his teeth and tries to speak clearly, but only grinds out from a mouth shaking with bristles some kind of barbarous sounds rather than lucid speech. Finally he finds a friendly mode of communication, and extending his right hand points out the way desired. Then with swift flight he crosses the spreading plain and vanishes from the sight of his wondering companion. But whether the devil himself took on the shape of this creature, thus to terrify Antony, or whether the desert, typically capable of engendering monstrous animals [*monstruosorum animalium ferax*], also gave birth [*gignat*] to this beast [*bestia*], we are uncertain.³⁵

This desert hallucination of a pointing, yet speechless, monstrosity of a man-horse might seem more than enough for our *Geschlecht*-blurring purposes. And yet, there is more. No sooner has Anthony resumed his journey than he encounters a dwarf, a *homunculus*, “whose nostrils were joined together, with horns growing out of his forehead, and with the legs and feet of a goat.”³⁶ Despite his fear, Antony finds himself drawn a step closer to the uncanny creature, who offers him the gift of some dates and identifies himself as a “mortal being”—that is, like Antony, an animal—who has been sent as an ambassador for his tribe (*grex*);³⁷ his kind are known by many names, satyrs, fauns, incubi (so many figures of desire). He is also a fellow follower of Christ, the creature explains, and he offers prayers for Antony, causing Antony to weep with joy, “marvel-

ing all the while that he could comprehend the dwarf’s speech.” If Antony and the *homunculus* speak with the same tongue, perhaps they belong to the same tribe. This is a nearly unthinkable thought, and Jerome again interrupts the narrative line: the satyr is gone in a flash, disappearing from sight as quickly as the centaur. Facing a flickeringly specular desert that has grown “vast” indeed, Antony once again “knows not what he should do and in what direction he should turn.”³⁸

A third figure appears, “a she-wolf [*lupa*], panting with thirst,” who crawls toward the foot of a mountain, where she enters a cave. Antony, perhaps panting too, follows her, advancing “step by step” in the darkness, “sometimes standing still.” Hearing him, shy Paul, who waits at the heart of the cave, shuts and bolts his door. Antony prays for hours on end for entrance, pronouncing himself “known” by Paul, acknowledging his unworthiness, and threatening nonetheless not to leave until he has seen his beloved. “You who receive wild beasts [*bestias*], why do you turn down a man [*hominem*]?” he cries, and the distinction between man and beast, already doubly disrupted by centaur and satyr, dissolves further, even as Antony attempts to reassert his difference—now also inscribed as a *sexual* difference (for it is presumably the she-wolf whom Paul has admitted).

Of course, Paul eventually opens his cave to Antony, and the two “mingle in mutual embraces.” “Behold the one you have sought with so much labor, his limbs decaying with age, his gray hair unkempt. You see a man [*homo*] soon to become dust. But love conquers all,” remarks Paul. Then, suddenly gossipy, he demands news: “Tell me, how is the human race [*humanum genus*]?” The nearly comical question calls attention to a distinction that has become quite unstable—*genus*, *Geschlecht*, the *Geschlecht* that is human. What is the human race to one soon to become dust, in a desert populated with monstrous hybrids? What is the human race to a couple of old saints sharing a simple meal—a loaf delivered by a bird, in fact!—in the brief interval of time that remains before the one will die and the other will bury him?

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When that day of joy and sorrow arrives, following another interval of grueling travel to fetch a cloak in which to wrap Paul's body, Antony realizes that he does not have the necessary tool for digging a grave. He has labored for love with his feet, wandering aimlessly in the desert until he finds Paul, but he's not much good at working with his hands, it seems. Fresh grief at this lack gives way to fear and wonder. "From out of the deep desert came running two lions with their manes streaming back from their shoulders. . . . Then they began to scratch at the dirt with their feet," we are told, digging Paul's grave without shovels *or* hands.³⁹ Sensing that it is what they desire, Antony offers them his blessing. In closing his narration, Jerome asks for ours.

Consider the Saint With Hands

Reading with Wyschogrod, but also with Derrida, I would suggest in closing that saints are the monsters among us animals—ominous portents, oversaturated signs, abysses of meaning. We point at them and they point us beyond ourselves. As Wyschogrod puts it, the saint's task is both "to construct a content, necessarily extreme ... to reach for what is inherently refractory to representation," and "to 'show' unrepresentability itself. . . . Even when saintly life is an expression of obedience to institutional norms or revealed laws, there can be no rules to guide that aspect of saintly work which admits of no conceivable realization."⁴⁰ She notes also that "the beliefs and actions of saints constitute an unmediated appeal to the lives of their addressees without recourse to laws, moral rules, or maxims."⁴¹

That the lives of saints constitute an unmediated appeal suggests both a call to imitate what cannot be imitated (thus can result in no mimesis of sameness) and a call to respond to the extremity of the saint's vulnerability; and I would suggest that the two calls turn out to be the same. Because the saint is radically open to the need of

others, she is endlessly vulnerable to need herself (she will give everything, again and again); and because she is endlessly vulnerable to need herself, she is radically open to the need of others. The appeal of the saint is that we make ourselves as vulnerable as she is. As Wyschogrod frames the call in a more recent essay: "If self-giving in acts of total self-donation are seen as the ultimate good, am I not, in the interest of the other, obliged to bring home to the other the necessity for her or him to engage in the same sacrificial prodigality I impose upon myself?"⁴² Yet in the vulnerability that results from such responsive incitements to sacrificial prodigality there is not only need but also resourcefulness—the capacity for labor, work that is at once uncalculating and crucially life-sustaining, that does not take time but makes time, that does not preserve energy but generates it precisely by expending it.⁴³ Wyschogrod locates animality in this conjunction of bodily vulnerability and bodily resourcefulness, not as a lowest common denominator but as a site of radical mutual opening. Animal time is the time of opening, of awaiting the arrival of an other. Animals do not dwell but wander; they know no bounds; they are not a *Geschlecht*.

Heidegger's hand, which does not labor but merely thinks, is not enough for Wyschogrod. (As Derrida also has it: "For language is like the rest, it is not enough to speak of it.")⁴⁴ *She* wants the whole hog—so to speak. And this means that her altruism holds some surprises. It is not a hand dispensing charity; it is more like a mother giving birth or a lover making love, painful and joyous at once. "The saintly desire for the Other is excessive and wild," she proclaims.⁴⁵ And for that very reason the saint herself becomes excessively and wildly desirable.⁴⁶ She draws us, is drawing us still, *both* hands extended, reaching outside the frame of the text; and whether she is giving a gift or beseeching our generosity is impossible to say.

NOTES

1. Jacques Derrida, "Heidegger's Hand (*Geschlecht II*)," in *Psyche: Inventions of the Other*, volume II, trans. John P. Leavy, jr. and Elizabeth Rottenberg (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2008), 28.
2. *Ibid.*, 32.

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3. This is not, of course, the first time that the hand appears in a Heideggerian text. As Derrida notes, “the hand or the word *Hand* plays an immense role in the whole Heideggerian conceptuality since *Sein und Zeit*, notably in the determination of presence according to the mode of *Vorhandenheit* or *Zuhandenheit*” (ibid., 43).
4. Ibid., 36.
5. Edith Wyschogrod, *Saints and Postmodernism: Revisioning Moral Philosophy* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1990), 80–83.
6. I discuss Levinas’s resistance to sainthood in “A Saint of One’s Own: Emmanuel Levinas, Eliezer Ben Hyrcanus, and Eulalia of Mérida,” *L’Esprit Créateur* 50 (2010): 6–20, with a brief discussion of Wyschogrod at 17. Matthew Calarco discusses both Levinas’s seemingly entrenched anthropocentrism and currents within his thought that subvert that anthropocentrism, without noting the intervention by Wyschogrod into “the question of the animal” that is the subject of this essay, in *Zoographies: The Question of the Animal from Heidegger to Derrida* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008), 55–77.
7. Wyschogrod, *Saints and Postmodernism*, 80.
8. Ibid., 81.
9. Martin Heidegger, *What is Called Thinking?* trans. J. Glenn Gray (New York: Harper Perennial, 1968), 16–17; *Was heisst Denken?* (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer Verlag, 1997), 50–51.
10. Derrida, “Heidegger’s Hand,” 37.
11. Wyschogrod, *Saints and Postmodernism*, 81.
12. Heidegger, *What is Called Thinking?* 14–15; *Was heisst Denken?* 50.
13. Derrida, “Heidegger’s Hand,” 50.
14. Ibid., 38.
15. Wyschogrod, *Saints and Postmodernism*, 81.
16. Ibid., 82.
17. Ibid.
18. Derrida, “Heidegger’s Hand,” 40–41.
19. Wyschogrod, *Saints and Postmodernism*, 82.
20. Derrida, “Heidegger’s Hand,” 43.
21. Ibid., 44.
22. Jacques Derrida, “I Don’t Know Why We Are Doing This,” in *The Animal That Therefore I Am*, ed. Marie-Louise Mallet, trans. David Wills (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008), 141–60.
23. Wyschogrod, *Saints and Postmodernism*, 82.
24. Derrida, “Heidegger’s Hand,” 41.
25. Wyschogrod, *Saints and Postmodernism*, 82–83.
26. Wyschogrod’s subtle but profound indebtedness to Jewish thought and tradition, as well as her openness to discovering in Judaism affinities with Christianity and Buddhism in particular, are illumined by Elliot Wolfson’s contribution to this issue, “Apophysis and the Trace of Transcendence: Wyschogrod’s Contribution to a Postmodern Jewish Immanent A/Theology.” Clearly the theme of exile is strongly inflecting her readings of (Christian-centered) hagiographical literature, as well as her resistance to Heideggerian “dwelling.”
27. Heidegger, *What is Called Thinking?* 9; *Was heisst Denken?* 5: “Was sich uns entzieht, zieht uns dabei gerade mit, ob wir es sogleich und überhaupt merken oder nicht. Wenn wir in den Zug des Entziehens gelangen, sind wir—nur ganz anders als die Zugvögel—auf dem Zug zu dem, was uns anzieht, in dem es sich entzieht.”
28. Wyschogrod, *Saints and Postmodernism*, 86.
29. Here and elsewhere, I am struck by affinities with Hannah Arendt’s early work on Augustine. Arendt too apprehends love as a radical giving of one’s whole self to all others that transforms understandings of humanity as a “race.” As she puts it: “Love extends to all people in the *civitas Dei*, just as interdependence extended equally to all in the *civitas terrena*. This love makes human relations definite and explicit. . . . Thus, love does not turn to humankind but to the individual, albeit every individual. In the community of the new society the human race dissolves into its many individuals. Hence, the human race as such is not in danger, but every individual is.” Hannah Arendt, *Love and Saint Augustine*, ed. Joanna Vecchiarelli Scott and Judith Chelius Stark (Chicago, London: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 111. In addition, both Wyschogrod and Arendt emphasize natality—the laboring body—rather than mortality, and correspondingly both crucially root hope in memory. Finally, both resist worldliness (dwelling) as well as disembodied unworldliness: to make oneself at home in the world is to bend creatures to one’s own desire, and to make oneself alien is to reject interconnection.
30. Wyschogrod, *Saints and Postmodernism*, xxiii.
31. This is part of the burden of the argument in my *Saving Shame: Martyrs, Saints, and Other Abject Subjects*, *Divinations—Rereading Late Ancient Religion* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008); see especially 81–109.

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32. Patricia Cox Miller, "Adam, Eve, and the Elephants: Asceticism and Animality," in *Ascetic Culture: Essays in Honor of Philip Rousseau*, ed. Blake Leyerle and Robin Darling Young (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, forthcoming) See also Blake Leyerle, "Monks and Other Animals," in *The Cultural Turn in Late Ancient Studies: Gender, Asceticism, and Historiography*, ed. Dale B. Martin and Patricia Cox Miller (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005), 150–71; particularly evocative is her treatment of tales of lions who live with and as monks (159–63). For a learned and often whimsical survey of animals in ancient Christian texts, see Robert M. Grant, *Early Christians and Animals* (London: Routledge, 1999). Ingvild Saelid Gilhus, *Animals, Gods, and Humans: Changing Attitudes to Animals in Greek, Roman, and Early Christian Ideas* (London: Routledge, 2006), emphasizes the desacralization of animals and their negative symbolic associations in early Christian texts; however, she does engage what she considers anomalies in a chapter entitled "Winged humans, speaking animals" (245–61).
33. See Patricia Cox Miller's fine study of the hybrid figure of the centaur in this text: "Jerome's Centaur: A Hyper-Icon of the Desert," *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 4 (1996): 209–33. See also my *The Sex Lives of Saints*, 24–33.
34. "Life of Paul, the First Hermit," in *St. Jerome: Select Works*, trans. W. H. Fremantle, Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, series 2, vol. 6 (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1989), 300.
35. Ibid.
36. Ibid.
37. Felicitiously, the word *grex* can apply to a flock or herd, or by extension to human groups.
38. "Life of Paul," 300–01.
39. Ibid, 301–02.
40. Wyschogrod, *Saints and Postmodernism*, 13.
41. Ibid., 28.
42. Edith Wyschogrod, "Profligacy, Parsimony, and the Ethics of Expenditure in the Philosophy of Levinas," in *The Exorbitant: Emmanuel Levinas Between Jews and Christians*, ed. Kevin Hart and Michael A. Signer (New York: Fordham University Press, 2010), 171.
43. In the more recent essay, she stresses the need to balance profligacy with "a parsimony that would husband the resources needed for further expenditure" ("Profligacy, Parsimony," 171). Here her references are explicitly economic, rather than corporeal.
44. Jacques Derrida, "The Animal That Therefore I Am (More to Follow)," in *The Animal That Therefore I Am*, 1–51.
45. Wyschogrod, *Saints and Postmodernism*, 255.
46. This is a case that I also try to make, from a different starting point, in Burrus, "A Saint of One's Own," 17–18. Wyschogrod's thought accommodates, where Levinas's does not easily do so, the entanglement of ethics with eroticism, as discussed by Karmen MacKendrick in her contribution to this issue, "Eros, Ethics, Explosion: The Loss of Deixis in Recurrence." Acknowledging the seductiveness of the saint opens another angle on the question of "saintly influence" thematized first by Wyschogrod herself and then by the contributors to Eric Boynton and Martin Kavka, eds., *Saintly Influence: Edith Wyschogrod and the Possibilities of Philosophy of Religion* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2009).

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