

**Samuel Weber: Towards a Politics of Singularity,
The Politics of Protection**

Vanessa Lemm: Commentary and Questions

Before I begin, I would like to thank you very much for sharing with us your thoughts. I am honored to have the opportunity to comment on some of your ideas, in particular, on what you call the open question of a politics of singularity which is to replace the politics of protection and projection of the sovereign self.

At the end of your paper you suggest, based on Benjamin's notion of *Erfahrung*, **“that anxiety, and even terror – can be a source of ‘pleasure, if not of joy, is an experience that increasingly informs politics today”**. Precisely this kind of experience signals a possible replacement of the politics of protection by a politics of singularity. The following remarks and questions are all concerned with trying to gain a better understanding of what you mean by this statement or rather open question at the end of your paper.

First of all, I think it could be very helpful if you could give us an example in recent politics or history that testifies to such an experience, to anxiety as a source of pleasure. I am, particularly, interested in finding out more about how you envisage the replacement of a politics of protection by a politics of singularity. In the happening of such an event does the politics of singularity remain coupled with the politics of protection, for example, as a counter-movement or as a form of resistance which is inseparable from the politics of protection? Or, on the contrary, do you envisage a politics of singularity as a politics which stands on its own, a politics which has, so to speak, overcome the politics of protection.

You convincingly argue that a politics of singularity requires adopting a different idea of the self and, in particular, a different attitude towards the self's various defense systems. In this context, I am not sure whether I fully understand the role and meaning of anxiety and auto-immunity as well as their relation to a politics of protection and to a politics of singularity. On your reading, Derrida's concept of auto-immunity tries to see in this phenomenon not something exclusively pathological or suicidal, that is, an attack on the protective system of the self, but also as self-transformative, as something positive. When you transpose the logic of auto-immunity to Freud's theories of anxiety, this is

how I understand it: the self employs anxiety as a defence mechanism against fright (*Schreck*); anxiety causes repression of what the self does not want to or rather can not deal with. Anxiety is therefore a way to keep the self united in the face of a terrifying multiplicity; through anxiety the self can concentrate on itself and isolate itself. Anxiety is here analogous to the death of a layer of the body that protects the other layers and separates the body from its outside.

So my question is as follows: it seems that anxiety functions as a form of immunity in Freud, as the self's psychic immunitary system. To undermine anxiety, to attack anxiety, therefore can be auto-immunitary in two senses: it can expose the self to real danger, to traumatic experiences, perhaps it is a form of suicide; or it can be self-transformative, in the sense that it permits the self to have a real experience, as in Benjamin's sense of *Erfahrung*. I am not clear how your politics of singularity is an attack on anxiety that is self-transformative, or a form of anxiety that is a source of joy as you say at the end.

Also, it seems to me that at this point of your treatment of Freud there is an ambiguity with respect to what is the real source of danger or terror (*Schreck*). You give the idea that multiplicity is terrific, except that you think the self should be more open to this kind of terror. But it seems that the opposite can also be said: not the multiple but rather the self-same is the real source of terror. In other words, the anxious self is the terrorist, so that any auto-immunitary attack on the self's immune system of anxiety might lessen the fear felt by others with respect to the protective, that is, terrorist, self. Where is the source of terror, then: with multiplicity or with the unitary self?

In this context it would also be interesting to learn more about the relation of the self to others in a politics of singularity in contrast to a politics of protection. It seems to me that in a politics of protection, the relation to the other is defined and determined by the need for self-preservation, and hence, my question is what in your view defines the relation to the other in a politics of singularity.

Finally, I would like to return to the beginning of your talk, to your remarks on Hobbes. Hobbes thinks that man is a wolf to man, and that legitimates politics need to protect man from its own animality. This vision of the human being as a violent beast is, for sure, not unrelated to the idea of the "fall of man," the idea that man is death. I am

wondering whether one aspect of a politics of singularity might not have something to do with recovering the human being's animal innocence. And, furthermore, thinking of course about Derrida's turn to animality in his late work, my question is whether a politics of singularity should be less concerned with the problem of language and signification, as in Derrida's earlier work, and more concerned with seeing in the animality of the human being a terrifying multiplicity to which it should open itself up to in view of a positive, self-transformative experience of itself and others. In other words, whether a politics of singularity is a biopolitics understood in a positive sense as a politics based on the innocence of animal life and animality?