Sophia Studies in Cross-cultural Philosophy
of Traditions and Cultures 8

Alistair Welchman *Editor*

Politics of Religion/ Religions of Politics

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Editor

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Editor
Alistair Welchman
Department of Philosophy and Classics
University of Texas at San Antonio
San Antonio
Texas, USA

ISSN 2211-1107 ISSN 2211-1115 (electronic)
ISBN 978-94-017-9447-3 ISBN 978-94-017-9448-0 (eBook)
DOI 10.1007/978-94-017-9448-0
Springer Dordrecht Heidelberg New York London

Library of Congress Control Number: 2014953336

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Acknowledgements

I would like to express my thanks for George W Brackenridge Endowment for its generous funding of Simon Critchley's Distinguished Visiting Professorship at the University of Texas at San Antonio, during which the workshop took place. I would also like to recognize the contributions of Provost's Core Values Initiative (which provided refreshments during the workshop) and the Department of Philosophy and Classics (which provided logistical support).

Abbreviations

Aesthetics	G.W.F. Hegel, *Hegel's Aesthetics: Lectures on Fine Art*. Trans. T.M. Knox. 2 volumes (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988).
Äesthetik	G.W.F. Hegel, *Vorlesungenüber die Ästhetik*. Suhrkamp Taschenbuch Wissenschaft (Suhrkamp: Frankfurt am Main, 1970 [1835–1838]).
Basic Problems	Martin Heidegger, *The Basic Problems of Phenomenology*. Trans. Albert Hofstadter (Bloomington/Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1988 [1927]).
Being and Time	Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*. Trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (New York: Harper and Row, 1962 [1927]).
The Brothers Karamazov	Fyodor Dostoyevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov*. Trans. and annotated by Richard Pevear and Larissa Volokhonsky (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2002 [1880]).
The Gay Science	Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*. Trans. Bernard Williams (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001 [1882]).
Kants Werke	*Kants Werke: Akademie-Textausgabe*. Berlin: Walter de Gruyter & Co., 28 Vol. 1900 ff. References will be to named text and volume and page number, except for the *Critique of Pure Reason*, which will be referenced in the standard A/B format giving the page number of the first (1782) and second (1787) editions.
Letter	John Locke, A letter concerning toleration. In *John Locke: The Second Treatise of Government and a Letter Concerning Toleration*, ed. Tom Crawford, 113–153 (New York: Dover Publications, 2002 [1689]).
Letter to d'Alembert	Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Politics and the Arts: Letter to M. d'Alembert on the Theater*. Trans. Allan Bloom (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1960 [1758]).

On Liberty	John Stuart Mill, *On Liberty* (New York: Liberal Arts Press, 1956 [1869]).
Phaedo	Plato, *Phaedo*. Trans. CMA Grube. In Plato, *Complete Works*, ed. John Cooper (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1997).
PhS	G.W.F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*. Trans. A.V. Miller (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979).
PhG	G.W.F. Hegel, *Phänomenologie des Geistes*, ed. J. Hoffmeister (Hamburg: Felix Meiner, 1952 [1807]).
Philosophical Investigations	Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*. Trans. G.E.M. Anscombe (Oxford: Blackwell, 2001 [1953]). 3rd edition. References are to section numbers.
Republic	Plato, *Republic*. Trans. Allan Bloom (New York: Basic Books, 1992).
Rise and Fall	Plutarch, *The Rise and Fall of Athena: Nine Greek Lives* (London: Penguin, 1960).
Seventh Letter	Plato, *Seventh Letter*. Trans. Glenn Morrow. In Plato, *Complete Works*, ed. John Cooper (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1997).
Twilight of the Idols	Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Anti-Christ, Ecco Homo, Twilight of the Idols and Other Writings*, eds. Aaron Ridley and Judith Norman, trans. Judith Norman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005 [1888]).

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Contributors

Costica Bradatan is an Associate Professor in the Honors College at Texas Tech University in the USA. He has also held faculty appointments at Cornell University, University of Notre Dame, University of Wisconsin-Madison, Miami University and Arizona State University, as well as at several universities in Europe and Asia. He works on topics in the history of Western philosophy, Continental philosophy, philosophy of religion, philosophy of literature and of film and is the author or editor (co-editor) of eight books, mostly recently *Dying for Ideas. The dangerous Lives of the Philosophers* (Bloomsbury, 2014). His work has been translated into more than ten languages, including Chinese, Vietnamese and Arabic. He has written essays, book reviews and op-eds for such publications as the *New York Times*, *The New Statesman*, *Dissent*, *Times Literary Supplement*, *Times Higher Education*, *Boston Review*, *The Daily Beast*, *International Herald Tribune*, *Christian Science Monitor*, CNN.com (CNN Opinion), and *The Globe and Mail*, among other places.

Roland Champagne is Professor Emeritus at the University of Missouri-St. Louis and Visiting Scholar at Trinity University. He is the author of eleven books, pertinently *The Ethics of Reading According to Emmanuel Lévinas* (1998), for which Simon Critchley's work played a significant inspiration.

Tina Chanter is Head of School at the School of Humanities, Kingston University in the UK. Her research currently focuses on questions of aesthetics and politics. Her recent publications have interrogated the philosophical, psychoanalytic and literary reception of Sophocles' tragic heroine Antigone, an analysis of abjection in contemporary, independent film, and the need to reflect on how to theorize gender in a manner that explores its intrinsic and complex relationship to other categories such as race, class and sexuality. Her work is informed by figures such as Levinas, Derrida, Irigaray, Kristeva, and Rancière. While it draws on these philosophical figures, and retains a disciplinary basis in philosophy, her work has become increasingly interdisciplinary.

Simon Critchley is Hans Jonas Professor of Philosophy at the New School for Social Research in New York City, a Professor of Philosophy at the University of Tilburg in The Netherlands and at the European Graduate School in Saas-Fee, Switzerland. His most recent books are *Bowie* (2014) and *The Faith of the Faithless* (2013).

Anne O'Byrne is Associate Professor of Philosophy at Stony Brook University. Her field of research is twentieth century and contemporary European philosophy. Much of her work—including her recent translation of Jean-Luc Nancy's *Corpus II: Writings on Sexuality* (Fordham 2013) and her own monograph *Natality and Finitude* (Indiana 2010)—lies at the intersection of ontology and politics. Several articles investigate the political and ontological questions that arise around embodiment ('The Politics of Intrusion' in *The New Centennial Review*), gender ('The Excess if Justice' in *International Studies in Philosophy*), labor ('Symbol, Exchange and Birth' in *Philosophy and Social Criticism*) and pedagogy ('Pedagogy without a Project' in *Studies in Philosophy and Education*) using the work of authors such as Heidegger, Arendt, Derrida, Jean-Luc Nancy, Jean Baudrillard and Julia Kristeva. O'Byrne also maintains an interest in Irish Studies and has written philosophical work concerning the functioning of sovereignty in Northern Ireland and the inheritance of the Irish language. At Stony Brook and while on faculty at Hofstra University (1999–2007) she has taught courses in feminist philosophy, social and political philosophy, philosophy of art, philosophy and the Holocaust, modernity and post-modernity, existentialism, phenomenology, and Nietzsche.

Davide Panagia is a political and cultural theorist who holds the Canada Research Chair in Cultural Studies at Trent University and is Co-Editor of the journal *Theory and Event*. He has published two books. The first, *The Poetics of Political Thinking* (Duke 2006), inquires into contemporary accounts of the nature of political argument from the perspective of modern political and aesthetic thought. His second book, entitled *The Political Life of Sensation* (Duke 2009), posits sensation as a dissensual democratic moment of aesthetic judgment and contends that sensorial experience interrupts our perceptual common modes of sensing and affords us an awareness of what had previously been insensible.

Currently he is working on two major research projects. The first of these asks the following question: What are the theories and practices of beholding that inform the iconophilia of contemporary democratic politics? This project explores an ethics of appearances by addressing how individuals or groups in pluralist democratic societies attend to the emergence of political subjectivities at the level of their appearances. Thus, the postures of attention that we lend to appearances are of critical importance to contemporary democratic life because the advenience of an appearance holds the potential to solicit an actively responsive mode for discomposing our attachments to the world. The second project addresses David Hume's contributions to contemporary political and cultural theory and will be included as a volume in the Rowman and Littlefield series, *Modernity and Political Thought*.

Davide Panagia is also the recipient of several scholarly and research awards including a Rhodes Scholarship (1993) and a Canadian Foundation for Innovation Grant (2004). His writings have been published in various peer-reviewed journals including *Political Theory*, *Diacritics*, *Theory & Event*, *The Journal for Cultural Research*, *Polity and Citizenship Studies*.

Philip Quadrio is based at the University of New South Wales where he works in a research project focusing on ethics in public administration. He was affiliated with the Centre for Research on Social Inclusion at Macquarie University and the Department of Studies in Religion at the University of Sydney. He has taught philosophy at: University of Sydney, University of New South Wales, Macquarie University, Charles Sturt University and the Melbourne School of Continental Philosophy. He has taught jurisprudence in the School of Law at Macquarie University and contributes to teaching in the Department of Religious Studies at the University of Sydney. His research focus is on practical philosophy and History of Philosophy (particularly eighteenth century). He has recently been working on the issue of sexual abuse by clergy, which draws upon his background of working with survivors as part of a legal reconciliation process in Australia.

Philip is author of 'Rousseau, Kant and the Critique of Philosophical Theology' (*Sophia*, 2009: 48), 'The Nature of Kantian Ethics' in *On the Ethical Life* (Cambridge Scholars Press, 2009) and 'Rousseau and Auto-critical Philosophy', in *Conceptions of Critique in Modern and Contemporary Philosophy*, R. Sonderegger and K. de Boer, eds. (Palgrave Macmillan 2012).

Jill Stauffer's edited volume (with Bettina Bergo), *Nietzsche and Lévinas: After the Death of a Certain God*, was published by Columbia University Press in 2009. She has taught at Amherst College in the Department of Law, Jurisprudence and Social Thought, and in the Philosophy department at John Jay College in New York, where she authored the concept paper for John Jay's new Philosophy major. She was resident fellow in the humanities at the CUNY Graduate Center in 2008–2009, where she ran a faculty seminar on 'Sacred and Secular,' and planned/moderated a series of public events. She has published widely on the work of Lévinas, human rights and humanitarian intervention, personal and political responsibility, ethics, and the rule of law. Jill is currently at Haverford College, where she is Assistant Professor of Philosophy and Director of a new academic concentration in Peace, Justice and Human Rights.

Alistair Welchman is Associate Professor of Philosophy in the Department of Philosophy and Classics at the University of Texas at San Antonio. He has published widely on contemporary French philosophy (especially Deleuze) and the nineteenth century German philosophy that it develops (especially Schelling and Schopenhauer). He is also the co-translator of Schopenhauer's *Will and Representation* for Cambridge (Vol 1, 2010; Vol 2, forthcoming) and Salamon Maimon's *Essay on Transcendental Philosophy* (Continuum 2010).

Chapter 1
Introduction

Alistair Welchman

Most of the articles in this collection were first presented in a workshop held on and with Simon Critchley at the University of Texas at San Antonio in February 2010. Each participant in the workshop was invited to comment on some aspect of Critchley's work, or develop, in his or her own way, some theme that emerges from Critchley's work. The workshop was therefore not dedicated solely either to philosophical commentary or to common thematic engagement, but rather represented a hybrid of the two. And this volume inherits that hybrid nature: in part it is one of the first collections of secondary texts on Critchley; but in part it is also an autonomous elaboration or contestation of some preoccupations shared by Critchley and the authors.

In addition to the conference papers, this collection concludes with the transcript of an interview with Simon Critchley conducted at the North Texas Philosophical Association meeting in 2012.

Despite the broad theme of the conference, many of the papers and much of the discussions revolved around Critchley's analysis of the intersection of politics and religion; this provided the point of convergence for the papers and it constitutes the focal point of this collection.

Concerns about the intrication of the political and the theological are as old as political theory itself; perhaps as old as politics, as Agamben's work attempts to show (1998, 2011). But these concerns have taken on a new prominence since the European revolutions of 1989, which heralded the substitution, within the Western imaginary, of the former structural enemy of (secular) godless communism, with a new structural enemy closely aligned with an excess of religious, ultimately theocratic, fanaticism. This prominence has in no way been reduced in recent years. As I write this introduction, India, the largest democracy in the world has just elected a Hindu fundamentalist as prime minister. A recent article in the *New York Times* (Hamid 2014)

A. Welchman (✉)
University of Texas at San Antonio, San Antonio, TX, USA
e-mail: alistair.welchman@utsa.edu

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A. Welchman (ed.), *Politics of Religion/Religions of Politics*,
Sophia Studies in Cross-cultural Philosophy of Traditions and Cultures 8,
DOI 10.1007/978-94-017-9448-0_1

articulates the tensions in a clear fashion: liberal politics is in a dilemma that is at its sharpest in Egypt, where the theological commitments of a majority of the population (manifest in the large degree of support for former and ousted president Morsi and the fact that a clear majority supports Shariah law) create a democratic mandate for the restriction of liberal rights. More worryingly still, and one of Critchley's abiding concerns, is that religion is able to motivate much more strongly, to provide a sense of commitment much more than liberalism is capable of doing; apathy, or what Critchley describes as ultimately a form of 'nihilism,' (Critchley 2007) is rife across liberal democracies.

This new imaginary is of course itself, in a dully familiar irony, partly the projection of a profound, and profoundly inconsistent, streak of theology within the self-articulation of Western liberalism itself. Such liberalism is, especially in the United States, and especially since 2001, shot through with messianism and theocracy, from George W Bush's claim that god wanted him to run for president to the Protestant rhythms of Barack Obama's best rhetoric. And thus global politics appears to take place simultaneously on military and metaphysical planes, as the clash between deities and their representatives rather than peoples and their representatives.

The practical dilemma can also be traced at the theoretical level, going back at least to Hegel's critique of the abstraction of Kant's moral and political theory, and recapitulated in recent political theory as the communitarian critique of Rawl's and Habermas's neo-Kantian liberalism exemplified by, among others, Alasdair MacIntyre (1981) and Michael Sandel (1981). Proponents of this critical view argue that the conception of the self required by liberalism is in some sense too thin, too abstracted from the substantive concerns of actual people, embedded in local traditions, and, in particular religious traditions. Rawls's conception of the right as distinct from the good, for instance, requires political engagement to be based on one's identification with a self located behind the veil of ignorance, as removed from its actual characteristics and convictions as Kant's noumenal self (as also, of course from 'its' gender).

Although this critique is a general one, it is religious traditions, beliefs and orientations that pose a particular problem for liberalism. Strongly binding, such orientations are, in part, orientations towards the political itself. Liberalism's tolerant respect for religious 'points of view' in fact systematically misrepresents them as purely private matters of individual belief. The communitarian critique opens the way for an insistence that politics engage with religion, as the historically privileged site of substantive commitments, rather than present itself as above the fray of, and negotiating between, such values. This theoretical movement recapitulates the empirical movement, described above, from the observation that the Western other (both spatially and temporally, in the past of the West) integrates the political and the religious, to the realization that Western politics is itself indissolubly intricated in the religious, as exemplified most famously by Carl Schmitt's pithy phrase 'political theology', and as taken up most recently especially by Giorgio Agamben (e.g. 1998, 2011).

It is noticeable that both communitarianism in general and the claims of political theology in particular are associated with a broadly conservative movement, with an attempt to resist the most deterritorialized aspects of Western modernity and to recapture a supposedly lost era of belief and commitment. What Critchley, especially in his recent *Faith of the Faithless* (2012), has done is to reframe the issue of political theology from a progressive perspective.

This is an important move because it permits the left to occupy a space that would otherwise be the sole preserve of the right, increasing the dangers of fundamentalism. But it is, according to Critchley, also important for a different and more basic reason: to avoid nihilism. The argument of Critchley's 2007 *Infinitely Demanding* thus dovetails with his later position in *The Faith of the Faithless* (2012): in the earlier text, Critchley identifies the snare of nihilism in its characteristic symptom in liberal democracies—motivational lethargy; in the later book he argues that a certain moment of religiosity is necessary for any kind of politics to be effective, even, especially, for an effective progressive politics.

But this move is as delicate as it is significant, for progressive politics is tied to secularism and the dangers of religious fanaticism now arise on the left. Critchley's argument is correspondingly supple, and can be seen to take place across three axes, which correspond to the three points of application of the papers in this collection.

Political Theologies Left and Right

In the first place, Critchley takes on concrete, actual political theologies. In part he is critical of extant Schmittian right-leaning traditional political theologies; but he also has a richer range of religious reference that enables him to mine even just Christian theology's more recondite moments for revolutionary political theologies as a counter to the more usually reactionary political theologies of Schmitt and his contemporary neo-liberal followers: 'it seems to me,' Critchley writes, 'that the left has all to easily ceded the religious ground to the right' (2012, p. 25). The first three papers in the volume address this first move. Critchley himself, in 'You are Not Your Own: On the Nature of Faith' provides a supple re-reading of Paul and Paul's own significance for politics. In the second paper, 'Politics, Anthropology, Religion: Religious Particularism, Anti-Somatism,' Philip Quadrio takes on a different political theology presented by Critchley, his 'mystical anarchism,' finding it politically wanting. And the last paper, Welchman's 'Border Sovereignty,' argues that some of the apparently paradoxical features of the spatiotemporality of political borders are the effects of a quite particular 'political theology,' one that maps the creation of the *polis* onto a non-spatiotemporal act cognate with god's creation.

Critchley himself provides a re-reading of Paul that opens this volume. For Critchley, Paul is always reformation, and the return to Paul is always a call for reformation, a call that is, with Paul, constitutive of the gesture of the Christian. Indeed, since Paul does not call himself a Christian, one might say that the reform of Christianity actually *predates* its institutional existence: Christianity is reformed Judaism.

In a nuanced presentation, and in particular with an eye to the political implications of Paul's theological doctrine, Critchley argues that reform is not rejection but modification. To interpret Paul as a rejection (of Judaism and of the law, but also of the body) is in fact to identify him with the teaching of a different theological position, that of Marcion, an influential and astute early interpreter of Paul who, like the Gnostics, views reform as a complete rejection of bodily life, radically separating the god of redemption from the god of creation and understanding the re-birth of the self in Christ as a complete rejection of the law, a total antinomianism.

Where Marcion differs from the Gnostics is precisely on the issue of *gnosis*, knowledge: for Marcion, the god of redemption is so alien (a word whose paranoid and science-fictional resonances are not at all inappropriate) that even believers have no cognitive insight into it. It is here that a connection between Marcion's reading of Paul and the recent readings of Agamben and particularly Badiou comes into focus: Marcion's Paul is all about *faith* as a practical or, in Badiou's word, 'militant,' exercise, as opposed to an epistemic escapade. Critchley is sympathetic to this understanding of faith, of faith as what he terms 'performative.' But the life beyond law (in Agamben) and the radically transcendent nature of the 'event' of faith in Badiou suggest a conception of 'absolute' novelty that goes beyond reform, and indeed beyond Paul, to Marcion's complete break with Judaism, with the law and with the body. For Paul himself, Jewish law and Christian love are locked in a 'dialectic' in which law is never sloughed off completely: we are redeemed by the 'law of spirit,' not by the lack of law altogether.

Critchley's re-reading of Paul in this volume provides a weighty intellectual counter-point to his account of political anarchism in *Infinitely Demanding*, as well as to his own 'mystical anarchism,' as discussed by Philip Quadrio. Quadrio, in the next paper, makes a general case for the divisive nature of a 'theological anthropology' understood as grounding politics. Unlike a philosophical anthropology—that in principle could encompass everyone—its theological cousin can only ever be parochial. Of course the liberal response to such 'political theology' (whether Schmittian and authoritarian or Critchleyan and anarchist) is to separate the political from the religious spheres along the lines laid out by Locke. But, following recent scholarship on Locke, Quadrio claims that this very division of spheres is itself religious in origin, and in fact makes sense only parochially, to those who understand religion in a specifically Protestant way. There is therefore no easy way to avoid political theology, and this opens up a space for a progressive political theology that Critchley explores. Unfortunately, Quadrio argues, the theological anthropology Critchley chooses in his 'Mystical Anarchism' (2009, 2012, Chap. 3), based on the writings of Maguerite Porete, a French speaking Beguine of the late thirteenth and early fourteenth century, turn out to be extremely unpromising: parochial (elitist) in the extreme, otherworldly and virulently hostile to the body, indeed to all of creation.

In the last paper in this section, 'Border Sovereignty,' Alistair Welchman engages with Schmitt as a classical case of conservative political theology.[1]

[1] This paper was not originally presented at the workshop.

But he argues that the theological premise that undergirds Schmitt's theory of sovereignty has not been correctly identified: it is the notion of an atemporal act, normally associated with god's creation of the world. Agamben's reading of Schmitt can be understood as drawing out some of the phenomenological consequences of this premise in its application to the political realm in the act of foundation of the *polis*, the construction of a certain non-empirical spatio-temporality of the state associated with its border. And these consequences have direct political effects, as Welchman shows in his analysis of the specific case of US-Mexico border. Welchman takes inspiration from the diversity of Critchley's political theologies to analyze the political presuppositions and consequences of a very specific theological doctrine.

Non-metaphysical Political Theology

Both this *agon* between Quadrio and Critchley, as well as Welchman's account of Schmitt's and Agamben's political theologies, show just how difficult it is to choose the correct theological model for progressive political intervention; but also how rich the vein of views and doctrines (heretical and otherwise) is, and how relatively unexplored in its political consequences.

However, this notion of a direct mapping—whether positively or negatively valorized—between the theological and the political does not on its own do justice to the subtlety of Critchley's views. For, at the same time as demanding a return to a certain kind of religiosity as a condition for combatting political nihilism, Critchely also affirms the death of god. How can these positions be rendered consistent? Through the application of a certain kind of flexible formalism. Critchley develops a view, similar to Heidegger's (and Derrida's) within which the formal structure of religiosity, and especially its practical, affective and motivational schemas, is retained, but without the purely cognitive aspect of belief in this or that metaphysical entity or entities.

It is this motivational aspect embedded in a certain form of religiosity that promises to solve the problem of nihilism or moral apathy under liberalism, and to do so without running the risk of any naïve return to an imaginary past or concomitant fundamentalist fanaticism. Critchley's argument here is sympathetic to the struggle for autonomy, both at the individual level, as in Kant (Critchley 2007, pp. 26ff) and at the level of the *polis*, as in Rousseau (Critchley 2012, Chap. 2). But he argues that ultimately this struggle is doomed to failure, and there must be a moment of heteronomy in any understanding of the moral or the political. In this he is following a counter-idealist post-Kantian tradition from Schelling to Kierkegaard (see Kosch 2006). But where this post-Kantian tradition arrives in the end at an effectively substantive commitment to Christianity (in Kierkegaard and the late Schelling), Critchley attempts, by contrast, to find the space for a moment of effective and affective religiosity capable of providing the motivational force that liberal apathy or even nihilism lacks, while also at the same time resisting a substantial, 'metaphysical' and cognitivist conception of this religiosity.

The next four papers in the volume address this non-substantive space of political community, the 'faith of the faithless' (Critchley 2012), the community of those who have no community or the polis, the a-political: Anne O'Byrne's 'The Gossip Circles of Geneva' questions whether Rousseau's conception of the motivational binding of social substance really can be as formal as Critchley maintains. In her 'Nihilists, Heroes, Samaritans and I,' Jill Stauffer contrasts Critchley's non-substantive religiosity with the explicit Christianity of Charles Taylor. Davide Panagia's 'Exposures and Projections,' uses conceptual resources from Critchley's aesthetics to map out the possibility of a shared democratic polity that does not presuppose substantive shared metaphysical commitments. And Roland Champagne's 'Simon Critchley' s Problem of Politics and Hannah Arendt's Idealism for the USA,' compares the ethical and political efficacy of Arendt's notion of the 'pariah' to Levinas's critique of metaphysically substantial conceptions of the ethical.

In the first of these papers, 'The Gossip Circles of Geneva,' Anne O'Byrne gives a close reading of Rousseau's *Letter to d'Alembert on the Theater* in order to answer the question whether the particular forms in which social substance is given, what she terms (exploiting both the English and French resonances of the word) 'moralizing,' are a necessary condition of political life or not. In a nuanced discussion of the semantic field of this term, O'Byrne nevertheless makes it clear that it would in many ways be good to think not. In particular, Critchley's anarchism is intended to respond to the motivational deficit of liberalism in a way that avoids falling back into a particular social substance, 'moralizing' in a coercive sense, or in Mouffe's sense, in which it represents the death of the political. In the *Letter*, O'Byrne follows Rousseau's vehement objection to d'Alembert's article in the *Encyclopedia* in which he praises Geneva, but bemoans the absence of theaters. For Rousseau the theater is a social solvent, standing in stark contrast to the informal single-sex 'sewing' or 'gossip' circles that he thinks synthesize an appropriate social substance, a set of *moeurs*. These circles are more important even than civil religion, and this form of 'social Calvinism' is indeed essential to political life, at least for Rousseau, and at least in his Geneva.

In the second of the papers in this section, Jill Stauffer addresses the question of the political lethargy associated with liberalism, of 'moral motivation' and of 'political disappointment.'[2] Her paper takes the form of a dialogue between two different ways of answering or at least addressing the issue: a Christian emphasis on the necessity of a substantial religious moment in the renewal of political motivation (given by a reading of Charles Taylor) and the atheist—or at least not explicitly theist—response of Simon Critchley to the same question. Both reject Kant's autonomy thesis: the self finds its ethical aspect only in something outside of that self: god, for Taylor, a 'demand' for Critchley (2007). For Taylor the rise of secularism—the avowal that the world of human existence is meaningless—does not make political motivation impossible, but it does make it unlikely, consigning it

[2] This paper was not the paper that Jill originally presented at the workshop, which was destined for publication elsewhere.

to a heroic mold that effectively deprives most of us of a proper political engagement. Critchley takes up this theatrical image, but argues that the tragic hero is not the only model for (self)transcendence: the *comic* can have the same effect. Stauffer defends Taylor's understanding of the problem, but sees no particular reason to think that *only* Christian universalism can solve it.

The third paper in this section is by Roland Champagne. Champagne addresses Hannah Arendt's conceptual enthusiasm for the United States and positions her, following Critchley, in a kind of Levinasian role: as the political representative of an individualism whose resistance to the 'totalization' of the state is analogous to Levinas's view of the ethical. On Champagne's reading, Arendt's cleaving to the private/public distinction ought to be viewed in relation to the questions of social substance and political motivation that animate both Critchley's work and several of the chapters in this collection.

In the fourth and final paper in this second set, Davide Panagia pursues a two-fold project. First, following some of Critchley's comments in *Infinitely Demanding*, Panagia seeks to substitute an ethics of appearance within democratic theory for an ethics of substance (social group, community etc.). For Panagia—as for others: Kant, Heidegger—appearance is itself most intimately encountered in the art object, and so Panagia begins with a link between aesthetics and ethics. But it is easy to make a mis-step here, and, in the second aim of his paper, Panagia develops from Critchley's remarks a cleft between two ways in which aesthetic objects thematize an appearance: first, by exposing themselves for intelligible cognition; and second, by constituting a 'screen' on which the unintelligible core of the ethical demand may be projected, granting us simultaneously access to it, while also protecting us from it—exposure and projection. In a close reading of Butler's rejection of Sontag's thesis that photographs only yield to interpretation by means of their *hors-textes* (captions, titles etc.), Panagia reveals the stake of an ethics of exposure: it betrays the specifically aesthetic value of the art object, its relation to *aisthesis*, to sensation, by reducing it to an ideological text, whose only value lies in its cognitive decoding. By contrast, reading Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations* in tandem with Stanley Cavell, a political aesthetic of projection emphasizes the ability of an art object to produce new views (something that Cavell shows applies even to language: the projective capacity of words is what makes metaphor possible). Allowing and provoking projections permits us a mode of connection that is not mediated by substantial similarity but rather 'immediated,' as it were, by what Panagia calls an 'intangible sympathy' that prevents substantive consensus from being the condition of democratic polity.

Tragedy, Comedy and the Grounds of Political-Ethical Life

The last two papers in the collection (prior to the concluding interview with Critchley), by Costica Bradatan and Tina Chanter, follow the lead set down by Panagia's paper and seek to address the variety of ways in which art has an

important role to play in Critchley's understanding of politics and religion. The first of these, Costica Bradatan's essay 'The World as Farce,' tables a novel proof for the existence of god derived from his reading of Dostoyevsky's *The Brothers Karamazov*: the very disorder and meaninglessness of the world renders it farcical; but something can be a farce only if there is someone—a god—to laugh at it. There is therefore a toehold against nihilism in even the most abyssal situations, one that we can use to lever ourselves into meaning even in the degradation of the ridiculous; there is transcendence not necessarily through laughing at our situation, but simply through the idea that we are in fact ridiculous. Bradatan uses this idea to explore a variety of themes, from Primo Levi through Roberto Benigni's *La vita è bella* and culminating in a detailed analysis of Milan Kundera's *The Joke*. On the way it becomes clear that the theological is at the same time the political, for the structure of minimal redemption that Bradatan lays out does not in fact need god, not even the evil demiurgical creator god of the Gnostics. *Any* force that makes us ridiculous will suffice, and, as he points out, many Central European intellectuals, including Kundera, understand themselves not as the pawns of god but as the pawns of history. These readings are framed by concerns characteristic of Critchley: god's laughter is a concretization of Critchley's injunction, in *Very Little,... Almost Nothing* (1997), to extract meaning from the meaningless, but it is also related to Critchley's suggestion, in *On Humor* (2002), that comedy could succeed in providing the minimal self-distance required for the development of an ethics where the tragic has failed. The comedy that can do this is directed at oneself, not, in the contrast Critchley provides, towards others. But Bradatan effectively argues for the redemptive potential of a different contrast case, not laughing at others, but being laughed at.

Tina Chanter's paper starts from a different, but equally potent, site of the intersection between the religious and the political: the Antigone myth. Chanter gives an extended analysis of Hegel's interpretation of Sophocles' tragedy as foreshadowing a reconciliation between love (Antigone) and law (Creon), and finds—aided by close readings of some post-colonial re-imaginings of *Antigone* set in Northern Ireland, Nigeria and Robben Island, South Africa—an altogether more unsettling political meditation on borders, identity, political subjectivity, slavery and the foreign. In part this reading picks and opens up the irreducible ethical remainder identified by Critchley's political reading of Levinas (Critchley 2004), a remainder that cannot be reabsorbed by the dialectical sublation of Antigone into the law. But part of Chanter's point is to highlight the extent to which it is theatrical re-productions of *Antigone* that have made its political stakes explicit, where the philosophical tradition is still entangled in the dialectic between love and law—religion and politics—albeit in a way that complicates their relation and refuses any simplistic subordination of love to law: following Critchley's understanding of faith as essentially performative, Chanter traces the efficacy of tragedy itself back to its performances. In the necessity of an appeal to art in negotiating the religious and the political, Chanter follows Critchley closely; but her analysis of the significance of the *tragedy* of Antigone resists Critchley's critique of the 'heroic' and the notion of 'authenticity' with which he argues it is

freighted (Critchley 2007, pp. 73ff). For Chanter there is still room for tragic effects of sublimation, and still a need to come to terms with the legacy of colonialism within both Antigone and the political context of its reception, a reception still dominated by Hegel's reading (see Chanter 2011).

The last chapter of this collection comprises an interview with Simon Critchley conducted on April 14th 2012 at the annual meeting and conference of the North Texas Philosophical Association, at which Simon Critchley was keynote speaker (many thanks to Trish Glazebrook for kindly finding us a room in which to conduct the interview). In the interview, Critchley ranges over the relations of mutual imbrication between the religious and the political that form the concern of this collection, sometimes updating the political references, especially in the case of the Occupy movement, but also the Arab Spring, that had not started when the conference from which these papers originated took place in 2010. But in the interview, Critchley also moves into new areas of interest, which, especially in Davide Panagia's and Tina Chanter's papers, are foreshadowed in this collection, most especially into the aesthetic realm. Indeed, Critchley has recently co-written a book on *Hamlet* (Critchley and Webster 2013).

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Chapter 2
You Are Not Your Own

On the Nature of Faith

Simon Critchley

Reformation

Saint Paul is trouble. It is simply a fact about the history of Christian dogma that the return to Paul is usually very bad news for the established church. As Adolph von Harnack pointed out more than a century ago,

> One might write the history of dogma as the history of the Pauline reactions in the Church, and in doing so would touch on all the turning points of the history. (von Harnack 1894, p. 136)

This is true of Marcion's opposition to the Apostolic Fathers, Augustine after the Church Fathers through to Luther after the Scholastics and Jansenism after the Council of Trent. Von Harnack continues, 'Everywhere it has been Paul. . .who produced the Reformation.' (von Harnack 1894, p. 136)

So, the spirit of Paul is the movement of reformation. It is the attempt to clear away the corruption, secularism and intellectual sophistry of the established church and to return to the *religious* core of Christianity that is tightly bound up with its oldest extant documents, Paul's Epistles. The Pauline motivation for religious reformation is also true of Kierkegaard, Karl Barth and Rudolf Bultmann. Perverse as it might sound, I think it is equally true of Nietzsche, even and perhaps especially when he dresses himself in the tragi-comic garb of the Anti-Christ. Giorgio Agamben rightly sees Nietzsche's adoption of the figure the Anti-Christ from Second Thessalonians as a kind of parody of Pauline Messianism (Agamben 2005b, p. 112). Nietzsche's call for a revaluation of values is based on a sheer jealousy of Paul: if anyone brought about a revaluation of values, then it was Paul. But also, Nietzsche's revelation of the intuition into Eternal Return, '6,000 ft above

S. Critchley (✉)
The New School for Social Research, New York, NY, USA
e-mail: critchls@newschool.edu

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A. Welchman (ed.), *Politics of Religion/Religions of Politics*,
Sophia Studies in Cross-cultural Philosophy of Traditions and Cultures 8,
DOI 10.1007/978-94-017-9448-0_2

man and time', is a kind of mimicry of Paul's road to Damascus experience. As Jacob Taubes writes, 'Paul haunts Nietzsche all the way to the deepest intimacies.' (Taubes 2004, p. 83)

To begin to turn towards my angle of entry into Paul, what goes for Nietzsche also goes for Heidegger's passionate interest in *Urchristentum,* primal or primordial Christianity, in his lectures on Paul's Epistles in the crisis years that followed the First World War. The basic intuition of Heidegger's reformation of thinking is deeply Pauline. The very gesture of attempting to recover a primordial Christianity is the desire for a repetition of the Pauline moment. We must slough off the sediment of tradition, what Heidegger called in his famous 1919 letter to his priest, Father Engelbert Krebs, 'The system of Catholicism', and reactivate the traditions' sources in the name of an originary experience (2002, p. 69). The return to Paul is the attempt, and this is Heidegger's word, at the *destruction (Destruktion)* or dismantling of a deadening tradition in the name of a proclamation of life.

As Wayne Meeks points out, Paul is both 'the most holy apostle' and 'the apostle of the heretics' (Meeks 1972, p. 435). Since the times of his quarrel with Peter and the Jewish Christians, Paul has been the zealot foe of tradition's authority and the opponent of any and all forms of authoritarianism. Paul is the proper name of a ferment in the history of Christianity. Indeed, it is a ferment that places even the specificity of Christianity in question. For example, what the books by Daniel Boyarin, Taubes and Agamben share is the desire to show that Paul is much better understood as a radical Jew. As Boyarin notes, 'Paul lived and died convinced he was a Jew living out Judaism' (Boyarin 1994, p. 2). Taubes goes even further, claiming that 'Paul is a fanatic, a Jewish zealot'(Taubes 2004, p. 24) and 'more Jewish than any reform rabbi'(Taubes 2004, p. 11). Agamben's governing hypothesis is to restore Paul's Epistles to their rightful place within the tradition of Jewish Messianism, a tradition reactivated through Scholem and Benjamin (Taubes 2004, p. 1).

If Paul's essence consists in anything, then it is surely constituted by activism. This spells trouble for any and every church that sees itself as founded, funded and well-defended. What usually happens when Paul is invoked is that the established church is declared to be the Whore of Babylon and its hierarchy the Anti-Christ. The fact that there is so much interest in Paul at present shouldn't therefore be seen as a conservative gesture or some sort of return to traditional religion. On the contrary, the return to Paul is the demand for reformation. It is the demand for a new figure of activism, or what Alain Badiou calls a new militancy for the universal in an age defined by moral relativism, a communitarian politics of identity and global capitalism (Badiou 2003, pp. 4–15). What is being glimpsed and groped towards in the return to Paul is a vision of faith and existential commitment that might begin to face and face down the demotivated slackening of existence under conditions of liberal democracy. The return to Paul is motivated by political disappointment.[1]

[1] For a rather different, but wonderfully detailed, account of Paul's politics, that attempts to show the extent of Paul's debt to the traditions of Hellenistic popular and political philosophy, see Blumenfeld (2001).

Paul's Address

Written with an overwhelming sense of urgency, over a very brief period – 10 years or so (51–62? a.d.) – in a context that, at the very least, could have been described as critical and crisis-ridden, Paul's Epistles have shown themselves to be susceptible to the widest and wildest interpretations, simplifications and distortions. From the time of the subsequent writing of the Gospels, through to the Acts of the Apostles and the so-called heresy of Marcion onwards, there has seemed to be something infinitely malleable about the subtle antithetical complexities of Paul's thinking, what Luther called 'an unheard-of speech' (Meeks 1972, p. 241). To call Paul protean is to risk utter understatement.

Obviously, the most widespread and egregious distortion is that Paul was the 'Founder of Christianity'. As any reader of Paul will know, the words 'Christian' and 'Christianity' were not employed by Paul. He spoke rather of being 'in Christ', a phrase which can be understood in at least two ways:

1. Mystically, as a claim for the immanence of Christ in the soul, as when Paul says 'It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me'(Gal. 2 19).[2]
2. Politically, as what Martin Dibelius calls 'membership in the waiting community' (Meeks 1972, p. 409). I will turn below to the subtlety of Paul's critique of mysticism.

However much subsequent Christian doctrine might have tried to transform him into a more Peter-like foundation stone or *pierre angulaire*, Paul certainly didn't see himself as a founder of an organized institutional religion, whether Orthodox or Catholic, let alone Anglican.

Paul simply proclaimed the Messiah (*Mashiah*, *Christos*), whose name was Jesus, the historical *Yeshu ben Yosef*. As we will see presently, Paul's faith is not the sort of abstract belief in God famously criticized by Martin Buber, as much as a passionate commitment to the Messiah (Buber 1994). The faith in Jesus as the anointed one or Messiah was evidenced through the resurrection. Read any few pages of Paul, and one is reminded of the absolute centrality of the resurrection. Without it, all faith is in vain. It cannot simply be dismissed as a 'fable', as Badiou tries to do (Badiou 2003, p. 4). But with his faith in the resurrection, Paul sought to build up communities that in his words would be a 'remnant, chosen by grace.' (Rom. 10 5) As Taubes shows, Paul constructs a negative political theology based on the single commandment of love that is against both the Jews and the Romans. Paul writes to an illicit, secret, subterranean community, 'a little Jewish, a little Gentile' (Taubes 2004, p. 54), a bunch of rejects and *refuseniks*, the very filth of the world: 'We have become, and are now as the refuse of the world *(perikatharmata tou kosmou)*, the offscouring *(peripsiema)* of all things' (1 Cor. 4 12).

[2] All references to Paul, unless indicated, are to the Revised Standard Edition, given in Meeks (1972). I have also, on occasion, checked translations from the Greek using Marshall (1933 [1882]).

What is being imagined here is a political theology of the wretched of the earth, as Frantz Fanon would say, or the scum of the earth, which is the New International Version translation of *perikatharmata tou kosmou*. Paul's politics is a building up of an unwanted offscouring that belongs neither to the world of the Romans or the Jews: an unclean husk, peel or skin scale, that which is sloughed off and thrown away, the human dregs and nailclippings of the world – the shit of the earth (see Eagleton 2009, p. 23). I think Agamben is therefore justified in his critique of Badiou that what is at stake in Paul is not the simple assertion of universalism against communitarianism (Agamben 2005b, pp. 51–52). Paulinism is not Kantianism. What is at stake is a politics of the remnant, where the off-cuttings of humanity are the basis for a new political articulation.

The task of these scoured-off communities was to bear the message of the Messiah through the end-times in which Paul believed he was living, 'For the form of this world is passing away.' (1 Cor. 7 31) As Agamben shows, Paul's concern is with the time that remains, *il tempo che resta*; that is, the remaining time between now and *parousia*, between the now that is defined by the historicity of the resurrection and the futurity of Jesus' return (Agamben 2005b, pp. 62–72). Pauline time – which can be described as messianic or indeed ecstatic – is stretched between the 'already' of the resurrection and the 'not-yet' of *parousia*, a historicity and futurity that are marked in the now, the *kairos,* of Paul's *address*. The urgency of the address shows that he didn't think there was much time left.

It is the nature of the address in Paul that is so fascinating. Firstly, Paul writes letters that are addressed to a specific community – the Thessalonians, the Galatians – or, in at least one case, to a specific person – Philemon. But, secondly, and more importantly, Paul writes these letters because he was addressed, because he was called. So, Paul addresses letters because he was addressed. Paul never speaks of a conversion experience. The closest we get to conversion is the questionable passage in Acts when Jesus says, 'Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?', the scales fell from his eyes, and Saul becomes Paul (Acts 9 4). Paul speaks rather of being called, *kletos*, or of a calling, *klesis*. As he writes at the beginning of Romans, Paul was called to be an apostle, a messenger (Rom. 1 1). In Corinthians 2, Paul speaks of himself in the third person, 'I know a man in Christ who, fourteen years ago was caught up to the third heaven.' (2 Cor. 10 2) But whatever happens to Paul that transforms him from a persecutor of Jewish Christians into a preacher of Christ's gospel, he is the subject of a calling. Or, better, Paul's subjectivity is constituted through a call.

Who is Paul, we might ask? Paul is the called. Indeed, Paul is called Paul because he was called. Before the call, he was Saul or *Saulos*. Saul was a noble and kingly name, 'of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew born of Hebrews. . .under the law blameless.' (Phil. 3 5) Through his calling, Paul writes, 'I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as refuse *(skubala)*.' (Phil. 3 8). When Paul is called, he becomes trash, literally a piece of shit or dung as some of the earlier translations render *toskubalon*. As opposed to the nobility of Saul, a free Roman citizen, Paul becomes small. As Agamben reminds us, *paulus* in Latin means 'small, of little significance.' (Agamben 2005b, p. 7) It is linked to *pauper*, a man of poor, scanty or

meager means. The movement from Saul to Paul occasioned by the call is a switch from major to minor. *Paulos* is a diminitive, something like 'Pauly' or 'Paulinho'. Crucially, Paul is a slave name and like all slave names it is a nickname – violently imposed – that superimposes itself in the place of the erased proper name. Once Paul is called, as he says at the beginning of Romans, he becomes a slave of the Messiah *(Paulos doulos Iesou Kristou)*. The key to Paul's 'unheard-of speech,' his delight and brilliance in multiplying antitheses, is that slavery makes us free and weakness is strength, 'For when I am weak, then I am strong.' (2 Cor 12 10) Christ was crucified in weakness to become powerful through the resurrection. Likewise, in becoming slaves of the Messiah, we are asked to abandon our secular, Roman life of freedom, and assert our weakness. The power of being in Christ is a powerless power. It is constituted by a call that exceeds human strength. It gives subjects a potentiality for action through rendering them impotent. We shall return to the central theme of impotence below.

Furthermore, Paul insists, 'This is my rule in all the churches' (1 Cor 7 17): we should remain in the condition in which we were called. If you were a slave when called, then no matter: he who was called as a slave becomes free in Christ. Alternatively, if you were free when called, like Paul, then you become a slave of Christ. A similar oxymoronic logic governs Paul's approach to marriage: if you are bound to a wife, then 'do not seek to be free.' (1 Cor. 7 27) But if you are free of a wife, then 'do not seek marriage.' (1 Cor. 7 27) As Paul continues, 'the appointed time has grown very short' and marriage will lead us into worldly troubles (1 Cor. 7 29). Therefore, 'let those who have wives live as if they had none.' (1 Cor. 7 29) So much for so-called Christian family values. As Terry Eagleton reminds us, 'Jesus' attitude to the family is one of implacable hostility.' (Eagleton 2009, p. 23)

Troth-Plight, Faith as Proclamation

My concern here is with the nature of faith. I'd like to address this issue directly by using Paul and some of his recent philosophical interlocutors as my guides. What kind of thing is faith and – more particularly – can someone who is nominally or denominationally faithless, such as myself, still have an experience of faith? Can one speak of a faith of the faithless?

The idea I want to propose here is faith as a declarative act, as an enactment, a performative that proclaims. To this extent, I want to tie the idea of the gospel and evangelical good tidings *(to euaggelion)* to the verbal sense of 'to proclaim' or 'to announce' *(euaggelixomai)*. Faith is an announcement that enacts, a proclamation that brings the subject of faith into being.

To put it telegraphically, faith is an enactment in relation to a calling. It is proclaimed in the urgent and punctual literary form of the epistle. The letter, arising out of the address of a calling, is addressed to a specific community usually at a critical moment in its existence. In other words, faith announces itself in a situation of crisis where a decisive intervention is called for. In other words, faith takes place

in a situation of struggle. At stake in the struggle is the meaning of the future and the exact extent of the shadow that the future casts across the present – eschatological struggle. So, faith is not an empty, fixed or constant state with the distant pay-off of final bliss in the afterlife. It is rather an enactment in the present that is shot through both by the facticity of the past (for Paul, the fact of the resurrection) and the imminence of the future *(parousia)*. The passion that defines Paul's proclamation in his letters concerns our relation to the futurity of a redemption that we anxiously await, but for which we must prepare ourselves.

Paul's conception of faith is not, then, the abstraction of a metaphysical belief in God. Nor is Christ some Hegelian mediation to the divine or a conduit to a transcendent beyond. Faith is rather a lived subjective commitment to what I have called elsewhere an infinite demand (Critchley 2007, Chap. 2). It is the infinite demand of the risen Christ that calls Paul to proclaim. It is in relation to that demand that the subject is constituted through an act of approval or fidelity. Crucially, and we will come back to this, the subject is not the equal of the infinite demand which is placed on it. If it were, the demand would not be infinite and the structure of faith would have the same shape as autonomy, namely the law that one gives oneself, for example in Kant. Rather, the infinite demand that calls Paul requires a faith in something that exceeds my power, the *Faktum* of Jesus Messiah. This *Faktum* hetero-affectively constitutes the subject in a very specific way. Faith does not consist in the assertive strength of the subject that makes it the equal of the demand placed on it. Rather, the infinite demand confronts the strength of the subject with an essential weakness or state of wanting *(asthenia)*. As Paul writes,

> God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong. God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things which are not, to bring to nothing things that are.(1 Cor. 1 27–28).

Agamben shows compellingly in his linking of Paul to Benjamin's 'Theses on the Philosophy of History' that messianic power is always weak (Agamben 2005b, pp. 138–45). The adjective 'weak' is not a qualification or diminution of messianic power, as Derrida seems to believe in *Specters of Marx* (Derrida 1994). As the Lord replies to Paul, 'My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.' (Cor. 2 12 9) Faith, especially a faith of the faithless, since it lacks a transcendent, metaphysical guarantee, is a powerless power, a strength in weakness.

On 'The Sixth Day' of his reading of the ten opening words of Paul's Letter to the Romans, Agamben turns to the question of faith in a way that finds an echo in the claim that I've just tried to make. In a gesture that one finds repeatedly in his writings, usually towards the ends of his books – sometimes, indeed, on the final page – Agamben tries to keep open a space between law and life.[3] His governing Benjaminian thesis is that history is the creeping juridification of all areas of human life, where the law is identified with violence. For Agamben, there is an essential decline in the experience of faith from Pauline *pistis* to the forms of sacramental

[3] See, for example, the final paragraph of *State of Exception* (Agamben 2005a, p. 88) which begins, 'To show law in its nonrelation to life and life in its nonrelation to law. . .'

faith that emerged in the centuries after Paul. The history of theology – and perhaps theology itself, the science of the divine – is the reduction of faith to creedal dogma or the articles of a catechism. When this happens, as Agamben lets slip in one his typically elliptical asides, 'The law stiffens and atrophies and relations between men lose all sense of grace and vitality.' (Agamben 2005b, p. 135) In what is essentially a repetition of the reformational gesture that I noted at the beginning of this chapter – Marcionite or Lutheran – Agamben finds that vitality of faith in Paul.

Agamben links faith to the experience of making an *oath*, the domain of what he calls *'pré-droit'*, 'pre-law.' (Agamben 2005b, p. 114) Such an oath is a kind of pledge or what I called above a proclamation. It is something that one swears. In this pre-creedal, pre-juridical experience of faith, there is no split between belief in God the Father and God the Son, as in the Nicene Creed – even if they are two aspects of the same Trinitarian ontological substance. Furthermore, and crucially for Agamben, faith is not ontological at all. It is not faith that 'Jesus *is* the Messiah', where the latter is a predicate of the former. Rather, faith is expressed in the more compressed pledge of the *Faktum:* 'Jesus Messiah'. Being is not something that we can predicate of Christ through a constative proposition or even Hegel's speculative copula. Rather, Jesus Messiah is something otherwise than Being or beyond essence, to coin a phrase.

Similarly, Jesus Messiah is beyond existence, or rather he is not proven through the fact of the historical Jesus. As Paul makes clear in Galatians, when Jesus Christ was revealed to Paul in order that he might preach amongst the Gentiles, 'I did not confer with flesh and blood, nor did I go up to Jerusalem to those who were apostles before me.' (Gal. 1 16–17) Rather, he disappeared into 'Arabia,' which scholars suggest refers to somewhere in modern Syria or Jordan. Thus, the experience of faith cannot be explained with reference to the category of being, whether conceived as essence or existence. As Agamben makes clear, between the words 'Jesus' and 'Messiah' there is no elbowroom into which the copula might squeeze its way. Faith, then, is the performative force of the words 'Jesus Messiah' – nothing more, but nothing less. This is what Agamben interestingly calls 'the effective experience of a pure power of saying.' (Agamben 2005b, p. 136)

Faith is a word, a word whose force consists in the event of its proclamation. The proclamation finds no support within being, whether conceived as existence or essence. Agamben interestingly links this thought to Foucault's idea of *veridiction* or truth-telling, where the truth lies in the telling alone.[4] But it could equally be linked to Lacan's distinction, inherited from Benveniste, between the orders of *énonciation* (the subject's act of speaking) and the *énoncé* (the formulation of this speech-act into a statement or proposition). Indeed, there are significant echoes between this idea of faith as proclamation and Levinas's conception of the Saying

[4] See Agamben (2005b, pp. 133–34) where he refers to unpublished lectures by Foucault given in Leuven in 1981 called 'Mal faire, dire vrai.' This is closely related to the also unpublished fourth volume of the History of Sexuality, *The Confessions of the Flesh*, which deals with the practice of confession and monastic discipline.

(le Dire) which is the performative act of addressing and being addressed by an other and the Said *(le Dit),* which is the formulation of that act into a proposition of the form 'S is P'. We are dealing here with a performative idea of truth as *troth*, an act of fidelity or 'being true to,' rather than a propositional or empirical idea of truth (see Critchley 2007, Chaps. 1 and 2). Truth is conceived as what, in a rather nicely antiquated English, can be called 'troth-plight,' the faithful act of pledging or proclaiming.

Truth as troth has to be underwritten by love, where the proclamation of faith is an act of betrothal where one affiances oneself to another and where the other is one's fiancé. This recalls the famous line of thinking from Corinthians 13, where Paul insists that if faith is not underwritten by love, then, 'I'm a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal.' (1 Cor. 13 1) The context here, of course, is the polemic against *glossolalia* or speaking in tongues that had seemingly crept into the Corinthian congregation. But if faith is a troth-plight that proclaims the calling of an infinite demand, then the proclamation has to be supported by love, which 'bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.' (1 Cor. 13 7) Faith without love is a hollow clanging that lacks the subjective commitment to endure. As Paul puts it in Galatians, 'For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision is of any avail, but faith working through love.' (Gal. 5 6) This is a point that Badiou makes well in his reading of Paul. If faith is the coming forth *(le surgir)* of the subject in the proclamation of an infinite demand, then love is the labor *(labeur)* of the subject that has bound itself to its demand in faith. Love is what gives consistency to a subject and which allows it to persevere with what Badiou always calls 'a process of truth'. Love, like faith, does not allow for copulative predication, it does not assemble predicates of the beloved as reasons for love. As Agamben insists, in a curious example (given the name of Jesus' mother), the lover says, 'I love beautiful-brunette-tender Mary,' not 'I love Mary because she is beautiful, brunette, tender.' (Agamben 2005b, p. 128) Love has no reason and needs none. If it did, it wouldn't be love.[5]

Crypto-Marcionism

In his Commentary on Galatians, Luther famously writes, 'The truth of the Gospel is that, that our righteousness comes by faith alone.' (Meeks 1972, p. 239) The return to Paul that defines the movement of reformation, is a return to the purity and authority of faith. As such, Luther draws the strongest of contrasts between faith and law, where 'Law only shows sin, terrifies and humbles; thus it prepares us for justification and drives us to Christ.' (Meeks 1972, p. 240) The effects of this radical

[5] As Agamben relatedly writes in *The Coming Community*, 'The lover wants the loved one *with all its predicates*, its being such as it is. The lover desires the *as* only insofar as it is *such* – this is the lover's particular fetishism.' (Agamben 1993, p. 2)

distinction between faith and law in the constitution of Christian anti-Semitism, where the Jews are always identified with law, are well-known and do not need to be rehearsed here (see Boyarin 1994, pp. 40–56).

My question here concerns the relation between faith and law in Paul and what is involved in the affirmation of a radical Paulinism that would be based on faith alone. In the history of Christian dogma, of course, this is the risk of Marcionism. It is, to quote Socrates, a fine risk, but one that ultimately has to be refused. My other concern here is with the way in which a certain ultra-Paulinism asserts itself in figures like Agamben, Heidegger and Badiou in a way that might lead one to conclude that the contemporary return to Paul is really a return to Marcion.

As Taubes writes, there are two ways out of Paul:

1. The Christian church itself in its early centuries, the tradition of Peter; and,
2. Marcionism, which posed the greatest political threat to emergent Catholic Christianity, particularly in the latter half of the Second Century.

Marcion, like Paul, was a gifted organizer and tenacious creator of churches. His followers were extremely numerous and lived in communities, in some cases whole villages, until the time of their persecution under Constantine in the Fourth Century. Marcionite communities reportedly endured here and there as late as the Tenth Century. For Marcion, Paul was the only true apostle. Marcion was his true follower. He called himself 'Presbyteros', leader of the true followers of the true apostle. For Marcion, the core of Paul's proclamation is the separation between the orders of faith and law, grace and works and spirit and flesh. Marcion radicalizes the antithetical form of Paul's thought – his only known work is called *The Antitheses*, which is roughly dated to 140 A.D. – to the point of cutting the bond that ties creation to redemption. And Marcion is surely right here: creation plays a very small role in Paul and his constant preoccupation is redemption. Therefore, as Taubes notes,

> The thread that links creation and redemption is a very thin one. A very, very thin one. And it can snap. And that is Marcion. He reads – and he knows how to read! – the father of Jesus Christ is *not* the creator of heaven and earth. (Taubes 2004, p. 60)

As von Harnack shows, in the obsessive and oddly moving book – 50 years in the making—*Marcion: The Gospel of the Alien God,* Marcion cuts the ontological link that ties creation to redemption and establishes an ontological dualism (von Harnack 1990, pp. 1–14). The God of the known world, the God of creation, whom Paul suggestively calls 'the God of this world,' is distinct from the God of redemption, the God who is revealed through and as Jesus Christ. In opposition to the known God of the Hebrew Bible, Christ is the unknown God, the radically new God. No word is more frequently used in Marcion's 'Antitheses' than the epithet 'new' and any critique of Marcion can be turned against the obsession with the new and the figure of novelty in recent philosophical readings of Paul, as we will see presently. The unknown God is the true God, but an alien God. Apparently, in the Marcionite churches, Christ was called 'the Alien' or 'the good Alien.' (von

Harnack 1990, p. 80) This means that God enters into the world as an outsider, a stranger to creation.

Marcion radicalizes the Pauline distinction between grace freely given and righteousness based on works and attaches them to two divine principles: the righteous and wrathful God of the Old Testament and the loving and merciful God of the Gospel. Of course, this sounds like Gnosticism, but crucially there is no *gnosis* for Marcion. In his *History of Dogma,* von Harnack identifies *gnosis* with an 'intellectual, philosophic element,' namely some sort of intellectual intuition of the divine (von Harnack 1990, p. 223). When von Harnack calls something 'philosophical', it is hardly a word of praise. It is rather to reduce religion to the categories of Hellenistic philosophy. Marcion cannot be numbered among the Gnostics because he places the entire emphasis on faith and not on any form of *gnosis*. von Harnack writes,

> It was Marcion's purpose therefore to give all value to faith alone, to make it dependent on its own convincing power, and avoid all philosophic paraphrase and argument. (von Harnack 1990, p. 267)

The consequence of this ontological dualism is dramatic: the alien God, being separate from the God of this world, frees human beings from the creator and his creation. For Marcion, as von Harnack writes, 'The God of the Jews, together with all his books, the Old Testament, had to become the actual enemy.' (1990, p. 23) Marcion refused the syncretism of Old and New Testaments and all allegorical forms of interpretation that understand the latter as the fulfillment of the former. Allegorically understood – and this is the core of Marcion's critique of the Apostolic Fathers like Clement of Rome and Ignatius of Antioch – Christianity is the fulfillment of Judaism.[6] By contrast, the two testaments need to be rigorously separated and this is what Marcion did in the very first attempt, allegedly completed around 144, to produce an authentic edition of the Old and New Testaments. The former was included in its entirety and treated as historical fact. The New Testament included some expurgated versions of Paul's Epistles and one Gospel, that of Luke. Marcion writes, 'One must not allegorize the Scripture.' (von Harnack 1990, p. 12) For Marcion, the Christianity of the Apostolic Fathers was a Jewish Christianity, which is, of course, the criticism that Paul levels at Peter and the Jerusalem Church. Emergent Christianity had, in Marcion's eyes, poured the new wine into old wineskins and lost the radicality of the Gospel by seeing it continually in the rear-view mirror of the Old Testament. The formation of the Christian Biblical canon is a direct response to the text that Marcion created and to that extent is directly due to his alleged heresy. This is why the very life of the emergent Catholic Church depended on showing the concordance between the Old and New Testaments – hence the centrality of allegorical interpretation.

There is a Marcionite saying,

[6] For a selection of the writings of the Apostolic Fathers.

> One work is sufficient for our God; he has delivered man by his supreme and most excellent goodness, which is preferable to the creation of all the locusts (von Harnack 1990, p. 66)

Once the thread connecting creation to redemption has been cut, the task of the Christian is no longer to love creation, but to separate oneself from it as radically as possible. The world is the prison cell of the creator God and it is full of vermin, locusts and mosquitoes. There is a story of a 90 year-old Marcionite who washed himself in the morning in his own saliva, in order to have nothing to do with the works of the evil, creator God (von Harnack 1990, p. 111). In order to loosen the hold that the creator has upon us through the body, Marcion advocated a severe ascetic ethic which forbade all marriage and sexual intercourse amongst his believers following baptism. In von Harnack's words, for Marcion marriage was 'filthy' and 'shameful.' (1990, p. 96) This is simply the radicalization of Paul when he says that because 'form of this world is passing away,' those who have wives should 'act if it they had none,' and adds that 'He who marries does well', but, 'He who refrains from marriage will do better.' (1 Cor 7 29, 31, 38) Marriage, sex and the whole business of the body are mere fleshly distractions from the urgency of the spiritual task at hand. Because, 'The appointed time has grown very short,' (1 Cor 7 29) the little time that remains should not be wasted in anything that draws the spirit back to the flesh of creation. Taubes writes of Marcionism, 'It's a church with a radical mission that can't rest on its laurels as a people's church. . .It's a church that practices, or executes, the end of the world.' (Taubes 2004, p. 58) The essence of Marcionism is constant activism: if followers are not permitted to reproduce, then the growth of the church can only be based on the continual winning of new converts.

Von Harnack – and this is the implicit agenda of his book – sees Marcion as a Second Century Luther, a powerful intellect possessed of a prodigious reforming zeal. Marcion was the first Protestant. Cutting the bond between philosophical dogma and the religious experience of faith, he accused the existing church of heresy. In Marcion's eyes, Paulinism represented a great revolution that had, already at the beginning of the Second Century, been betrayed and required reformation. The core of this reformation consisted in asserting the radicality of the Pauline distinction between law and faith and asserting that grace alone was the purest essence of the Gospel. Taubes thinks that Marcion's adoption of dualism is an error, but an 'ingenious' one that is consistent with a certain ambivalence in Paul in conceiving the relation between creation and redemption (Taubes 2004, p. 61). For von Harnack – to adapt Hegel's dying words – Marcion is the only one who understood Paul and he misunderstood him. But the conclusion that von Harnack wants to draw from his study of Marcion is dramatic: the rejection of the Old Testament. For Protestantism, von Harnack insists, the Old Testament is 'the consequence of a religious and ecclesiastical crippling.' (1990, p. 134) Von Harnack wants to defend a radical fideism, where Christianity is nothing but faith in God's revelation in Christ.

Odd it might sound, I think Agamben's reading of Paul is crypto-Marcionite in its emphasis on a radically antinomian conception of faith. For example, in the

'Fifth Day' of his interpretation of Paul, Agamben focuses on the verb *katargeo*, which he wants to translate as 'to render inoperative or inactive' or, most revealingly, 'to suspend.' (Agamben 2005b, pp. 95–96) Agamben implicitly links *katargeo* to the state of exception in Schmitt, where the sovereign is the one who suspends the operation of the law. The Messianic is characterized by Agamben as a lawlessness that, in a sovereign political act, suspends the legality and legitimacy of both Rome and Jerusalem. Agamben backs this up with a particularly willful reading of the idea of the figure of *anomos* or lawlessness in Second Thessalonians (Agamben 2005b, pp. 108–11). To my mind, it is more than simply arguable that Paul's reference to the 'mystery of lawlessness' refers back to the 'son of perdition,' the Anti-Christ, who will appear prior to the *parousia* of the Messiah (2 Thess. 2 3-7). But Agamben wants to identify lawlessness with the Messianic in order to radicalize the distinction between law and life, which is a Benjaminian theme one can find throughout Agamben's writings: if law is violence and the history of law is the history of the violence that has led to the present situation of what Agamben calls 'global civil war,' then the Messianic occurs as the revolutionary suspension of law (Agamben 2005a, p. 87). There are moments when Agamben seems to want to push Benjamin's Messianism towards a radical dualism of, on the one hand, the profane order of the created world and, on the other hand, the Messianic order of redemption. As we saw above, Agamben writes of 'law in its nonrelation to life and life in its nonrelation to law.' (Agamben 2005a, p. 88) But this is Marcion, not Paul.

Badiou gives a brief but compelling discussion of Marcion in his book on Paul. Although Badiou insists that Marcion's ontological dualism is 'an instance of manipulation'(Badiou 2003, p. 35) and cannot be based on any consistent reading of Paul, Badiou nonetheless recognizes that, 'By pushing a little, one could arrive at Marcion's conception: the new gospel is an absolute beginning.' (Badiou 2003, p. 35) But isn't Badiou's position precisely that of Marcion? In opposition to Pascal's Old Testament reliance on 'prophecies, which are solid and palpable proofs,' (2003, p. 48) Badiou asserts that, 'There is no proof of the event; nor is the event a proof.' (Badiou 2003, p. 49) For Paul, 'there is only faith' and Badiou's basic claim is that fidelity to the event in what breaks with the order of being. Badiou continues, 'For Paul, the event has not come to prove something; it is *pure beginning*.' (my emphasis, Badiou 2003, p. 49) But what is this 'pure beginning,' but the 'absolute beginning' that Badiou attributes to Marcion? Might we not conclude that Badiou's ontological dualism of being and the event, where the latter is always described as the absolutely new and where Badiou sees his project as the attempt to conceptualize novelty, is a Marcionite radicalization of Paul? In his insistence on the Pauline figure of Christ as the experience of an event that provokes subjective fidelity, is there not an essential disavowal of law and the ineluctable character of the facticity of being-in-the-world?

There is also something Marcionite in Heidegger's reading of Paul. Tertullian famously lambasted Marcion for providing no proof for his views. But that is precisely Marcion's point: to avoid all reliance on Old Testament prophecy, philosophical argument, theological conceptualization or even *gnosis*. Christianity

must be based on faith alone. In a marginal note to his 1920–21 lecture course on Paul, Heidegger suggestively writes that proof *(Beweis)* lies,

> Not in having-had insight *(im Eingesehen-haben)*; rather, the proclamation is 'showing'*(apodeixis)* of the 'spirit,' 'force' *('Kraft')*. (Heidegger 2004, p. 97)

That is, the proof of faith lies only in the showing of the spirit in a proclamation which is a kind of force or power. To demand a proof for faith is to misunderstand faith's very nature. There is an ultra-Protestantism at work in Heidegger's reading of Paul which is crypto-Harnackian in its refusal of the influence of Plato, Aristotle and Hellenistic philosophy and its attempt to recover an *Urchristentum* against the dogmatic system of Catholicism.

However, although Heidegger wants to affirm what I have identified as a Messianic experience of faith as enactment in Paul, this has to be distinguished from Agamben's more radical antinomianism. Authenticity for Heidegger culminates in an experience of *kairos*, but it consists in nothing else but seeing inauthentic, fallen everyday life in the world in a different light. Heidegger does not believe in the possibility of a radical faith that would absolutely break with the world. Law and life always remain in a relation of *modification (Modifikation)* – an idea that is in many ways *the* key concept in *Being and Time* (p. 168). The proclamation of faith always moves within the gravity of the inauthentic everydayness against which it pulls. The 'nothing' of projection only projects from the 'nothing' of a thrown basis that cannot be thrown off – the law of facticity is inexorable.

There is an undeniable lure to Marcionism. Its ontological dualism and its separation of creation from redemption allows us to attribute all that is wrong with the world (locusts, mosquitoes, etc.) to the activity of the bad deity, rather than blaming ourselves through the standard Christian narrative of the fall, death and original sin. The idea that religion consists in faith alone, as a subjective feature that is not based in any *gnosis* or intellectual intuition and for which there can be no proof, has an undeniable power. It is the power of radical novelty, of an absolute or pure beginning. On the one hand, it fosters a conception of faith as a testing self-responsibility, while, on the one hand, holding out the possibility that we might be entirely remade, renewed and redeemed: born again.

Yet, Marcionism has to be refused. Its dualism leads to a rejection of the world and a conception of religion as a retreat from creation. At its most extreme, it encourages a politics of secession from a terminally corrupt world, a kind of mystical anarchism, the heresy of the Free Spirit and the neo-insurrectionism of the Invisible Committee. Marcionism becomes a theology of alien abduction. As von Harnack writes – half-longingly – in the final pages of his book, Marcion,

> Calls us, not out of an alien existence in which we have gone astray and into our true home, but out of the dreadful homeland to which we belong into a blessed alien land. (von Harnack 1990, p. 139)

Much as we might sometimes desire it, and this desire fills so much of our cultural void, from science fiction to Hollywood's constant obsession with aliens which finds its most consummate ideological expression in James Cameron's

Avatar from 2009, it is precisely the desire for blessed alien land that has to be rejected.

Faith and Law

For Paul, we don't escape from the law. This is also why Paul's Jewishness is essential. If the law was not fully within me, as the awareness of my fallenness and consciousness of sin, then faith as the overcoming of the law would mean nothing. If, with Marcion and von Harnack, we throw out the Old Testament, then we attempt to throw away our thrownness and imagine that we can distance ourselves from the constitutive flaw of the law, from our ontological defectiveness. If we throw out the Old Testament, then we imagine ourselves perfected, without stain or sin. If we were ever to attain such a state, faith would mean nothing. Faith is only possible as the counter-movement to law and the two terms of the movement exist in a permanent dialectic. There is no absolute beginning and the idea of life without a relation to law is a puristic and slightly puerile dream.

This, I think, is what Paul shows in the sinuous complexity of Romans 7 and 8. The question in Romans 7 is the nature of the relation between the law and sin. Paul writes, 'If it had not been for the law, I should not have known sin.' (Rom. 7 7) Paul gives the example of coveting, namely that we would never have known what it is to partake in the sin of coveting if the law had not said, 'Thou shalt not covet.' (Rom. 7 7) There is only sin in relation to the law and without the law, 'sin lies dead.' Paul goes on, 'I was once alive apart from the law,' namely that there was a time prior to the law when human beings lived in paradise without sin (Rom. 7 9). 'But when the commandment came,' namely the prohibition not to eat of the tree of knowledge of good and evil, we erred and fell. As Paul puts it, 'sin revived and I died.' (Rom. 7 9) Therefore, the very commandment which promised life proved to bring death. But is that to say – and this is where things begin to get nicely tangled – that the law, which is holy and by definition good, as it comes from God, brings death? 'By no means!' Paul adds. It is rather that the law reveals negatively the sinfulness of sin, in order that 'sin might be shown to be sin' and 'become sinful beyond measure.' (Rom. 7 12) For – and here we confront the extent of the antithesis between flesh and spirit – 'the law is spiritual; but I am carnal, sold under sin.' (Rom. 7 14)

This dialectic between law and sin has the dramatic consequence that, 'I do not understand my own actions.' (Rom. 7 15) That is, I do not do the thing that I want, namely to follow the law. Rather I do the thing that I hate, namely sin. But if I do not do the thing that I want, but do the thing that I hate, then what can we say of this 'I'? How might we characterize such a self? Such a self is a 'dividual,' radically divided over against itself in relation to the law. Sin is the effect of the law and my being is split between the law and sin. As Paul puts it, at his oxymoronic best, 'For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I do.' (Rom. 7 19) That part of the self that does what I do not want is attributed to sin, 'It is no longer I that do it,

but sin that dwells within me.' (Rom. 7 17) The self is here radically divided between flesh and spirit. On the one hand, there is 'my delight in the law of God,' which belongs to my 'inmost self.' (Rom. 7 22) But, on the other hand, 'I see another law at war with the law of my mind.' (Rom. 7 23) This outermost self 'dwells in my members.' (Rom. 7 23) But inmost and outermost are not two selves, but two halves of the same self, which is divided against itself. Paul exclaims, *'Talaiporos ego anthropos,'* 'Wretched man that I am!'(Rom. 7 24) The dialectic of law and sin is fatal and it divides the self from itself. How, then, can this dialectic be broken? Or, as Paul puts it, 'Who will deliver me from this body of death?'(Rom. 7 24)

The answer, of course, is 'Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!'(Rom. 7 25) But what does that mean? Of course, what is stake here is salvation through grace, which is precisely what cannot be willed by the self. The self, by itself, cannot be delivered from the body of death and the fatal dialectic of law and sin. It is only through God sending his son in the likeness of the flesh, and therefore in the likeness of sin and death, that sin and death can be overcome. But – and this is crucial – it is not a question, for Paul, of an Agambenian *anomos*, of lawlessness against law. Rather, what is at stake is 'the law of the Spirit *(nomos tou Pneumatos).*' (Rom. 8 2) It is the law of the Spirit that can set me free from, 'the law of sin and death.' (Rom. 8 2) It is therefore a question of law against law. I think this is what Paul means when he writes later in Romans of love as the fulfillment of the law (Rom. 13 10). Fulfillment does not mean negation of the law, but its completion in the single commandment: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' (*Rom.* 13 9) Fulfillment *(pleroma)* means filling up: it is a complement, not a replacement; a supplement, not a replacement.

The key thought here is that redemption is not something that can be willed: 'You are not your own.' All that can be willed is the dialectic of law and sin. Redemption exceeds the limit of human potentiality and renders us impotent. The appearance of the law of the Spirit in the person of Jesus is the unwilled possibility of redemption, the possibility that, with the resurrection of Christ, we receive 'the spirit of sonship' and might become 'fellow heirs with Christ.' (Rom. 8 15) If we suffer with Christ, Paul insists, then 'we may also be glorified with him.' (Rom. 8 16) But what is essential here is the subjunctive mood of Paul's discourse: we *may* be glorified with Christ. The realization of this possibility is something we *may* hope for and patiently await. But there is no certainty here. Otherwise hope would not be hope. This is the deep logic of *groaning* in Paul,

> We know that the whole creation has been groaning in travail together until now; and not only creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. For in this hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what he sees? But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience (Rom. 8 22-24).

Corrupted by the fall but saved by the resurrection, creation groans in travail. That is, both human nature and external nature are pregnant and undergoing the pangs of childbirth. This is Paul's understanding of the present time: it is pregnant

with the possibility of redemption and this gives us reason to hope. But hope requires patience and awaiting. This, I think, is the meaning of the phrase, 'remain in this condition in which you were called.' At the present moment, we patiently await, 'For the night is far gone, the day is at hand.' (Rom 13 12) We look at all things *hos me*, as if they were not, in a Messianic light.

Finally, this is why the seduction of Marcion has to be refused and why contemporary crypto-Marcionist renderings of Paul are pernicious. If law and sin were not within me, then freedom would mean nothing. The self is broken, impotent and wretched, but its wretchedness is its greatness: we *know* that we are broken.[7] Furthermore, I can only hold out the hope for being put back together, the hope for 'what we do not see,' if I know I am broken. In other words, the Christians can only be Christian if they know themselves to be Jewish, at least on the father's side. On Paul's picture, the human condition is constitutively torn between faith and law or love and sin and it is only in the strife that divides us that we are defined. It is only a being who is constitutively impotent that is capable of receiving that over which it has no power: love. This is one way – the most persuasive, in my view – of thinking the relation in Heidegger between the authentic and the inauthentic, between the *kairos* of the moment of vision and the slide back into falling. It gives us, I think, a powerful picture of conscience, that most enigmatic aspect of what it means to be human: both our power and our constitutive powerlessness.

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[7] I owe these thoughts to conversations with Lisabeth During.

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Chapter 3
Politics, Anthropology and Religion

Religious Particularism, Anti-somatism and Elitism in 'Mystical Anarchism'

Philip A. Quadrio

Introduction

Simon Critchley's essay, 'Mystical Anarchism' is a rich and interesting engagement with Christian mysticism and antinomian tendencies within it; in particular it considers the writings of Maguerite Porete, a French speaking Beguine of the late thirteenth and early fourteenth century. These antinomian tendencies are tied to what Critchley refers to as the communism of the free spirit. This presents the nexus of communism and antinomianism set within the context of mystical practice, thus 'Mytical Anarchism'. Needless to say the conjunction provides for a fascinating essay. Critchley's engagement with anarchist politics in his recent work is a much-needed breath of fresh air in an atmosphere dominated by a liberal *status quo*, where political philosophy sometimes appears to be either a footnote on Rawls or to have disappeared into the philosophy of public policy, a mere, even if sophisticated, tinkering at the edges of liberal theory.

Philosophy is seldom a hymn of praise, and neither is my response to 'Mystical Anarchism'. I present two criticisms. The first is general and relates to the use of theological resources in political philosophy. The second is more particular; it considers how well the mystical tradition fits with an anarchist outlook. In making these criticisms I am not rejecting the idea that 'religion' could play a role in political thought and anarchist politics, rather I am concerned, first, that the invocation of any determinate religion risks alienating those who cannot affirm it; second I worry about the specific values animating any religious perspective brought into an anarchist politics. I would reject the idea that a religious view that devalues this world and orientates us on a beyond (of whatever description) could play much, if any, role in anarchist politics. And, importantly, that mysticism,

P.A. Quadrio (✉)
University of New South Wales, Sydney, NSW, Australia
e-mail: p.quadrio@unsw.edu.au

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A. Welchman (ed.), *Politics of Religion/Religions of Politics*,
Sophia Studies in Cross-cultural Philosophy of Traditions and Cultures 8,
DOI 10.1007/978-94-017-9448-0_3

always for the few and never for the many, has a tendency to end up as elitism. I will weave these criticisms into a discussion of the place of religion in secular liberal thought, allowing me to offset my first criticism of Critchley by showing that it is equally true of the liberal view as well as establishing resources for my second criticism of Critchley's work.

Problem One: Theology, Anthropology and Limited Horizons

An important aspect of Simon Critchley's 'Mystical Anarchism' is the issue of overcoming original sin. We can start there. Sin is a moral concept, a normative concept; we ought not sin. But sin here is specifically 'original', bound up with 'our' origins, it is fundamental, constitutive of our being. So, not only is sin a moral concept, the notion of original sin binds that concept to an anthropological one, the human being is partly defined on a moral basis, but negatively so. There is something about us that 'ought not to be'. Critchley raises the issue in regard to Carl Schmitt and cites Schmitt's view that every conception of the political takes a position on human nature—it requires an anthropological commitment—and this relates to the question of whether the human being is good or evil (Critchley 2009, p. 276). Critchley explicitly affirms that analysis, but there is an ambiguity: we have two claims and one might question how far each is (or could be) endorsed. The first is that there is a systematic connection between our understandings of humanity and our conceptions of the political. The second is that we are, thereby, faced with making a determination on whether the human being is good or evil. We might ask, however, whether Critchley is affirming the former, the latter, or both? One hopes it is only the former. For even if one accepts that there is a strong connection between conceptions of human nature and conceptions of the political it is absolutely clear that we are not thereby forced to take a position on whether the human being is good or evil. From certain perspectives it would be hard to understand how one is compelled from an affirmation of the first claim to an engagement with the second. The latter move is neither forced nor entailed by the former.

That 'Mystical Anarchism' is framed around the notion of original sin and its overcoming shows that, in fact, both claims are endorsed. The text takes us from the claim that there is a connection between conceptions of human nature and conceptions of the political to the question of where to situate the human being within the good and evil binary. The Schmittian framework is affirmed. The affirmation is not a straightforward acceptance, nor should we expect it to be, it is nuanced by the idea that while we carry the taint of original sin, we need to overcome it; yes, we are subject to sin, but we can overcome this. Critchley's departure from that framework consists in a movement from one side of the binary to the other; it takes us from an authoritarian politics based on the idea that humanity is depraved to an anarchist politics based on the idea that depravity can be overcome; this captures a movement

from Right to Left. Thus while the framework is accepted, Critchley inverts Schmitt.

Although it might be challenged in various ways in my view the claim that there is a relationship between conceptions of the political and anthropological commitments is unremarkable. It certainly is, however, worth questioning the idea that the anthropological question relates to or ought to relate to the question of whether the human being is good or evil. Schmitt is reaching towards the kind of axiological norms familiar to those who share his broadly Christian, specifically Catholic, outlook and it is easy to be suspicious that this, despite the rich resources of Christian thought, only provides a culturally and theologically particular and limited understanding of human nature, and not necessarily one comprehensible to those unfamiliar with that context. This retrieval of resources from theological discourse to orient and give content to a political discussion fits with 'Mystical Anarchism' (Critchley 2009, p. 276); being bound up with the notion of original sin, the anthropological question is theologically oriented: How does one overcome original sin? Critchley's suggestion, broadly Heideggerian, seems to be that one looks back into the tradition and creatively re-appropriates the past to push towards a more radical future. All well and good—if you happen to share that past and understand the significance of its paradigms. But without such a background these paradigms might be difficult to understand, or lack sufficient significance to render them compelling; the transcendental conditions for their creative reappropriation are not necessarily in place. It would seem problematic then to suggest that we could draw upon theological resources as a way of engaging the question of human nature in a political project with any general, never mind universal, significance; and if that is not what one is doing then one needs to specify to whom, in particular, the account is addressed.[1] Certainly this could be useful to those who share the relevant background, but our polities contain significant numbers who do not. If we accept that limitation and say that this could only be relevant for smaller groups with such a shared past, then contingent and arbitrary factors, such as one's ability to find significance in it, define the principles of inclusion and exclusion. The resources are problematically particular, perhaps parochially particular. Before drawing this section to a close let me make this concrete, first through a discussion of theology and then through a discussion of the good/evil binary.

While Critchley will seek to move towards conclusions that are far more radical than the path followed by Schmitt, he accepts the general trajectory, the turn from anthropological questions to a theology. But, theology is always particular, never general, and we can note that there are few theological doctrines held within Christianity that can be claimed to be universally held by all denominations and sects. Even questions as fundamental as the status of Jesus are disputed. The

[1] One might answer: 'those on the Left', but surely not all 'on the Left' are going to identify with the resources of the Christian tradition. Are we only addressing those who do so identify? If that is the case then surely we ought to consider that there are already anarchist traditions within Christianity—such as the Catholic Workers Movement—and see what resources such groups are already drawing on.

doctrine of original sin is similar: it is not a view held within Jewish theology and it lacks an unambiguous Old Testament basis. It stems from an interpretation of Paul (Rom 5:12-22 and 1 Cor 15:22) that comes to us from Augustine, an interpretation that has dominated the Western Church[2]. Augustine's reading is not, however, accepted in the Eastern or Greek tradition (an oft ignored but populous branch of Christianity[3]) and was explicitly rejected in Pelagian theology. Needless to say Paul's epistles have little significance outside the Christian tradition. The notion of original sin can only be considered a non-parochial starting point by ignoring what goes on outside mainstream Western theology.

Noting that theology is always particular and never general leads us to look at the relationship between the question we are asking and the resources through which it is answered; there is a tension between the universal aspirations of our question and the particular nature of our answer. The question is about human nature, and for all that we might wish to reject an essentialist answer, we have to acknowledge that it orientates us on the universal. Yet the discourse with which we seek to answer that question, while perhaps claiming or aspiring to universal validity, is quite particular, as are the axiological norms found in it: 'good/evil'. This binary has not always or even originally picked out absolute values, the Old English terms *gōd* (good) and *yfel* (evil) did not pick out anything absolute, rather they had a sense of relative or comparative value—better and worse (Quirk and Wrenn 1996, p. 35). In particular the term *yfel* was not nearly as axiologically strong, bringing more a sense of inferiority than anything maleficent. In that the terms were comparative they are closer to the binary good/bad than to the binary good/evil. Now while the contemporary use of good and evil still has a comparative element and while evil is still seen as, in some sense, inferior to the good, in calling something evil we are not merely saying it is inferior, we commit ourselves to something stronger. Evil opposes the good, cancels the good, is the complete absence of good or some such absolute understanding. Nor are these concepts that have universal application or significance. As R.J.J. Wargo (1990) claims, in traditional Japanese religion (Shinto), 'There was no Manichean conflict of equally substantive forces of good and evil. . .there were no elaborate and systematic ethical proscriptions since there was no absolute good or evil' (p. 504). The fact that the terms good and evil have come, within a certain culture, to represent absolute values is contingent, they did not always represent absolute values, they have come, in history, to be such and once we step outside that culture the terms lose traction. So not only does Schmitt's question orientate us on a theological anthropology, and thus the particular, the very values that animate that anthropology only contingently pick out absolute values.

The first problem ought now be clear: under conditions of pluralism, a politics suggesting we draw our understanding of human nature (universal) from a

[2] For the purposes of this chapter 'Western' refers to those contexts in which the Latin, rather than the Greek or Eastern, tradition of Christianity has been dominant.

[3] For instance it is the dominant religion in Russia, Greece, Bulgaria, Romania, Macedonia, Cyprus, Moldova, Ukraine, Montenegro, Belarus. . ..

theological anthropology (particular) would require significant numbers to either understand themselves through axiological norms they do not affirm or that lack significance for them; or, permit an anthropology they do not affirm (or understand to be an accurate description of themselves), to define the political life they inhabit. That seems a problematic and potentially alienating idea, difficult to use in any endeavor of (re)collectivization. An alienating idea can only play a limited role in a politics oriented on the universal as it seems to do more to constitute and structure forms of difference, forms of otherness that did not prefigure the idea itself, than anything else. If it brings people together it brings them together as separate (from others). This worry resonates with the kind of traditional secularist view: that politics is orientated on the universal or universal interests and is thus a public matter, whereas religion is particular, it expresses interests that are contingently held, and thus private. Citizens might want (or need) to understand the political structure they inhabit on religious (particular) terms, but the idea that the political structure actually be articulated through them is problematic. This is so even for Rawls or Habermas, for while they grant scope to religious reasons, neither would accept the idea that political theory be drawn out of religiously particular, theological, premises. Liberals would criticize the way specifically religious reasons, rather than public (shareable) reasons, structure such a discourse even if they allow that individual religious persons might justify (to themselves) those same structures in religious terms.

Something very much like this criticism could, however, be turned against a liberal secular conception of the relationship between politics and religion and towards the liberal secular conception of tolerance. The liberal cannot claim that Schmitt transgresses the value of neutrality whereas liberalism does not because the latter views have a theological lineage, they fail the test of neutrality, it is just that this is seldom acknowledged or understood (indeed, insofar as neutrality is a liberal value, the failure is more problematic, it is a failure to live up to one's own standards; at best a failure of historical self-understanding, at worst hypocrisy). The fact that Schmitt does not live up to the liberal value of neutrality is not nearly so problematic: He is not a liberal. If we criticize his work for failing to be neutral, our critique will be an external one, we charge him with failing to realize a value to which he is not committed but to which (we feel) he ought to be. The liberal, however, does affirm the value of neutrality; this allows an internal critique of secular liberal discourse on tolerance. The liberal conception of tolerance is bound up with a theological lineage. It has accepted, in broad outlines, an account of the relationship between politics and religion that is theological. But, if liberal theory, the theoretical home of much contemporary secular theory, is as subject to religious parochialism as the Schmittian starting point, then this creates a point of departure for post-secular thinking: to understand the subtle ways in which Western Christianity has shaped secular understanding of both religion and politics and what is proper to both. This is interesting in terms of Critchley's work for we might ask whether the particularity of 'Mystical Anarchism' leads to an external critique, criticizing Critchley for failing to realize a value that he is not committed to but

should be (neutrality or universalisability), or whether, our critique is internal and we charge him with failing, like the liberal account, to live up to a value he otherwise affirms. Finally it gives us a way of responding to those liberals who would reject Critchley's line on the basis that tolerance requires neutrality.

Excursus: Some Reflections on Traditional Liberal Accounts of Secular Tolerance

Given what I have said about the liberal conception of tolerance it is appropriate here to examine how religion, particularly a religiously inspired conception of what is proper to religion and politics, influences liberal secular theory. I focus on what I take to be the traditional liberal view, which I anchor in Locke, who was theoretically vital to the emergence of secular practice in the first modern liberal secular democracy, the United States of America (USA). Such examination shows that the theory underwriting secular practice in the USA recapitulates a particular theological outlook, most specifically a conceptual articulation of 'religion' and 'politics' that carries a religious content. The issue is not merely about religious reasons underwriting a political theory; it is just as much a conceptual issue. We are not as concerned with the reasons underwriting liberal theory as with the limitations of the concepts used within it. Thus it is important to consider the way conceptually parochial notions structure the Lockean account of tolerance.

One of the other important streams feeding early political practice in the USA is the work of Hugo Grotius, I will not, however, discuss this at length even though a similar argument applies. Locke is more central to the development of liberal secular democratic practice that emerges in the USA so I confine my discussion to his work. Regardless of whether we are talking about secular theory or the practical embodiment of it that emerges in the USA, liberal secular politics arises against a background of conflict and rivalry between Christian (primarily Protestant) sects: while Locke's thoughts are motivated by Anglican latitudinarian concerns (to resolve the tensions and rivalries over doctrinal and organizational issues that arose between Anglican sects) the context of Grotius' response is Calvanism (the debate between Remonstrants and the Calvinists). The background to the liberal discourse of secular tolerance is the sectarian disputes and rivalries within the Protestant sects of North Western Europe; it was not a general response to religious pluralism (demonstrated by the Lockean limitation on tolerance—Catholics and atheists being situated beyond it).

The Lockean conception of tolerance, put forward in, *A Letter Concerning Toleration* (*Letter,* pp. 113–153), is derived, via the latitudinarian (Anglican) theological tradition, from the Anglican divine, Richard Hooker; it carries a conception of the nature and function of religion and its relation to civil and political life drawn out of Christian thought. The concepts employed, particularly the conceptual articulation of 'religion', are particular to that tradition and limited or

circumscribed by its outlook.[4] Hooker thinks through issues of Church and state in England. In attempting to do so he sought to create latitude for theological difference within the English Church and create space for reasonable pluralism (amongst Anglican sects). Hooker's view was that while God took an interest in the human soul and its moral condition, particularly its progress towards redemption, God was not interested in the institutional regulation, such as the organization or structure of the Church; God is indifferent to social regulative matters and is only interested in the state of the individual's soul and their progress towards salvation. Institutional issues were to be determined at the institutional level, the specific mode of regulation; the various mechanisms in place were of no interest to God.

Like the Lockean state religious institutions are instrumental, a means to an end, facilitating the satisfaction of an individual's specifically religious interests (non-material and internal interests). We grant latitude to difference because 'religion' is primarily about the individual's relation to God, a matter for the individual, it is up to them to chose what they feel is the right (good) path to salvation. So long as religious institutions are fulfilling their instrumental purpose then how exactly they are set up, their specific policies and institutional mechanisms, is a matter for those that inhabit them, a matter of inter-subjective agreement amongst participants. It is the way the concept 'religion' is understood, the meaning that the concept is thought to have, that leads us to this view. While we could pursue a historical story that moves from Locke back to Hooker, Calvin, Luther and ultimately to Augustine, what is more interesting is the movement from Locke to some of the foundational documents of religious liberty in the first modern liberal democratic state, the USA. So, the account of religious liberty found in George Mason's *Virginia Declaration of Rights* is a condensation of Locke's *Letter*, and the *American Declaration of Independence* takes over much of the content of the Virginia declaration, particularly in its famous opening paragraphs. These Lockean principles are also seen in Jefferson's *Virginia Statute for Religious Freedom*, a document that is eventually transformed into Jefferson's *Act for Establishing Religious Freedom.* Further, in his famous, 'Letter to the Danbury Baptist Association', Jefferson explains the establishment clause of the *Bill of Rights* through that same Lockean framework. (See Quadrio 2012). Moving our thoughts toward contemporary theory, a close examination shows that the Lockean principles, particularly the conceptual understanding of religion, found in Locke's *Letter,* also fit with the kind of picture found in thinkers like Rawls and Habermas (Habermas 2006, pp. 4–9. See also Quadrio 2012)

Locke's *Letter* is interesting in terms of Critchley's appropriation of Schmitt; Locke's argument moves from an anthropological assertion about the human being to an account of human interest entailed by it, and then to political conclusions (*Letter,* pp. 118–122; pp. 140–142). The movement is of a theological anthropology

[4] One can legitimately worry about the degree to which that specific conceptualisation is shareable, one can worry whether people from outside that tradition mean the same thing when they use the term 'religion'.

that defines a moral psychology and these underwrite a conception of what is proper to politics (and religion). The anthropology is theological: *qua* beings with a soul, capable of eternal happiness (or misery), we are members of an eternal kingdom. This is an inward matter; it is a matter of having the right convictions, subscribing to the correct doctrines, those favored by God, and thus developing a relationship with God and the eternal order. It is theocentric but inward. *Qua* creatures with a temporal and embodied existence, we live in a civil society, the realm of bodily needs, bodily actions and political institutions; it is a matter of sustaining material existence and using force to limit human depravity. Legislation can demand that I respect the property and liberty of others in the name of the prosperity and liberty of all; that is what civil society was established for; it is anthropocentric and outward. The civil order was not established to assist in the work of the soul, but it does make space for it, private space (the space of inner reflection), and because the work of the soul is inward, the outward force of the magistrate, or state, cannot touch it. Legislation may require conformity of our actions but cannot touch conviction; it cannot ask me to desire the action I perform. Legislation and force have no authority over my inner convictions, no one can dictate the doctrines I affirm, this is a matter between myself in my inward existence and God. So, on the basis of a theological anthropology, Locke produces a dualistic moral psychology (a dualistic account of human moral interest) the nodes of which offer us a theocentric and an anthropocentric moment. Our moral interests are divided between two orders, one orientated on God and the eternal, the other on our material, embodied needs.

In being mediated by Hooker, this Lockean understanding fits with the political theology found in Luther and Calvin; Locke's *Letter* recapitulates these earlier views and carries the same conceptual presuppositions about the nature of religion, that it is quintessentially an internal and private matter, a matter of individual belief. Of course the tradition of thinking we find captured in Luther and Calvin is old. The tension between the demands of this world and the demands of the next are at least as old as Augustine. Here we are returned to the same considerations we raised regarding Schmitt: being theologically derived, these ideas appear culturally circumscribed and require, as a transcendental condition of significance, some background in the relevant culture. This division between our worldly or material interests and our other-worldly or religious interests, is problematic for those traditions, such as Islam, whose holy texts hold specific instruction *vis-à-vis* social regulation, or where the 'work of the soul' is intricately bound up with material and political affairs and social arrangements. Traditions wherein instituting certain forms of social/political regulation is a pressing religious duty, could well find the Lockean structure contradicting their understanding of what 'religion' is. So, while the Lockean understanding fits with a venerable tradition in Latin Western thinking about religion and politics and while it resonates with the secular liberal view, whether it could be affirmed by other traditions is contingent: liberalism faces the problem of parochialism.

Religion *per se* need not articulate a dualistic anthropology, nor a dualism within human interests, and it need not posit any tension between this world and the next (Quadrio 2009, pp. 387–8). Whether or not a non-Latin tradition could find the

division of 'secular' from 'religious' interests rationally acceptable depends on whether they can affirm the dualistic anthropology and account of human interest on which it rests. But, whether or not they can affirm that depends on the whether they see religion and religious interests as being an inward matter, a matter between an individual and their 'creator'. Certainly this is the view that has dominated the Anglophone and Western European world; but this understanding of the concept 'religion' and its relation to human interests is culturally and theologically circumscribed. This tension, or dualism, within that tradition facilitates a separation of religion from the political; it makes sense in light of that understanding of what 'religion' is, the structure fits with 'our' religion, is structured by it, it does not demand of 'us' significant accommodation. This is not necessarily the case for all.

The point is made in regard to contemporary secular discourse by de Roover and Balagangadhara (2008) who tell us:

> In the theology of Christian liberty, the division of human society into a sphere of political coercion and one of religious liberty does not cause any conceptual problems. It is founded in the Christian anthropology: each individual human being consists of a soul and a body; and human life and society consist of spiritual and temporal realms accordingly. Human authorities can rule over the latter alone, for God is the only spiritual Lord.' (541)

Again it can be seen that this picture fits nicely with Critchley's Schmittian starting point—anthropology grounds conceptions of the political. But the concepts that animate the account are parochial, limited, or theologically circumscribed. This kind of structure is the pre-theoretical ground of much modern liberal thought on tolerance: the assumption is that religion simply is an inward matter, primarily a matter of belief or conscience, a matter primarily for individuals and a matter that does not concern our material existence but is entirely oriented towards our other-worldly destination. It is thus private, not something with which the state can legitimately meddle. After a fascinating discussion of problems that relate to the application of liberal secular principles in a context that does not share this conceptual orientation, India, de Roover and Balagangadhara (2008) lead us to the following conclusion:

> all theories of liberal toleration presuppose the truth of a Christian anthropology in one way or another. Their division of society into the two spheres and their claims about the freedom of religion depend on this background framework. Maximally, this theological anthropology makes sense also to Jews and Muslims, but it does not do so to others. . .The problems that the liberal theories of toleration face today are those that emerge from trying to provide secular universal foundations and arguments for the notion of Christian liberty and its two kingdoms. It is like trying to show in a 'secular' language that the claims of Christianity are true. . .In other words, the Judeo-Christian theology [theological anthropology] is the condition of intelligibility for the liberal theories of toleration. Where it is not available these theories become radically unintelligible. . . [this] hypothesis downsizes the importance of research that presumes itself 'secular' and 'universal,' while being deeply theological.

We are taken to an interesting point: that secular liberal thinking on tolerance places a Christian conception at the heart of its understanding of religion generally and as such its account of toleration is a specifically Christian way of resolving the problem of pluralism, one that contains presuppositions that are parochial because

the norms of Christianity are not universally applicable, comprehensible or affirmable. The secular liberal *status quo*—in regard to the way it understands religion, politics, the function of each, the relation of each to the other and human nature itself—recapitulates Christian norms. Our conception of the limits of religion and its relation to the political, is shaped by our experience with a specific religion, one that emphasizes the internal, private, doxastic and individual. Thus we need to examine some of the religious and theological presuppositions in our thinking, particularly the way our concepts vis-à-vis religion are shaped or determined by our experience with a specific religion, and to do so in a way that shines a critical light back on what is thought through those presuppositions. If the Anglo-European world solved the sectarian disputes within Christianity in one way, one comprehensible to those who shared a certain theological frame of reference, an anthropology based in a division between soul and body, and a cosmology based in a division between this world and the next, we cannot take it that this solution is the answer to the problem of religious liberty generally, for that is not the problem it was trying to solve.

It is not the case that Schmitt sins where liberals prove saintly. The thinking of both Schmitt and Locke draws on theological resources. Neither conception is religiously neutral, although Schmitt never asserts neutrality as a value, only the liberal does. What we can say is that while the use of theological resources, particularly a theologically inspired anthropology, seems problematic and parochial, such a theological anthropology, and a theologically influenced conception of what is proper to both religion and politics, lies sedimented within the liberal tradition just awaiting critique. Schmitt seems to offer a problematically parochial account; in following Schmitt, Critchley too might fall into that trap, but it is not the case that liberal thinking is 'free of sin' in this regard; rather the theological presuppositions are so deeply sedimented within the liberal tradition and within our conceptual understanding of religion, that for the most part they can travel through intellectual life unnoticed.

Transition to 'Mystical Anarchism'

In regard to the question of secularism, the presuppositions of Christian anthrolopology have led to one way of dealing with religious liberty, one that perhaps excludes others, but is asserted as a universal paradigm. Liberal secular governments have valued the liberal secular solution so much they have felt justified in exporting it through violence. If political philosophy's support of secular liberal thought is, as suggested, an attempt to show, in secular language, the truth of the doctrines of Christianity, how is one to evaluate political attempts to export this politics? The analogy of the Crusade is not inappropriate. It seems that these considerations have largely been marginalized in discussions of liberal secular discourse. Further, (and tacking back towards our discussion of Critchley's Schmittian starting point) with these thoughts in mind, how do we evaluate the

turn in Left politics to Christian theology, whether it be a turn to the mystical theology of Porete or a turn to the mainstream (sometimes political) theology of Paul or Augustine?[5] Could the resources of the Christian tradition lead to anything but a limited response? Why should our anthropological commitments be structured in terms of whether human beings are good or evil? Why is this fundamental to 'our' anthropological thinking? Certainly it is important to Christian thinking - but 'we' are not all Christians. Turning now more directly to Critchley's 'Mystical Anarchism', why ought original and hereditary sin be so important? If anthropological commitments shape conceptions of the political, then why ought such a specific theological outlook, one not shared by a vast number of contemporary folk, determine the shape of our anthropological commitments?

Consider: if the project of 'Mystical Anarchism' is bound up with the overcoming of original sin, does this not presuppose that the human being has something to overcome that is constitutive of its nature? We are asked to turn to an engagement with original sin as a path to a radical anarchism; what we find is that we overcome it by engaging in a spiritual practice that affirms original sin by seeking to transcend it. So, the key to a political problem is to engage with a particular theological anthropology, one whereby human beings are marked by sin because they carry the guilt of Adam. This is a theological anthropology with an ancestry stretching back at least to Augustine; it has been dominant in the Western tradition of Christianity that shapes Protestant and Catholic outlooks but it has limited standing in the Greek or Eastern tradition, it is not part of Jewish theology, and it is directly rejected by Islamic theology in which no human being inherits the sin of Adam, all human beings are born sin-free and innocent (*Fitrah*); and it seems problematic from a fulsome perspective on religious thinking which includes Hinduism, Buddhism, Japanese religions, Chinese religions, and countless numbers of traditions from Polynesia, Africa, South America and so on. The field marked out by this doctrine, original sin, and the anthropology connected to it, is overly circumscribed. To what are we taken? A demand that we overcome Augustine? If so, who is this 'we' doing the overcoming? It is not all of 'us'; clearly it has to be a very particular 'we', too particular to be of general relevance. It is more radical to simply deny original sin, whether this be the metaphysical Augustinian notion of an inherited blemish or the naturalized version of it that we find in Hobbes or Gray. Naturalized versions of original sin haunt the liberal tradition—whether it be *homo œconomicus*, the rational, self-interested, utility-maximiser, or *homo rapiens*, the rapacious hominid—liberal politics sees itself as creating the boundary conditions in which such beings can be 'what they are', competitive and self-interested brutes, without killing one another, at least not often and not unpunished.

To put my thoughts here as a slogan, or series of them: An anarchist project does not overcome original sin; it denies it. An anarchist project denies original sin as anti-human; it denies it as anti-somatic; it denies it as anti-cosmic; and it denies it as parochial. To borrow from Michael Bakunin, such thoughts 'begin with God. . .and

[5] Each of whom produces more than just a theology but also a political theology.

the first step that they take is a terrible fall from the sublime heights. . .into the mire of the material world; from absolute perfection into absolute imperfection' (Bakunin 1970, p. 14). The very idea of original sin leads us into a binary between a perfect Creator and an imperfect, sinful humanity. An anarchist project rejects original sin and its naturalized variants as so many 'absurd tales. . .and. . .monstrous doctrines' (Bakunin 1970, p. 11). Why? Because a primary idea held by anarchists is that the human being is not corrupt by nature but, instead, is corrupted by the social systems it inhabits; corrupted by systems of hierarchy, control and domination. If original sin is meant as a metaphor for such social corruption then it is a poor one, as it directs attention away from the social ground of human deformation, which obfuscates a core element of the anarchist social critique. But these thoughts now lead us away from the general ideas we encountered in the first section of this chapter and towards a focused engagement with 'Mystical Anarchism', one that considers this dualism between creator and created.

Problem Two: 'Mystical Anarchism' Anti-somatic and Anti-cosmic Dualism

'Mystical Anarchism', engages original sin, and its overcoming, by turning to the Brethren of the Free Spirit. What interests Critchley is a reading of 2 Cor 3:17: 'Now the Lord is Spirit, and where the Lord's Spirit is there is freedom'. There are two possibilities: either the Lord's Spirit is outside the self, or inside the self (Critchley 2009, p. 285). These are the alternatives; no middle path for the Lord's Spirit - in or out. If the Lord's Spirit is external this is because the human being is marked with original sin and requires grace for salvation: We are separated from God through the sin of Adam, whose guilt is inherited. Due to our sinful condition we require grace—which leads to the other side of the equation: If the Lord's spirit is within the self, then the soul is free of sin and has no need of the mediation of the church to receive grace (Critchley 2009, pp. 285–6). Critchley then tells us:

> If a community participates in the Spirit of God, then it is free and has no need of the agencies of the Church, state, law or police. These are the institutions of the unfree world that a community based on the Free Spirit rejects. It is not difficult to grasp the anarchistic consequences of such a belief. (Critchley 2009, p. 286)

Original, inherited or ancestral sin defines the boundaries of the unfree world. It is because we are marked by sin that we require the structures of unfreedom to tame our natures and order social life. If we could overcome our sinful condition, one inherited and not one that originates through our actions, we could discard all of the structures of unfreedom and move towards liberty, in the sense of freedom from domination and control and a freedom to determine one's own course. Under such conditions the structures of unfreedom could, in anarchist spirit, wither as an unnecessary artifact.

Anarchist freedom is not mere freedom of choice, but is better described as liberty, combining what is often described through the twin misnomers negative

and positive liberty. Liberty is certainly freedom from coercive authority, domination and external control. But it is also autonomy, the positive possession of the capacities grounding self-determination, which allow us to affirm the rational and just as rational and just.[6] Liberty exists where both conditions are met. Indeed, negative freedom without positive freedom is blind, positive freedom without negative freedom is empty. An anarchist project does not develop human creative capacities while leaving structures of authority and domination un-critiqued, nor does it seek to remove or critique structures of domination and authority without regard for the development of creative capacities. Certainly mere negative freedom is insufficient. The most rational social structure imaginable is still an abomination as long as its structures are not freely and fully affirmed by those that inhabit them (Bakunin 1970, p. 30).

This is the context for Critchley's consideration of Marguerite Porete's 1306 text *The Mirror of Simple and Annihilated Souls and Who Remain Only in Wanting and Desire of Love* (Porete 1993). It is an instruction manual outlining the seven stages the soul must pass through to overcome original sin (Critchley 2009, p. 286). Here the overcoming of sin is based in a struggle towards what Critchley refers to as self-deification, considered as the annihilation of any distinction between self and God, which is only properly or fully achieved in the seventh stage, after our death (Critchley 2009, pp. 87–91). To those raised in the Latin tradition this notion of self-deification may seem fringe mysticism, marginal, no matter how interesting. Placing an emphasis on self-deification as a way of overcoming original sin is radical because it draws on resources that are peripheral to challenge a thought that is doctrinally central. Yet those familiar with Eastern Christianity know that theosis, or self-deification, is an important feature of Eastern Christian thinking and that original sin, in the sense of ancestral sin, is not. So the notion of self-deification is not marginal within certain forms of Christianity and in some of those contexts, ancestral sin is. Turning to a tenth Century Persian Islamic setting we note Sufi ecstatic Mansur Al Hallaj's declaration that he was 'the creative truth' (Schimmel 1962, p. 161) and—by implication—God, a declaration made after engaging in practices similar to those of Porete (see Schimmel 1962, pp. 61–200), was not at all well received. It was the impetus for his arrest and eventual execution. Although, of course, being from an Islamic setting, original sin plays no role in Al Hallaj's work. So, the notion of self-deification will be received differently in different contexts and how it is received and evaluated will relate to other specific theological features of that context. Further, self-deification is only contingently connected to original sin.

Returning to Porete, the essential point is that the seven-stage process is arduous and difficult, self-deification is a process of self-annihilation, of boring a hole into the self so that love can enter (Critchley 2009, pp. 86–91). This is achieved by annihilation of the will, which is associated with original sin; Augustinian concupiscence, bodily desire and everything willed is an expression of that sin. There is a

[6] Such as, creative imagination, communicative capacities, reason and so on.

need to create an empty space, one free of appetitive desire, concupiscence, or sin, so that love may enter. The mystic is caught in a tension between activity and passivity, they must actively create a space for love, but are passive in regard to love, they make a space so that it may enter, but remain passive, they cannot force love to enter, it will be gratuitously given, never actively taken, that would indicate the presence of will, desire, and this is to be renounced (overcome). We have moved quickly to the fourth stage (Critchley 2009, p. 288): once my creaturely will has been renounced, the process of self annihilation has begun and love penetrates the space created by hacking and hewing at the will (Critchley 2009, p. 288). The creature is, as the etymology suggests, a created thing, that which owes its being to another, a creator, and the process that Porete is going through is one whereby she seeks to decreate the self; the process is a guide to the destruction of the creaturely or created self. This is captured by Critchley, 'when I have renounced my will and hewn away at myself, when I have begun to decreate and annihilate myself I am filled by God's love' (Critchley 2009, p. 288). Insofar as I am creaturely I am marked by appetitive desire, to destroy this conative aspect of the self is to decreate the creaturely. This is part of overcoming original sin, part of the journey towards self-deification.

Sin is connected to our inner state, like conscience, it is an internal matter which passes over into externality through action, which can only be (religiously) evaluated in reference to that inner state. As per Locke, what is religiously significant relates to inner condition and is a matter between individual and God. The emphasis on the internal reflects Matthew (5:28), 'everyone who looks at a woman with lust has already committed adultery with her in his heart.' Porete's work also emphasizes the internal, like Augustine, the emphasis is material desires, these assailing appetites stem from our created, natural selves. Augustine asserts, 'the will can supersede reason. . .the will can do evil even when reason tells it that this is wrong. . .reason can become *enslaved* to libidinous passion' (Gillespie 2008, p. 142, my emphasis). As such Augustine asserts the independence of the human will from God, the human will is independent and separate from God, but has been created, is something granted by God. Thus, 'the source of evil lay not in God but in man. God grants humans freedom [of will], and they are free to choose to do evil' (Gillespie 2008, p. 142).

Augustine is both affirming and rejecting Manichaeism. He has affirmed the Manichean suspicions about the embodied, an anti-somatism that, due to the downgraded status of all embodied beings vis-à-vis God, might rise as high (as in the Manichean tradition) as anti-cosmism, a devaluation of everything material or embodied. But he simultaneously rejects the Manichean version of the problem of evil, which held the presence of evil in the world did not imply that God created evil but that there were two Gods, one an evil creator and the other a good redeemer (Gillespie 2008, p. 142). Augustine rejects the idea of an evil creator, nothing that God creates is evil *per se* (an idea later affirmed by Luther), the Manichean evil God is replaced by free human beings and their appetitive material desires, which, again, are not evil *per se* but lead to sin and are the source of evil in the world. The cosmic metaphysical tension between good and evil is internalized: no longer a description

of the cosmos, it is now a claim about the internal life of the human being, no longer a battle between good and evil, now a struggle between conscience and appetitive desire. The human will is torn between conscience and material desires, the will moved purely by conscience is divine, the will moved purely by appetites is animal, the former needs no authority to guide conduct, the latter needs the zoo of the state to prevent its rapacious appetites from harming others: angels or apes.

This involves a negative relation to the created self, a negative relation to creation generally, at the least it is anti-creaturely, perhaps anti-cosmic, perhaps a rejection of all material life as deficient, because separate. The created is not merely separate, it is alienated, it is in virtue of being what we are, created, that we are separate. The key to overcoming alienation is the destruction of difference, the annihilation of the distinction between creator and created. This overcomes a primal difference, taking the created back to its source, undoing separation: the re-absorption of the separate back into a unity that preceded separation, a return from dualism to undifferentiated monism. This struggle, while ensuing in action, is an internal one that occurs within the created being. But, *qua* anti-somatic and anti-cosmic, the account here has the dualistic hallmarks of Marcionite dualism, Manichaeism, Paulicianism and Catharism, it is our creaturely nature that separates us from God's love (Neumann 1919, p. 497). As with Marcion, who viewed the material or created world as defective, Porete seeks to negate the created; redemption, full redemption, redemption from the painful state of separateness requires that one breaks oneself away from the created order.

Once love has entered there is an internal struggle between divine goodness and the created self with its sinful appetites. Sin consists not merely of acts that we trace to the agent and their appetites, but *qua* original sin, an inherited taint that marks all human beings (Critchley 2009, pp. 90–91). There is a desire for an annihilation of the self so as to achieve unity with God, this is coupled with the knowledge that all desire is a reflection of original sin—a manifestation of concupiscence. Even the desire for God, produced by the mystic's love of God, evidences this sinful concupiscence, announces the difference between God and the desiring creature. Desire is the expression of separateness. As such the mystic must separate herself from that which announces her separateness, from that which she desires, must separate herself from that which announces her creaturely nature, her desire. It is through the extinction of the will, in the sixth stage, that the soul separates from the source of its separateness, and no longer sees itself at all, cannot, but neither does it see God; the soul is thus free of all 'things', free of its creaturely self, free of the things it desires. As Critichley tells us: 'It is only by reducing myself to nothing, that I can join with that divine something' (p. 290).

Reducing myself to nothing is radical decreation for, on a classical theology, it is to reduce the self to that which is prior to creation—nothing. In the sixth stage God's love fills the annihilated soul. The annihilation of the will is the condition of filling the soul, which has been rendered a completely free space, with God's love. Critchley captures these thoughts: 'What the soul has created is the space of its own annihilation. This nihil is the 'place' or better what Augustine might call the 'no place' where God reflects on himself' (p. 291). To sum up the process from one to

six: The love of God provides the impetus for utter self-renunciation, the annihilation of the will, the decreation of the created which creates the space for love, for God. This is the audacity of impoverishment that is the sixth stage of Porete's work; here the will wills nothing, not even the self, there is nothing it clings to, for to cling to anything expresses a creaturely will, and this is the source of separation from God and so the primary object of annihilation. This constitutes an inner transformation, an internal change, a passing over from a state where I am beset by concupiscence and appetitive desire to one where I am free of these things, free of sin. This work is, as per Locke, 'properly religious' for it is about creating an inner change acceptable to God and suited to individual salvation, a leaving of things of this world, the created, to this world and a turning inward so as to build a relationship with God. Again Locke comes to mind: things of this world are peripheral to properly religious concerns, which are individual, internal and orientated on the otherworldly, non-material, God. The concept 'religion' has the same shape as it does for Locke because, while this is a mystical and ascetic approach, it is one that fits within the paradigms of religion discussed above. Politics is about regulating material affairs and material desires so as to prevent or lessen conflict between agents, religion is about the internal, the individual, the otherworldly and redemption. The concept 'religion' has the same extension as it does for Locke, and, for the most part, the same is true with 'politics'.

But stage six is not the ultimate stage, which is only achieved in death when the material realm is left behind. The final state is an experience of everlasting glory where the self is so completely annihilated that it is identified with God, a direct participant in God's Glory, there is no difference between God and the mystic, she has been absorbed into the monistic unity that preceded her created form. This is not a unity that preserves difference—it is totalizing, no individuality, simply participation in God. There is a post-terrestrial existence, but that existence is God and nothing more, ultimate freedom is self-deification and self-deification points beyond life, beyond the created, to the uncreated; radical self-deification is radical decreation because (on the traditional account) the created is separate from the creator, the kingdom of God is eternal and separate from the temporal kingdom, this world is separate from the next. Nothing is left of the created self, no will, no body, everything incompatible with God annihilated, all that is left is God, all that is left is an undifferentiated unity, the self is completely absorbed into this monistic unity, difference would only bring separateness, separateness has been completely overcome and with it difference, the other has been reduced to the same.

Such may be the mystic's path, but not the anarchist's. Anarchist hopes are thisworldly: liberty should not be otherworldly, a post-terrestrial promise, it ought not to come through death. The focus of Porete's mysticism is not life, not the social, not the material and not this world. As with the Marcionites, the Manichaens, the Paulicians and the Cathari, the material and worldly are devalued in relation to the spiritual, love is opposed to desire, incompatible and so love can only be in a space empty of desire—that is the point of decreation, to make space for love. Ultimately it is spiritual not earthly salvation that is sought, the *telos* is non-terrestrial, beyond the realm of life, beyond society, beyond the world and the worldly, the *telos* is

death. Here the world becomes 'a *caput mortuum*. . .in contrast to the beautiful fancy. . .God' (Bakunin 1970, p. 13). The sixth stage is 'the highest that can be attained in terrestrial life' (Critchley 2009, p. 290), not the highest state, but the highest state of material, terrestrial and embodied attainment. The sixth stage is not the *telos*, the *telos* is stage seven. But, 'the seventh state is only attained after our death. It is the condition of 'everlasting glory', of which we shall have no knowledge until our souls have left our bodies' (Critchley 2009, p. 291). So while the process of self-deification described by Porete is an ultimate goal, an otherworldly one, if we are going to draw a political point out of things we must focus on the stages of transformation of human nature that lead up to it.

This is what Critchley does: the process has certain communistic consequences, and to draw these out we focus on the sixth and penultimate stage. In annihilating the self, God comes to reside in the soul, this is not complete identity with, or participation in God, reserved for the seventh and final stage, but it is God that animates one's being. While the mystic is still embodied and has a terrestrial form, God moves through them. Nothing is higher than God and in being filled with God's spirit the mystic is identified with God and not bound by human law. They have overcome original sin and are free. For Porete this implies that one can live outside of the institution of the Catholic Church and the authority of the state, for no humanly made law can be higher than the law of love which now inhabits the inner life of the mystic. So, while on the negative side, the practice is anti-cosmic and anti-somatic, on the positive, insofar as human law is a thing of this world, we are offered spiritualized antinomianism—a rejection of human law through an identification with a higher spiritual authority. Through the annihilation of the soul one becomes identified with that from which all things have their being, and above which stands nothing: individuality is abolished. Thus all worldly distinctions, thine and mine, vanish. Private property is merely a product of concupiscence, the desire to cling to objects, to exclude others from their use, this has been overcome through the annihilation of the will. Human law and property rights concretize mine and thine, whereas God's love dissipates them allowing a free distribution from rich to poor, one the rich have no claim against. Institutionalized privilege is abolished by the law of love; to identify with an institutionally legitimated social status, to see it as mine, is to cling to and desire a thing of this world and a humanly created rule.

But the freedom on offer in stage six is not complete or perfect freedom, if it were there would be six, not seven, stages. The communism of the free spirit is not the goal. It is a necessary point on a path to a goal, instrumental to a goal, but not one. The communism of the free spirit is a waypoint, perhaps a beautiful one, but a waypoint nonetheless.

This schema also maps onto that discussed in regard to Locke. The distinction between body and soul, between this world and the next, between the earthly kingdom, rightly governed by human law, and the heavenly kingdom, governed by God, the structures underwriting Lockean liberalism, are recapitulated in a quasi-immanentist schema. Human law is valid in the earthly kingdom because its citizens, *qua* creaturely concupiscent beings, are marked by original sin, they

require political structures to keep their desires in check and protect the interests of others from the excesses of the fallen will. The law of love is valid to those who inhabit the kingdom of God and have overcome their creaturely nature, these have no worldly or material interests for the state to regulate and are no longer marked by original sin; there is nothing of this world they desire. They validly transgress human laws, meant to govern sinful beings, they dwell in the kingdom of God, above human law orientated on worldly interest. They have purged themselves of that which connects them to the world, a world considered a mere superfluous externality they pass through but lacking significance because their inner being is filled with an otherworldly love that constitutes a new law. We still need our political theorists, our Lockes, because there remains an unfree world whose practices must be regulated for the sake of the material interests of those who are unable to hack and hew. The secular liberal state remains in place and remains a fit dwelling place for the citizens of an unfree world, our dwelling place, for if one is unable to decreate oneself, if one cannot hack and hew at the sinful concupiscent self, if one is not part of the elite, then mystical 'anarchist' freedom is just not on offer, the best one may have is a political realm that guarantees negative liberty. The liberal secular state remains the proper political home to those unable to join the elite of mystical anarchist self-deifiers (decreators) who properly transgress its boundaries. The liberal secular state and its regulatory mechanisms are affirmed, they receive normative support from this theory, there is no real critique here, it is just that its strictures and structures do not apply for the elite, they are exempt; the rest are left where they lie. This could hardly be seen as the building of new social forms within the shell of the old as part of a process of social transformation because the old here is not seen as a shell at all, it is something of vital importance given our anthropological predicament, and general social transformation is not on offer.

Reflections on Mystical Anarchism

I cannot accept this affirmation of original sin. It seems that rather than deny that we are mired in ancestral sin, or deny that we are *homo œconomicus* or *homo rapiens*, what is going on in Porete's mystical anarchism is affirming that we are precisely these things. It would seem then that we would have to say that the structures of the unfree world (for us the liberal democratic state) do not corrupt humanity, rather these structures are a fitting home for a primitively corrupt humanity. Worse yet, because it is the home of a primitively corrupt humanity, liberal democratic society is basically absolved of responsibility for or complicity in corruption. On the back of this we are ushered towards the second feature of the above that I cannot affirm, the ascetic, anti-somatic, anti-cosmic solution. If we follow Porete we affirm our sinful condition and we affirm that the only way to overcome it is through hacking and hewing at ourselves, decreating ourselves, annihilating our souls and will until all that remains is a decreated space, a '*nihil*' (Critchley 2009, p. 291). Porete, who

is probably most accurately described as a Beguine, gives us the spiritual technology required for this, one that ultimately takes us out of this world and into participation in God's glory, making it clear that if we follow our true spiritual *telos* it leads out of this world and towards another more perfect. This is not an affirmation of the self, nor humanity, the human being is sinful, concupiscent, a thing to be annihilated, left behind. This view does not affirm the earth, or the cosmos, it does not affirm the social or human social capacities. We affirm Augustine: the human being is a concupiscent being. We affirm Hobbes: we are competitive, acquisitive, self-centered beings who calculate the most efficient means to our self-centered ends. We affirm Gray: we are the rapacious hominid—greedy, violent apes. We affirm what many anarchists seek to deny:

> God once installed, he was naturally proclaimed the cause, reason, arbiter, and absolute disposer of all things; the world henceforth was nothing, God was all. . ..God being everything, the real world and man are nothing. God being truth, justice, goodness, beauty, power and life, man is falsehood, iniquity, evil, ugliness, impotence and death. (Bakunin 1970, p. 24)

Here we have an anarchist response to the relationship between creator and created: the created material realm is nothing, the human animal is nothing, ultimately these are the true *nihil*, the true nothingness, and the *nihil* that preexisted creation, preexisted the material, is everything, is what is desired. That which relates to our bodily needs is devalued '[t]hey dishonor human labor and make it a sign and source of servitude' (Bakunin 1970, p. 25).

But, the few, that elite who will have the strength to attack this greedy rapacious thing we are, will hack and hew at it until it is decreated, until, filled with God's love, they have achieved 'the extinction of the will and annihilation of the soul' (Critchley 2009, p. 290). This is a state where Critchley describes the soul as having become 'emptied and excoriated;' the soul has obtained 'absolute poverty'—a poverty that allows 'that the wealth of God can be poured into the soul' (290). Thus the mystic remains suspended between this world and the next and capable of autonomous community, the communism of the free spirit. There is a gap then, a difference, between those who have obtained the freedom of the spirit and may live by the law of love, God's law, and those who have not obtained it, those whose actions are based in will and thus live by human laws, the former are angels, the latter mere hominids. Angels are free of original sin and inhabit the kingdom of God, the hominid can be an object of love, a secondary beneficiary of the law of love, the recipient of charity, but has not obtained the freedom of spirit and so is otherwise abandoned to human law and the earthly kingdom. The community of the free spirit, ruled by love, is like the Beguineage, it is not a complete withdrawal from the world, one still lives in the world but apart from it. The Beguinage is situated on the edge of a larger community but its gates permit only limited intercourse between them. The gates are not there to keep the Beguines in, no they (more or less) have free passage, they can move into the broader community to do good works, particularly for the poor. The gates are there predominantly to keep the world out. It is the gated community of the soul; a community partly broken off

from life; a retreat that establishes community only by a partial withdrawal from community, those who are members of it can move freely between it and the broader community, but those outside it must ask permission to enter. Like contemporary gated communities, the gates keep the excluded out, those within are not so subject to constraint, they may move between worlds depending on what they have determined for themselves, they have liberty.

Here we have a community that is defined against what is external to it, we are within range of a politics of identity. What is external to that identity is negatively construed. If the free community is a partaker in the spirit of God then those external to it do not partake because they are mired in sin, there is a 'we' and 'they'. This takes us back to the tension between good and evil. If we who partake of the spirit of God are good, because we have purged ourselves of original sin and may inhabit God's kingdom, those who do not partake in the spirit are still sinful and must live under secular human law which can regulate how they conduct themselves in the pursuit of their material desires. The focus on original sin, and the theological anthropology that flows out of it, is the product of a fractured, dualistic normative orientation: it divides the sinful from those who have overcome, those who may act according to the law of love and those who must act according to human law defined by the state. *Qua* form of anarchism the radicalism here lies mostly in the asceticism of its demands, its demands for self-denial, a self-loathing expressed through asceticism. Its radicalism does not lie in its egalitarian call for the complete development of every individual's creative capacities—that is not what is called for, not at all. The only capacity developed is the capacity to renounce the self, and through the renunciation of the created to renounce being.

What are we to do? Shrink back into small communities of love, these gated communities of the soul, which are ironically also communities of self-loathing, or somatic loathing and leave the rest of humanity to themselves, to rapaciously rip and rend each other, and the planet, in their competitive acquisitiveness? I do not see that as a solution. Behind the communities of love lies a misanthropic and dystopic vision, for here utopia is but an enclave, an island before death.

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Chapter 4
Border Sovereignty

Alistair Welchman

Part I

Agamben's analysis of the conceptual structure of sovereignty depends on a particular reading of Carl Schmitt's theory of sovereignty. Schmitt's argument proceeds from the claim that the sovereign is 'the one who decides on the state of exception [*Ausnahmezustand*].' (1985, p. 5; 1922, p. 13)[1] His argument appeals to the idea—now familiar from some interpretations of the work of Wittgenstein—that rules cannot ultimately specify the situations in which they can be correctly applied. The argument is a *reductio*. Assume that rules can specify their applications. This implies that the question of whether a given rule is applicable can itself be settled by appeal to some further rule. But this further rule would itself stand in need of application. And so there would be an infinite regress of rules. But this is impossible. So rules cannot ultimately specify the situations in which they can be correctly applied. We can call this the rule regress argument.

The issue has a long and venerable history, stretching back to Kant (*Critique of Pure Reason* A132-134/B171-173). Wittgensteinian critical legal theorists have for a long time understood rule-regress arguments as having an important impact on our understanding of how specifically *legal* judgments work, an understanding that usually sees legal judgment as underdetermined by explicitly stated legal rules, opening up important extra-legal areas of research (Finkelstein 2010). In a recent article on Agamben, for instance, William Connolly is typical in representing

[1] *Ausnahme* is literally an exception, and the term *Ausnahmezustand* is often translated (including by Agamben) as 'state of exception' even though its corresponding technical sense in English is 'state of emergency'.

A. Welchman (✉)
University of Texas at San Antonio, San Antonio, TX, USA
e-mail: alistair.welchman@utsa.edu

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A. Welchman (ed.), *Politics of Religion/Religions of Politics*,
Sophia Studies in Cross-cultural Philosophy of Traditions and Cultures 8,
DOI 10.1007/978-94-017-9448-0_4

Wittgenstein (and hence the rule-regress argument) as showing that 'every rule and law encounters uncertainty and indeterminacy as it bumps into new and unforeseen circumstances' so that formal self-rule can only be established on the basis of an informal (institutional) network of practices bolstering the capacity for self-rule (2007, p. 23). Indeed, Agamben himself sometimes appears to support this kind of interpretation when he claims, appealing to Gadamer's hermeneutics, that 'the application of a norm is in no way contained within the norm and cannot be derived from it; otherwise there would be no need to create the grand edifice of trial law.' (1998, p. 40)[2]

On this view, Schmitt's definition of the sovereign decision is a special case of a general problem possessed by all conceptual rules or norms that can be explicitly formulated. If it is impossible in general for a rule of any kind exhaustively to specify its correct applications, then, a fortiori, it is impossible for a legal-constitutional rule to specify exhaustively which authority is competent to declare an emergency or exceptional situation. Only something non-rule-governed can fill in the gap. And a criterion-less i.e. free decision is the only understanding we have of such non-rule-governed action. The sovereign is then simply the name for the one who makes this decision. Schmitt himself refers obliquely to Kierkegaard,[3] so that the existentialist overtones of this description are not at all inappropriate.[4]

Nevertheless, Agamben ultimately rejects this understanding of Schmitt: 'Here [i.e. in Schmitt] the decision is not the expression of the will of an individual hierarchically superior to all others.' (2005, pp. 25–6) Agamben retains the term 'decision', especially in *Homo Sacer*, but re-interprets its meaning. This is, in part, in line with Wittgenstein commentary. Wittgenstein does occasionally describe following a rule in terms of a 'decision' (*Philosophical Investigations* §186) and of course he famously claims that any 'reasons [*Gründe*]' we can give for going on in a particular way 'soon give out. And then I will act without reasons.' (§211) But such apparent 'existentialism' is clearly inconsistent with the basic results of the private language argument: if I just make up the next application, then there is no difference between correct and incorrect applications of a rule, and hence no normativity, and hence no rule. (§202) It is not really clear what Wittgenstein's solution is. But its structure clearly involves the claim that there must be some other way of 'grasping a rule' than the one that leads to this paradox. (§201) Here Wittgenstein adverts to the notion of a 'practice', or some form of quasi-empirical regularity that underlies and makes possible normative rule following.[5] Schmitt adverts to something similar, I

[2] This passage is interesting because he presents Gadamer as giving a *critique* of Kant, whose account of 'the relation between the particular case and the norm' is of 'a merely logical operation' that put everything on the wrong track (1998, p. 39). Agamben, I think, underestimates the importance of Kant here, although he is correct to say that Kant thinks the rule regress argument concerns only what he calls general (rather than transcendental) logic.

[3] He refers to 'a protestant theologian.' (1985, p. 15; 1922, p. 21).

[4] Consider Schmitt's description of de Maistre later in the text: 'In … de Maistre we can see a reduction of the state to the moment of pure decision, to a decision not based on reason and discussion and justifying itself, that is, to an absolute decision created out of nothingness.' (1985, p. 66; 1922, p. 69).

[5] Quite possibly, the objections recur at the level of a (collective) practice.

think, when he makes the following famous—but opaque—remark: 'There exists no norm that is applicable to chaos. For a legal order to make sense, a normal situation must exist.' (1985, p. 19; 1922, p. 13) The obvious interpretation here would be that Schmitt, like Wittgenstein, also understands that 'rule-following', or what he calls 'the legal order', is only possible if there is sufficient quasi-empirical regularity of behavior, a 'normal situation', not chaos; enough regularity for a Wittgensteinian 'practice' to emerge.[6]

Agamben continues to use the vocabulary of a decision. But what is this decision if it is not to be thought in the apparently existentialist and personalist terms that Schmitt uses? I think that this question can best be answered in the theological context of the later German Idealist tradition. Agamben's reading of the Schmittian decision on which the law rests is first and foremost as a *transcendental* decision akin to god's decision to create, that is, a decision (or act) that takes place at the transcendental level and which conditions the possibility of the legal order and hence should not be confused (conceptually) with any empirical part of that order.

The *locus classicus* for the notion of a transcendental decision is Kant's late analysis of radical evil in his 1793 text *Religion with the Limits of Mere Reason*. Kant argues that our moral natures, our intelligible characters, are constituted by an act—a decision—, but not one that can be localized in the empirical flow of time. Rather that decision—like god's 'before' it—takes place out of time and explains *both* why we can be held responsible for our moral natures *and* why the propensities embodied in that nature have the phenomenal appearance of innateness:

> To have a good or an evil disposition as an inborn natural constitution does not here mean that it has not been acquired by the man who harbors it, i.e. that he is not the author of it; but rather, it means that it has not been acquired in time (that he has *always* been good or evil *from his youth up*). The disposition, i.e. the ultimate subjective ground of the adoption of maxims can be one only and applies universally to the whole use of freedom. Yet this disposition itself must have been adopted by free choice, for otherwise it could not be imputed. (*Werke*, v. 6, pp. 22–3)

Kant's idea of a transcendental act of freedom effectively integrates the two elements at issue in Schmitt's discussion of the application of norms: this temporally non-localizable act *both* fixes the empirical regularities that underlie human behavior (for Kant, the universal but empirical generalization that everyone has an evil disposition, i.e. is disposed to make bad choices) *and* makes it the in principle revocable content of an of a free act.[7]

[6] Norris (2006, pp. 19f) criticizes Mouffe's appropriation of Wittgenstein on just this point: that she interprets Wittgenstein's talk of a 'decision' as it were 'existentially', where Wittgenstein clearly has something else in mind.

[7] Fichte and Schelling take up this notion of a constitutive transcendental act: Fichte in his quasi-mythic *Tathandlung* in which the transcendental subject is responsible for the creation of the entire empirical world; and Schelling, who, in his middle period works, elaborates a sustained analogy between the atemporal choice of moral personality and the criterionlessness of god's decision to create—or, ultimately, to exist at all. But it is in Schopenhauer's philosophy that the notion reaches

Part II

One of the most important tendencies in the development of the idea of the transcendental in general is an increasing sensitivity to its paradoxical nature. In its most elaborated form, this tendency can be (rather brutally) summarized with the axiom that for any x, the transcendental condition of possibility of x is not itself an x. This leads to immediately paradoxical results in general cases of transcendental investigation: the condition of possibility of any experience is not itself something that can be an object of possible experience; the condition of conceptuality is not itself a concept etc. Heidegger's claims (a) that everything that is, is a being but (b) that the Being of beings is not itself a being, are well-known versions of this axiom. And Derrida radicalizes Heidegger's conception of this ontological difference, i.e. of the difference between Being and beings, by effectively noting that the opening up of the space of this difference is in a sense prior to and 'constitutive of' any attempt to characterize Being. This is at least one of the senses of his *mot d'art* '*différance*.'

Agamben himself is clearly in close dialogue both with Heidegger (Agamben 2007) as well as with Derrida, (1998, pp. 49ff; 2005, pp. 10ff.) and some of his own technical terms echo these claims about the refractory nature of the transcendental. For instance, he conceives of what I have described as the transcendental relation between positive law (the empirical) and sovereignty (the decision that makes it possible) on the basis of an *indifference* between transcendental and empirical, as comprising the paradoxical (non)space in which transcendental and empirical (coordinating various series of constitutive distinctions: fact/law, outside/inside, exclusion/inclusion, *nomos/phusis* etc.) *cannot* be distinguished, the (non)space of their 'indistinction.' (1998, pp. 4, 9, 20, 31-2, 90, 168). Thus, for instance, shortly after rejecting Schmitt's existentialist understanding of the sovereign decision that makes the law possible, he argues that '[t]he sovereign structure of the law . . . has the form of a state of exception in which fact and law are indistinguishable.' (1998, p. 27)

At a conceptual level in his 'political theory' texts, Agamben often deploys these blankly paradoxical formulations involving a 'zone of indiscernibility' between opposing terms that are strongly reminiscent of the principled indeterminacy and negatively conceptual formulations characteristic of Derrida's deconstruction. But in the 'empirical' dimension of his work (which I am attempting to prolong into a consideration of the effects of the US/Mexico border wall and the unauthorized migrants it both produces and hinders), I think Agamben can be understood as moving in a different and less blankly negative direction.

The case I want to make is that the a proper understanding of the Schmittian decision as operating on a transcendental level should not—or at least not merely—be an opportunity for a conceptual investigation into the difficulties of thinking the

its most general expression in a conception of the world as it is in itself, an active striving that is endless and aimless because non-temporal and non-spatial.

transcendental; rather it should be an opportunity for considering the unique spatiotemporal structures that a transcendental decision produces when it founds normativity. Such an investigation could be given the label, following Kant, of a 'transcendental aesthetic.' But it would be important to observe a crucial difference: in the Transcendental Aesthetic of the *Critique of Pure Reason* Kant treats spatiotemporal sensory determination (the 'aesthetic') as itself transcendental i.e. as making experience possible. The structures of space and time themselves remain unchanged through this process (it is precisely the fact that the propositions of Euclidean geometry are unchangeable i.e. a priori that motivates Kant's transcendental idealism), even if their ontological status is modified (because the conclusion of his argument is that they are forms of human sensibility, not properties of things as they are in themselves). By contrast, I want to argue that the intrusion of a founding transcendental decision into the empirical creates distinctive *transcendental* spatiotemporal forms whose properties and structures differ in interesting ways from empirical space and time.

Most significant among these is the specifically transcendental temporality that attaches to a transcendental decision. Since a transcendental decision is not directly conditioned by time, the event that comprises it is not one that can be localized in empirical time. Thus Agamben describes the fundamental political decision, the founding of the *polis* as 'an event [that cannot be] achieved once and for all but is continually operative in the civil state in the form of the sovereign decision.' (1998, p. 109) It is precisely the transcendental (as opposed to personal) nature of the decision that comprises sovereignty on Schmitt's analysis that makes this comprehensible. The decision to found a political unit can *never* be completed because it takes place (in a sense) outside of time, like the decision that comprises my intelligible character in Kant's analysis of radical evil. But this exteriority to time is not blankly paradoxical in the way that a conceptual contradiction would be. Rather there is a quite precise way to understand it, as involving a transcendental temporality distinct from and irreducible to empirical temporality, but also not its simple negation (sheer timelessness): this temporal structure that Agamben describes is more like the *intrusion* of timelessness into time.

A second aspect of this transcendental temporality is advanced by the German idealist philosopher, F.W.J. Schelling, who claims that we can understand the past not as something that was once present (but now is not) but rather as something that was never present.[8] In later works, Schelling identifies that transcendental past with the temporality of the myth. But here *muthos* should not be understood as in simple opposition to *logos*. The temporality of transcendental decision can *only* be

[8] '[T]the past clearly cannot be a present at the same time as the present; but as past, it is certainly simultaneous with the present, and it is easy to see that the same holds true of the future.' (Schelling 1813, p. 197) But the 'simultaneity' of the past with the present does not constitute the past *as* present (as a 'now'). It follows from this that this conception of the past is *never* present since it is 'simultaneous' with every present moment in the sequence of nows, but is not itself present in any of them. Schelling's argument is taken up again by Bergson and more recently Deleuze.

expressed in the temporality of myth, a temporality, as Lévi-Strauss observes, that expresses the fact that it is (conceptually speaking) 'timeless' by (temporally) locating events in a past time, but not one that could ever have been present (Lévi-Strauss 1967, p. 205).

Agamben effectively combines these views in his analysis of the temporality of the sovereign decision. On the one hand, this decision necessarily appears in mythic form, in terms of a foundational event whose transcendental effects always exceed its empirical content and that takes place in a past not supposed to have been a past present. On the other hand, the act is never fully completed and recurs, is 'continually operative', in the permanent possibility of sovereign intervention. The founding or grounding of the *polis* appears both as an event that is always already completed (never took place in the present) *and* as impossible to complete because still on-going, so that the exercise of sovereign power is effectively required as the permanent possibility of re-grounding the *polis*. Understood both as a quasi-conceptual condition *and* as a necessarily mythical founding event, it becomes possible to understand the motivation behind Schmitt's claim that in the state of emergency, the 'entire subsisting order' is no longer operative, but the pure sovereign decision is still the manifestation of some kind of order, 'in a juridical sense, even if it is not a legal order [*Rechstordnung*]' (1985, p. 12; 1922, p. 18). The decisive act definitively characteristic of sovereignty is a moment of a continuous re-founding of the political unit that is both a part of the political order (in that it founds this order) and distinct from it (because, as condition for the political order, it cannot simply be identified with it).

Part III

In many ways, this account is consonant with quite traditional ones. Social contract theory in general postulates a moment of decision (consent) that founds the legitimacy of juridical system without being located within in. In its simplest form, this event is understood historically. But even moderately sophisticated advocates of the view understand that this is naïve. The alternative is usually postulated as purely 'hypothetical'. The reasoning behind this shift is instructive however. Rawls gives a clear expression of this reasoning at the beginning of his *Theory of Justice* (1971, p. 13):

> No society can of course be a scheme of cooperation which men enter voluntarily in a literal sense; each person finds himself placed at birth in some particular position in some particular society, and the nature of this position materially affects his life prospects. Yet a society satisfying the principles of justice as fairness comes as close as a society can to being a voluntary scheme, for it meets the principles which free and equal persons would assent to under circumstances that are fair.

This reasoning exactly mirrors Kant's account of natural propensities: they appear phenomenally as unchosen; and yet they must be regarded as having been chosen. What Kant's transcendental analysis adds is the insight that a

counter-factual account cannot work. There are two cases: either the counter-factual decision to accept the juridical system voluntarily has not in fact been taken (in which case the juridical system is not *in fact* legitimated) or it has (in which case it has been legitimated by an unproblematic decision of voluntary consent). Kant's transcendental analysis correctly apprehends the phenomenology of legitimation as comprising an irreducible moment within which the juridical system is experienced both as legitimate *and* as unchosen. To reconcile legitimacy with consent it is therefore necessary to postulate an originary decision in a mythic past time. Precisely because it occurs in a past that cannot be thought of as having once been present, this decision is always leaking back into empirical time in a permanent need for re-founding. What Rawls's hypothetical gloss on this structure does raise is the issue of whether Schmitt is right to think of this re-founding in terms of sovereignty. Why should it not also be thought of in terms of a *democratic* act of legitimation?

To evaluate this possibility it is instructive to compare the traditional paradox of democracy (Whelan 1983; Abizadeh 2008) with Agamben's reading of Schmitt as providing a 'paradox of sovereignty.' For Agamben, 'the paradox of sovereignty consists in the fact that the sovereign is at the same time inside and outside the judicial order.' (1998, pp. 15ff.) This confusion is what justifies Agamben's 'zone of indiscernibility' between sovereignty and the juridical order; and it is what I have explained as stemming from an essentially transcendental analysis: it is precisely as 'condition of possibility of the juridical order' that the sovereign exception is both connected to and simultaneously disconnected from that order (Agamben 1998, p. 17). However it is immediately noticeable that the expression of this paradox is directly spatial: the sovereign is both 'inside and outside' the juridical order. And this conceptual-spatial confusion has its parallel in the paradox of democracy. This paradox lies in the fact that in a democracy, political legitimation lies in democratic legislation. But any act of legislation in a democracy presupposes the prior constitution of a bounded *demos* endowed with the capacity to confer legitimacy. This *demos* cannot itself be legitimated democratically on pain of an infinite regress. And therefore any attempt at democratic legitimation is inherently paradoxical, in that it necessarily presupposes an indissoluble remainder of non-democratic legitimacy. The structure of this situation neatly parallels both the logical structure of Agamben's paradox of sovereignty *and* implies the spatialization of this structure in the border: democratic political legitimation is only possible on the basis of a 'prior' non-democratic decision that lies outside the politico-juridical sphere (in what Schmitt calls 'sociology'); but at the same time this non-democratic element is an intrinsic feature of every democratic decision and hence also inexorably 'inside' it. Every 'empirical' democratic decision is implicated in a prior 'transcendental' decision—that can no longer be counted as democratic—determining the bounds of the *demos* included in making the empirical decision.

This parallel is illuminating in a number of respects. First, it makes it clear—perhaps clearer than Agamben makes it—why even liberal democratic states are vulnerable to the permanent risk of exposure to sovereign power without principled limit. Agamben's Schmittian argument here is based on the necessary

indeterminacy of the exceptional situation within which (typically) executive power comes to the fore. One of the weaknesses of this account is that it is unclear why this indeterminacy necessarily implies the foregrounding of executive power. Other thinkers, like Negri, have used arguments in many ways similar to Schmitt's to establish the existence of a revolutionary moment of constituent power distinct from the institutional coagulations of constituted power. (Agamben 1998, p. 42)

Agamben's response is to deny that there are principled criteria to differentiate between a reactionary statist moment of sovereign power and a revolutionary realization of the ultimately political character of social institutions. This is technically correct: the sovereign is (in Schmitt's description) the one who decides the exception; so if the exception is decided (in some instance) by a revolutionary movement, then that movement is sovereign. But this fails to establish the conceptual link between sovereignty and *Gewalt* that is at the heart of Agamben's picture of sovereignty, because it depends on an apparently empirical claim. It might for instance be grounded in the view that all revolutions will go the way of the Nazis and Lenin, (Agamben 1998, p. 42); or by an argument (which Agamben does not make) seeking to show that the necessary absence of positive legal constraints on revolutionary moments of the insurgence of constituent power makes them permanently vulnerable to totalitarian capture. If the former claim is empirical, then so is the link between sovereignty and *Gewalt*; if it is not empirical, then it is surely itself grounded in some transcendental or conceptual link between sovereignty and *Gewalt* and therefore cannot be used to ground such a link. This latter is not such a bad argument, but is clearly empirical and does not establish the kind of strong (transcendental) relationship that Agamben is after.

However, if the parallel Schmittian argument about the insoluble remainder of democratic decision-making goes through, then the basis of the intrusion of a moment of non-legitimated power into even the most radically democratic decision becomes clear. Thus when Negri, attempting to distinguish his position from Schmitt's, declares: 'the absoluteness of sovereignty is a totalitarian concept, whereas that of constituent power is the absoluteness of democratic government,' (Negri 1999, p. 13) he is unwittingly reproducing Schmitt's very argumentation: sovereignty is precisely absolute, in Schmitt's view, because it names the site within which the intrinsic contradictions within the legal system are posed; similarly, any 'absoluteness' possessed by democracy names a parallel aporetic space within which the limits of democratic legitimation are posed.

Part IV

Borders are privileged points of application for political sovereignty. In this section I want to investigate the traction that Agamben's theory of sovereignty has in explaining concrete effects on the border and to evaluate what counter-effects this application has on his theory. I am especially interested in the southern border of the United States—and so the term 'concrete' should be taken (also) literally,

since one of the most significant developments in recent years has been the construction of an 850 mile physical barrier along portions of the Texas-Mexico political boundary.

For this purpose the most important aspect of the intersection of the two paradoxes—of sovereignty and democracy—is the corollary of the transcendental temporality of the decision in a transcendental spatiality. Of course, the primary site of such spatiality is the border. Understood materially, the border is a physical limit, dividing a plane. But in relation to its role as condition of possibility of a juridical system, this physical realization of the border becomes complicated. The first and most obvious way in which this happens is that the division is a *normative* one (indeed, in part, it is the condition of functioning of norms): a border is not constituted merely by performing a spatial division, but only by establishing relations of inclusion and exclusion to human beings and their products. As the spatialization of a transcendental act, the drawing of a border in its full sense is not a project that can ever be completed: it requires something like Freud's 'permanent expenditure of energy' to maintain. (Freud 1986, p. 213) The continual re-founding of the *polis* is spatially situated at its border, which is therefore intrinsically incapable of complete securitization because the question of who comprises the *demos* is unanswerable in democratic terms, that is to say, it is in principle always open.

Mouffe (2000) accepts something like the paradox of democracy (although she presents it as a paradox *between* the liberal and democratic aspects of liberal democracy) but argues that it is benign. She accepts, drawing on Schmitt's *Freund/Feind* or friend/foe distinction, that the constitution of a democratic polity involves an irreducible act of exclusion but argues that it is formal rather than substantive (as in Schmitt). That is, there must *be* some exclusion, but the notion of what counts as a people is formed in that moment of exclusion (rather than, as with Schmitt, comprising a pre-political communal substance) and is hence a political construct open to perpetual re-negotiation (though never complete elimination) through liberal critical interrogation. Mouffe's insouciance provides one understanding of the necessarily incomplete securitization of the border. But the facts on the ground, at least in the southern United States, suggest another, less benign one. (Mouffe 2000, pp. 4ff., 36ff.)

The transcendental incompletion of the border is mirrored at an empirical level in the well-known inefficacy of physical prohibition in controlling border transgression in the form of unauthorized migration. Large-scale physical barriers ('walls') have become an increasingly significant phenomenon in recent years, the most prominent examples being the US wall on the border with Mexico and the Israeli wall that acts to annex parts of the occupied Palestinian West Bank to Israel. Although their aims differ, it is hard to think them apart from the intention to restrict human movement across a simultaneously physical and political threshold.[9]

[9] In this sense the contemporary wall is quite different from the cold war paradigm of the Berlin wall.

Certainly it is true of the US southern border wall that its official justification revolves around its ability to 'deter' unauthorized migration.[10] Yet they are all, in this respect, grotesque failures (Brown 2010, pp. 109f). In the case of US border wall, these failures are particularly acute for the most recently authorized sections in Texas have the benefit of evidence about the effects of the previously constructed sections, mostly in California (the so-called 'primary fence' dates from 1994 in San Diego). Yet all this evidence, including official sources, suggests that the wall has no discernible impact on net unauthorized migration. (Haddal et al. 2009, p. 2) This is not surprising because, in a literally Kafkaesque scenario, the wall is, like the wall in Kafka's story *Beim Bau der Chinesischen Mauer*, built to be incomplete, stretching across only 850 miles of the nearly 3,000 mile border: 'how can protection be provided by a wall that is not built continuously?' asks the narrator of Kafka's story (1931, p. 10, my translation). How, indeed. And, again just as in Kafka's story, certainly by the time of the decision to build the Texas segment, the evidence of its failure is 'widespread and widely known', not least to policy makers.

Obviously this situation can be read ideologically: the manifest justification, it is clear, cannot be the real motivation. And it is easy to speculate about what the institutionally (politically) unconscious alternative motive might be that cannot be consciously i.e. publically, voiced. For instance, obvious considerations of global political economy suggest that US capital has an interest both in maintaining the traditional long-term barriers to the free flow of labor from Mexico (to perpetuate wage disparities that enable the practices of offshoring) and to permit some significant flows of the most desperate, as long as they remain unintegrated into the American polity (and can hence comprise a super-exploitable class and exercise downward pressure on US wages in the service sectors). A porous wall would serve just this end, an end that cannot itself be integrated into the conscious (public) discourse of legitimation, justification and explanation. (Davies 2005)

But, without denying the validity of this analysis, an understanding of the structural nature of the incompletion of the wall offers an insight into the construction of the space within which *this* ideological appeal turns out to be a successful way of carrying through the latent project. Here the paradoxes of democracy and sovereignty intersect: the unresolved kernel of illegitimacy within the project of democratic legitimacy that constitutes the paradox of democracy entails an appeal to sovereignty, since to be sovereign is to be able, legitimately, to make a decision that cannot be legitimated.

The permanently incomplete act performed at the border is of the order of an exception or emergency, but an avowedly permanent one (whereas the discourse of the war on terror is forced to try to justify its own permanence). This is because, at the level of democracy, the border is the site at which a phase of the decision

[10] The public rationale for these measures is expressed in the slogan adopted by the US Border Patrol when the primary fence was built: 'Prevention through Deterrence'. As Congressional Research Service documents explain, this strategy calls for 'reducing unauthorized migration by placing agents and resources directly on the border along population centers in order to deter would-be migrants from entering the country.' (Haddal et al. 2009, p. 33)

comprising the constitution of the *demos* is enacted. The border is therefore the point at which the indissoluble transcendental core of democratic legitimation is negotiated, the question *of* the constitution of the *demos* that itself *constitutes* political legitimacy. The foundational nature of this question—however it is ultimately answered; or even if it has no substantive answer (as in Mouffe)—positions it in the space occupied by the question of the existence of the *polis*: just the question that comprises a state of emergency. The ideology of the 'state of emergency' or the 'existential threat' proceeds by means of what Kant would have called a transcendental subreption: substituting an *empirical* answer (migrants changing the 'nature' of the political substance of the nation) to a transcendental question (about the constitution of the political unit itself).

In the legal literature concerning the United States, it is well established that the border policies flow from a direct assertion of the power of sovereignty, in the doctrine of so-called 'plenary' or 'Inherent powers' possessed by the national government of the United States. Such powers are distinct from the government's 'normal' powers, which have the source of their authority in the specifically enumerated clauses of the constitution. Plenary powers however have their source in 'the status of the US as a sovereign nation' and are—at least relatively speaking—unconstrained by the constitution and insulated from judicial review (Cleveland 2002, pp. 5–8).[11]

These powers were developed—by means of a mutually supporting network of case citation—during the course of the nineteenth century in three apparently distinct areas: regulation of affairs with Native Americans, regulation of aliens (non-citizen immigrants) and colonial rule over territories like the Philippines. What ties the three areas together is that they all involve the physical presence of non-citizens in territory claimed by United States. In these circumstances, so a series of Supreme Court cases argued, non-citizens are exposed to legislative power unchecked by constitutional constraint and ultimately to sovereign power unchecked by law.

The Report of the Select committee of the House of Representatives, made to the House of Representatives on Feb. 21, 1799 in response to the famous 1798 Alien Exclusion Act, marks a particularly clear expression of the idea: 'the citizen,' the House Report observed, 'being a member of the society,' could not be disenfranchised other than following conviction by a jury trial. Aliens, however, could be removed 'merely . . . from motives' of policy or security. Their removal was not a punishment, but the withdrawal 'of an indulgence . . . which we are in no manner bound to grant or continue.' (Cleveland 2002, p. 93) But similar ideas animate recent cases too. Thus in Knauff v. Shaughnessy (1950) Justice Minton writes: '[t]he exclusion of aliens is a fundamental act of sovereignty. The right to do

[11] Agamben rejects the characterization of the assertion of sovereignty within the state of exception as 'plenary' for reasons derived ultimately from his use of an Aristotelian metaphysics of potentiality (2005, pp. 5–6). But his rejection concerns only the description of such powers as 'plenary' i.e. full, not the understanding of sovereignty at issue.

so stems not alone from legislative power but is inherent in the executive power to control the foreign affairs of the nation. When Congress prescribes a procedure concerning the admissibility of aliens, it is not dealing alone with a legislative power. It is implementing an inherent executive power' (Cleveland 2002, p. 160).

This last claim is particularly interesting. For Agamben, the 'indiscernibility' between normal liberal democratic states and totalitarian ones is grounded in the increasing use of the state of exception. And states of exception have the empirical character of assertions of *executive* power. But Minton writes as if the legislative i.e. democratic power *becomes* executive when it deals with issues concerning the non-democratic core of the choice of the constitution of the *demos* in a border policy. This intersection of the paradoxes of sovereignty and democracy explains more directly how liberal democratic states are implicated in an on-going and constitutive emergency that opens up the ideological space in which even the abandonment of justification can present itself as a justification.

Indeed this abandonment is the most striking characteristic of the discourse of legitimation—and counter-legitimation—that surrounded the construction of the border wall: exactly those who would be affected by the project were absent from consideration of its effects. For instance, the obvious and well-known fact that an incomplete wall will have no discernible effect on overall migration is in part based on the equally well-known fact that would-be migrants will be able to circumvent built segments and go through the holes. The Border Patrol in particular has been quite clear about this, explicitly claiming that the wall would displace unauthorized migrant entry points from urban areas to extra-urban ones (Haddal et al. 2009, p. 26). But it is also well known that these alternative crossing-points, especially in the Sonoran desert between San Diego and El Paso, are extremely hostile to human life. Official sources have documented mortality rates since the beginning of the 'Prevention through Deterrence' strategy: these have risen in absolute terms through the whole of the 1990s and have continued to rise as a proportion of apprehensions (Haddal 2009, pp. 25f) so that more that 4,000 people have now died attempting to cross the US-Mexico Border wall in the last 12 years.[12]

What is striking about this absence of migrants themselves from the structures of justification and legitimation of policy is that it is almost equally as pronounced among those *opposed* to the construction of the wall. A large majority of people from the US borderlands object to the wall, but there has been relatively little national media coverage of the border wall, which is regarded as a 'regional' issue. However in April 2008 there was a small flurry of national interest in the topic manifesting a kind of official opposition. Several newspapers published editorials on the issue after then Homeland Security Secretary Michael Chertoff's invocation of the Real ID act of 2005, an act that enabled those involved in wall construction (and other projects related to the militarization of the border) to waive up to 60 laws

[12] According to the Congressional Research Service deaths peaked at 475 in 2005, more than twice the number prior to 'Prevention through Deterrence.' (Nuñez-Neto and Garcia 2007, p. 35). Other sources put the figures much higher (International Federation for Human Rights 2008).

that might conceivably impede the construction of the wall. So the 'official' opposition to the wall paid no attention to the contradictions within the official justification for the wall, nor to its effects on would-be migrants, but focused instead on the environmental laws waived to speed its construction.[13]

Even on the left, the fatal cost of the wall in general, and any costs to migrants in particular, are similarly downplayed. A recent film, *The Wall* (Ricardo Martinez 2009), devotes only one scene to the issue (albeit a gruesome one: the Chief Medical Officer for Pima Co. Arizona has run out of morgue space to house all the bodies of dead migrants). Its narrative arc instead focuses largely on the radicalization of a poor white woman living on the border whose garden was to be transected by the wall and the film therefore developed a theme of the suspension of legal rights, in this case property rights, similar in substance to the official discourse of objection.

This state of affairs is, I think, the symptom, within the democratic discourse surrounding the wall policy, of something more radical than merely the presence of an ideologically disavowed content (the wall is not 'really' about reducing migration but contributing to the construction of an even more radically disempowered super-exploitable underclass)—even if this content is certainly present. Rather, I think we are in the presence here of something more like the spatial localization of a primary or structural repression of the relation between the paradoxes of democracy and of sovereignty.

This is perhaps an appropriate place to consider an objection to Agamben's Schmittian conception of sovereignty. In her important recent book on the contemporary spate of border wallings, Brown (2010) also uses broadly psychoanalytic resources. As I do, she sees them as intimately tied to assertions of state sovereignty. But for her their failure is an index of the erosion of state sovereignty itself. The massive physical presence of the walls themselves is a kind of overcompensation for the decline of state sovereignty in a post-Westphalian world. The walls themselves are, according to Brown's amplification of Mike Davies's judgment, 'hyperbolic' (Davies 2005, p. 88) performances of a state sovereignty that no longer exists (Brown 2010, p. 24): 'rogue-state behavior—manifest *inter alia* in the building of walls—may look like hypersovereignty, but is actually often compensating for its loss.' (p. 67) In particular, 'the US-Mexico barrier stages a sovereign power and control that it does not exercise.' (p. 38) But generally, there is a 'post-Westphalian distinctiveness to contemporary walls' precisely in 'the reaction they represent to the dissolving effects of globalization on nation-state sovereignty.' (p. 39)

So, although Brown certainly does not emphasize this, her account is continuous with one in which the contradictions in the manifest content of the wall projects are

[13] See, for instance, editorials in the *El Paso Times*, the *Houston Chronicle*, the *San Antonio-Express News*, the *Yuma Sun* on April 4th 2008 (all of which specifically mention environmental laws) as well as editorials in the *Austin-American Statesman* (April 4th 2008), the *Boston Globe* (April 7th) and the *New York Times* (April 3rd).

evidence of a latent but ideologically unavowable content: in the case I mentioned, to effect an intensified exploitation of labor; in her case, the collapse of any sovereignty of the state at all. By contrast, I am arguing that the failure fully and completely to secure borders is an intrinsic property of the assertion of democratic sovereignty, and hence not a repressed content, but the primary repression that opens up the space of ideological disavowal.

Nevertheless, I do not see Brown's reading as necessarily contradicting the one I offer: there can *be* latent contents only on the basis of the primary repression that opens up the space of latency. But the question my reading answers is a different one: not *what* are they really up to; but how is that they can use *this* manifest content as a justificatory screen. The paradox of sovereignty—where there is a remnant of juridical order without determinate legislation—fills up the space opened by the paradox of democracy—where democratic legitimation gives out, at the border. Instead of legitimation one has the appeal to sovereignty, which trumps legitimation, or legitimates by failing to legitimate, by occluding from consideration those affected by the foundational decision that comprises the *demos*. But I do think it is unwise to underestimate the effects of sovereignty—the deaths caused by the porous wall for instance—by reading its failure to successfully assert itself as an empirical index of its waning importance rather than as a structural condition of its functioning.

Part V

In this section I want to address the question of whether this intersection of the paradoxes of democracy and sovereignty might involve something like the bare life that Agamben argues is the effect of sovereignty. I think so: the occlusion of unauthorized migrants from consideration corresponds to the legally anomalous status that unauthorized aliens in general possess within the US. And this anomalous legal situation can itself be best understood using Agamben's conception of bare life as that which, by virtue of its exclusion from the constituted legal system (e.g. through deprivation of legal rights) is exposed to a sovereign-type power that presents itself as legitimate without any legitimation.

Aliens who were not legally admissible at the time of their (physical) entry into the United States or who overstay the terms of their visas are guilty of a minor civil infraction to which no criminal penalties, certainly not imprisonment, apply. Nevertheless, those suspected of this civil violation are subject to proceedings with no right to a government-funded attorney, limited and in some cases no due-process rights, limited and in some cases no right of appeal,[14] forced imprisonment ('administrative detention') until a determination has been made, and whose

[14] Aliens found within 100 miles of the border are subject to 'expedited' removal 'without further hearing or review' (Scaperlanda 2009, p. 68).

outcome may be the alien's forced and involuntary removal from physical presence on US territory. In fact it is *because* 'the decision to remove (by exclusion or deportation) an alien from the United States has long been considered a civil matter, not a criminal one' that 'the alien in removal proceedings is entitled to none of the panoply of constitutional criminal procedure rights.' (Scaperlanda 2009, p. 33) Nevertheless, as the Supreme Court has itself noted, 'the impact of deportation upon the life of an alien is often as great if not greater than the imposition of a criminal sentence.' (Scaperlanda 2009, p. 103) Salinas (1996, p. 245) argues that in many respects, deportation can be viewed as a punishment that is more severe than confinement because 'removal from home, family, and country can mean permanent exile, in some cases to a country the deportee may have never actually known.'

The number of removals has been increasing exponentially in recent years, with nearly 400,000 people being deported in 2010. (Bruno 2010) But the fact of being 'deportable' is just as significant in the lived experience of unauthorized migrants since increasingly any interaction with the police—being stopped for a broken taillight for instance—can result in the initiation of deportation proceedings, forced detention and ultimately forced removal. 'Deportability' is transformed from a legal category to an essentially totalitarian experience of aversion not only to the public sphere but even to public spaces (squares, highways, parks), which promise not the possibility of collectivity but the permanent potential for forced detention without trial and ultimately forced removal.

The crucial conceptual aspect of this tightly woven web of fear is the claim that removal is not a form of punishment. But paradoxically it is as a result of this fact that it is not subject to review, and those removed are not able to claim the rights of someone who is accused of committing a crime. Conversely, the triviality of the offence of merely being physically present in the United States without appropriate authorization affords little protection against search and seizure, as authority is transferred down to local law enforcement who can in effect target anyone they want. If it is not a punishment, how then must removal (and its threat) be understood? It is a purely administrative measure, aimed to correct the anomalous situation in which an alien is physically present on United States territory without authorization. It cannot even be seen as a legal response to the civil violation that comprises its occasion.[15] At the limit, it is a *physical* measure in which the state lays hold of a body that has been legally de-subjectified, and removes it from the territory that defines the state.

The sense of Agamben's provocative critique of human rights discourse is clear here. It is precisely a *humanitarian* gesture to separate immigration violations from criminal violations. Mexico for instance has recently succumbed to international pressure to move in this direction, so that migrants from Central America will not

[15] For three reasons: (1) this follow a fortiori from the fact that it is not any kind of punishment; (2) if it were a punishment it would be wildly disproportionate to the violation; (3) there exist other separate civil penalties for the violation that are proportionate (e.g. fines).

be subject to harsh criminal penalties.[16] But the effect of this humanitarian intervention is to create a separate parallel or shadow quasi-legal system of immigration judges, immigration detention centers and enforcement officers (ICE, Border Patrol) which, *exactly because they are not a part of the criminal justice system*, deprive alien migrants of crucial rights and expose them to arbitrary treatment.

The absence of migrants from the discourse of democratic legitimation thus mirrors their subtraction from legal protection: the arbitrary administrative power in the one is the reflection of arbitrary democratic legitimation in the other. It is tempting to regard the suspension of environmental laws authorized by the Real ID Act in 2006 as characteristic expression of sovereign power as the bringing out of force of the law. But it is first of all *democratic* sovereignty that is expressed here (since the laws are taken out of force by the force of *another* law). And what this assertion of a specifically democratic sovereignty involves is the creation of an ideological situation in which it is only *environmental* laws that require suspension: the migrants who will be those most affected by the construction of the wall have already been so thoroughly subtracted from the law that *there is no need to suspend the law concerning them.*

Part VI

I want to conclude by taking up again the spatial aspect of the transcendental 'aesthetic' of the act of sovereignty. As with its temporality, the transcendental spatiality of sovereignty is distinct from empirical spatiality but without being blankly negative. There are a number of aspects of this spatiality that deserve attention in this context, but the most relevant for thinking about Agamben's understanding of sovereignty on the border is a certain kind of dimensional twisting. There are various empirical manifestations of this twisting: the physical border between the US and Mexico is for instance extended into the country in a so-called 'depth barrier' extending 100 miles up so into the US within which any unauthorized migrants are subject to immediate deportation without any redress, just as if they had been discovered exactly at the physical border. Even further into the US are checkpoints on major highways that represent the only feasible exit points from the border, where, again, unauthorized migrants are subject to immediate deportation. (Brown 2010, p. 32) More radically, the spatial integration of unauthorized migrants into non-border communities that has taken place over the last decade means that the state's political outside has been fractally interiorized in increasingly small-scale local migrant communities interspersed throughout the whole territory of the US.

[16] See 'Mexican Congress votes to decriminalize illegal immigration,' *Arizona Daily Star*, Saturday, May 3rd 2011.

In his short essay on Arendt's essay on refugees, Agamben follows Arendt in proposing the migrant as 'the paradigm of a new historical consciousness' so that the 'refugee is perhaps the only imaginable figure of the people [as opposed to the nation state] in our day'. (Agamben 1995, p. 114) And he adverts in particular to a kind of dimensional twisting of complication of empirical space that is the effect of unauthorized migration: there is a kind of 'reciprocal extraterritoriality (or better aterritoriality)' that would 'deform' and dig 'holes in' the national territory. (1995, p. 118) In particular, Agamben uses the same images of Möbius strip or Leyden jar. These images are provoking because he uses exactly the same ones in *Homo Sacer* to characterize what comprises the *problem* of sovereignty (1998, p. 37). Indeed most of the theoretical apparatus of his political texts is oriented around this spatial metaphorization of the transcendental relation itself: it is when transcendental and empirical, fact and law etc. become mutually 'indistinct' that sovereignty is able to grip life, and to present itself as the unmediated synthesis of life and law, whose logical conclusion is the claim that the voice of the *Führer* is itself immediately law. So this fractalized space is at once what makes possible (by effecting their indistinction) the transcendental leak into the empirical constitutive of the state of exception *and* the structure of the experience of the unauthorized migrant as exposed to sovereign violence *and* the blueprint for a solution to the problem of sovereignty.

It is notoriously hard to read Agamben's positive program. But in *The Coming Community*, Agamben comments that '[e]vil . . . is the reduction of the taking-place of things to a fact like others' whereas the good (god) is 'the place that does not take place but is the taking-place of the entities.' (2007, p. 15) And this suggests that Agamben believes that the failure to respect ontological difference (i.e. the difference between the 'taking-place' of entities and 'facts' about entities) should be identified with evil. In the political texts, it is this Heideggerian account that motivates his hyperbolic view that the (concentration) camp is the result of the attempt to localize (i.e. to give ontic sense to) 'the unlocalizable,' i.e. the ontological (1998, p. 20). But here it really is hard to see where Agamben is going: the spatial structure of the camp is precisely *not* fractalized or twisted (like that of the border) but plain and Euclidian. So are we to have hope because of the transcendentally complicated spatiality of the border (which maps onto the complexity of transcendental relation itself, as one of ultimately spatial 'indistinction')? Ultimately, Agamben's solution to the problem remains itself *indistinct* from his posing of the problem.

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Chapter 5
The Gossip Circles of Geneva: Morals, Mores and Moralizing in Political Life

Anne O'Byrne

The best lack all conviction, while the worst
Are full of passionate intensity.
W.B. Yeats
The Second Coming

Can there be such thing as a robust political life without a substantial shared social life formed through some form of moralizing process? Borrowing Yeats' formulation, can we have the experience of passionate political intensity without the experience of a love that can generate that passion, a love that comes with particular demands? Can we acquire political conviction outside the context provided by a group and its distinctive social practices? What sort of politics can there be without an *ethos*? In the terms Simon Critchley uses in *Infinitely Demanding*, can there be direct democracy without the apple pie? In the terms of Rousseau's *Letter to d'Alembert*, can there be a republic without a set of intimately shared, constantly reinforced mores [*moeurs*]? In the terms of political ontology, can we grasp political life without acknowledging that we are not just ethical or moral but also *moralizing* beings?

Critchley's memorable answer is 'Yes, but. . ..' Yes, there needs to be a shared ethical framework but his hope is that it need not involve what we think of as moralizing; perhaps it can produce instead an 'infinitely demanding ethics of commitment and political resistance that can face and face down depoliticizing moralization' (Critchley 2007, p. 130).

This is an admirable thought but the concern persists that moralization might not be so easily dispensed with. Or, since Critchley would certainly admit that there is nothing especially easy about getting rid of it, we must ask whether it can be dispensed with in this way. This is worth worrying about for several reasons. First, as Chantal Mouffe points out, moralizing tends to take over the political space and eventually shut down the possibility of political struggle, the *agon* that is so valued in the tradition of political thinking. Second, moralizing often proceeds as though its demands issue either from a higher source (that is, as thought they are

A. O'Byrne (✉)
Stony Brook University, Stony Brook, NY, USA
e-mail: anne.obyrne@stonybrook.edu

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A. Welchman (ed.), *Politics of Religion/Religions of Politics*,
Sophia Studies in Cross-cultural Philosophy of Traditions and Cultures 8,
DOI 10.1007/978-94-017-9448-0_5

transcendental) or from the truth of who we are (that is, as though they are immanent). The one is no better than the other. In either case the demands arrive in the guise of inexorability and immutability. Third, any particular practice of moralizing, if it is to perform the function of social adhesion, also works as a practice of social control.

No-one has grasped this with greater enthusiasm than Rousseau, and nowhere does he lay out the task and the work of moralizing in more detail than in his *Letter to d'Alembert*. Critchley's turn to the relation of ethics to political life comes in response to what he diagnoses as the disappointment that has left us disinterested in politics and unmotivated to engage in political action. He has famously directed our attention to the ethics of commitment (mentioned above) and the Levinasian understanding of the infinite demand that comes with it, but he has also had us turn towards Rousseau's thought of civil religion as the sort of institution or set of practices that might inflame civic passion and make us full-throated, whole-hearted, active citizens. Yet what form can those shared ethical frameworks take, and what precisely is the object of political passion?

The city state of Geneva—Rousseau's home town and the subject of the *Letter to d'Alembert*—was founded on Calvinist principles, but the discussion of the explicitly religious elements of city life are less revealing than the account he offers of mores and their role in the life of the city. I will take this ostentatiously loving account of Rousseau's birthplace as the forum for working out whether the ethical framework that we use to make up the motivational deficit in political life can escape being an exercise in moralizing. While Critchley thinks of ethics as anarchic meta-politics, might it turn out to be—and to *have* to be—more like social Calvinism or Machiavellian republicanism?

What is meant here by moralizing? Mouffe's *On the Political* includes a polemic against the moralizing tendency she observes in political life in Europe and America after 9/11. Mouffe defines the political as 'the dimension of antagonism which [is] constitutive of human societies' and politics as 'the set of practices and institutions through which an order is created, organizing human coexistence in the context of conflictuality provided by the political' (Mouffe 2005, p. 9). When political life is moralized it means that its constitutive antagonism cannot find its expression and politics, instead of being the place where we engage in power struggles, perhaps between the poles of left and right, becomes the place where we talk in terms of right and wrong, good and evil. *They* and *we* become the titles of moral rather than political categories, which allows *us* to refuse to talk to *them*. Indeed, we find ourselves compelled to shun them. One example offered by Mouffe is the rise of a far-right party, the FPÖ, in Austria in the 1990s. The political establishment, which had run Austrian politics since the end of World War II, responded by declaring the party and its leader, Jörg Haider, moral pariahs. The stand they chose to take against its racist, anti-immigrant opinions was to refuse to engage them politically, refuse to admit them to the political sphere and instead respond in moral terms. This is how a political space is moralized.

Yet the term crops up another time in Critchley's *Infinitely Demanding*, in a passing reference to the intentional communities that were founded on idealism and built with such hope in the 1960s and 1970s. Many of these communes faltered and

disbanded in the 1980s and 1990s, and none managed to make their mode of living have an appreciable impact on the way we run political life.[1] Why did those communities, who had such an impact in other ways, have such little influence on politics? Were they too unrealistic? Too radical? Too *moralistic*? The emphasis in the use of the term is different here. Now moralizing refers to a sort of conviction, a mode of commitment to the intention on which your commune is founded that often comes with a distinct earnestness. (The charge of earnestness is not insignificant, given Critchley's argument, also in the political significance of comedy.) It also suggests that the conviction is based on a claim to truth, the sense of having a shared insight into what humans are and how they should live, with a concomitant apolitical or anti-political sense that we (who share this conviction) are right and those who do not are wrong.

A more colloquial use of the term 'moralizing' refers to the promotion of morals, the cultivation of morality. It conjures images of Victorian girls being encouraged to read improving texts, that is, moralizing tales, rather than allowing themselves to be led astray by romance novels. It brings to mind the very many children's stories that encourage sharing toys and appreciating diversity. It suggests social phenomena like the Promise Keepers of the 1990s in the USA, a movement that involved very large gatherings in football stadia where men would be reminded to stay married or, failing that, to make their child support payments.

Finally, moralizing is the only apt term for all those pseudo-political arguments that appeal to the moral fabric of society. For example, throughout the 1980s and 1990s in Ireland repeated attempts were made to change the Constitution in order to allow divorce and access to abortion. (The former was eventually made legal in 1996, the latter is still not legal.) Common claims were: 'if couples can divorce, the moral fabric of society will unravel' and 'if women can have abortions, the moral fabric will be torn.' They are the same responses that meet the demand for gay marriage in the U.S. today: 'If we allow marriage to mean something other than a contract between a man and a woman, the institution of marriage will be undermined and the moral fabric will be destroyed'.

Why is the *Letter to d'Alembert* an interesting place to think about the relation of moralizing, in these various senses, to political life? Rousseau, in all his political writings, holds on to his home town, the city-state of Geneva, as a favored (if untrustworthy) example and this letter becomes the occasion for Rousseau to work out in considerable detail his great insight in *The Social Contract* that state institutions and political life are not generated by a mere collection of individuals who emerge from the primeval forest, but rather by *a people*.

[1] This is not true of our way of life generally speaking, since there is a direct line of influence from the agrarian hippies of 30 years ago to the current interest in organic farming and discussions of the need for a new Green Revolution. Indeed, if this phenomenon does not easily fit our conception of what counts as political, we might ask if the problem lies with the limitations we place on our definition of political life. This problem owes a lot to Arendt's distinction between the public realm as the realm of action and the private as the realm of mere labor and consumption. See Hannah Arendt (1958) *The Human Condition*.

The letter is a response to the article written by M. d'Alembert of Paris—the contrast between sophisticated Parisians and simple Genevans is regularly emphasized in Rousseau's letter—about the city of Geneva for d'Alembert and Diderot's *Encyclopaedia*. In the article he praised the town effusively, admiring its natural setting, its orderliness and its hard-working citizens, but suggesting that it would be made complete by the addition of a theater. This angered Rousseau enormously. Signing himself J.J. Rousseau, citizen of Geneva (although he had not lived there for years) he rejects the very idea of setting up a theater because it would disrupt and corrupt the vibrant and wholesome social life of the Genevans. It would, he argues, destroy the *moeurs* or mores of the inhabitants.

This term is crucial. It is used in French in turns of phrase such as: '*contraire aux bonnes moeurs*,' contrary to accepted standards of behavior; '*femme de moeurs lé geres*,' a woman of easy virtue; '*un histoire des moeurs*' is a sex case in the courts or as reported by the media; '*la police des moeurs*' or simply '*Les Moeurs*' refers to the Vice Squad. It has a moral connotation but cannot be translated as *morals* because it has neither transcendental or immanentist foundations and makes no attempt at universality. *Moeurs* develop among and between people and at some point make of them *a* people. *Manners* is also an inadequate translation, since it suggests mere etiquette, but *moeurs* encompass *both* morals *and* manners and so have much in common with the Aristotelian notion of *ethos*. In that case, the English word *mores* serves well, suggesting a set of shared customs, practices and values, or morals, habits and manners that characterize—indeed, create—a social group.

Rousseau devotes the last part of the letter to an account of the means by which the mores of Geneva are cultivated among its population. There is little discussion of the private life of the family but much talk of the social institutions of the circles (for men) and societies (for women). The men's circles consist of 12 or 15 men who rent 'comfortable quarters' where they meet in the afternoons to gamble, chat, read, drink and smoke. They sometimes take walks together. The women, meanwhile, gather in societies which meet in people's houses. Perhaps they sew or engage in appropriately domestic activities; most importantly, though, they gossip. This is not to be regarded as a disadvantage. Rather, Rousseau writes, 'How many public scandals are prevented for fear of these severe observers? They almost perform the function of censors in our city' (*Letter to d'Alembert*, p. 106). They have a function that runs deeper than censorship, however. They also educate. The young women, as they come of age and begin to join their elders in the societies, are left in no doubt about the disapproval they will suffer if their conduct draws the attention of the gossip circles; the girls internalize the mores they see enforced by their aunties and, as a result, the womenfolk of Geneva are as modest and chaste as the actresses who come to perform at a town theater would be flagrant and loose. The virtuous Genevan woman is only who she is, and her every move is open to observation by other women; in contrast, the actress is a dissembler by trade *and* her performances are offered for observation by men and women alike.

After all, according to Rousseau, theater represents a great threat to a republic in part because it allows men and women to socialize. If a theater were built, the

women would forsake their societies, the men their circles, and both would choose to spend their free time together watching plays. This is a problem in an indirect and also a direct way. First, it begins the unravelling of the social fabric that relied on the good behavior of women. When women and men mix there will be the temptation for 'little suppers' after the play, and, with the social power of the gossips on the wane, it is not clear how the young women will be kept virtuous. Second, virile republican men of sound opinion will be transformed into weak fops. This degeneration begins when they realize how much they enjoy being in the company of women and how much pleasure is to be had from the play of desire. They will give up their circles, give up smoking, playing cards and engaging in men's talk as they come to prefer attending to women, who in turn will soon begin to grasp what power they have. Where the men could devote themselves to serious matters in the circles, they will be forced—happily, sheepishly—into flirtations and jokes in the feminized atmosphere of the salon. Rather than walking in the hills with his men friends, the Genevan male will find himself pacing about in an over-decorated interior, being managed—played—by a clever coquette. At the club-house the men could devote themselves to 'grave and serious discourse without fear of ridicule. They [could] dare to speak of country and virtue without passing for windbags; they [could] even dare to be themselves without being enslaved to the maxims of a magpie' (*Letter to d'Alembert*, p. 105). In the salon, by contrast, they will have to lower their ideas to the range of women, and reason will be masked in gallantry. They will find themselves *playing* roles rather than *being* themselves.

Rousseau pauses more than once to consider the objection that the content of the dramas offered in the Genevan theater could redeem it. Would the great tragedies not ennoble the people? Not in the least, he replies. Those tragedies would be presented in the most refined theatrical style, which can only have an alienating effect. After all, we would not dream of copying the virtues of the ancient heroes anymore than we would consider dressing up in Roman clothes (*Letter to d'Alembert*, p. 25). In that case, could the plays not be performed in a more accessible style? Realism? Naturalism? Could we not take them as an example then? Rousseau rejects this too, even more vehemently. This would end up reducing virtue to a caricature and, 'afraid of being ridiculous, men [would] no longer [be] afraid of being vicious' (*Letter to d'Alembert*, p. 26).

Thus, in a single gesture, Rousseau dismisses both tragedy *and* comedy. Tragedy will at its best fail to move us and, at its worst, will turn itself into comedy and drive us to vice. The tragic hero following her desire (the very figure Lacan offers as the model for ethical life) is either too tragic or too ridiculous to make an impression on simple, virtuous Genevans.

Regarding comedy proper, Rousseau has nothing good to say. 'It is all bad and pernicious; every aspect strikes home with the audience. And since the very pleasure of the comic is founded on a vice of the human heart, it is a consequence of this principle that the more the comedy is amusing, and perfect, the more its effect is disastrous for mores' (*Letter to d'Alembert*, p. 34). After all, says Rousseau in the course of a detailed reading of Moliére's *Misanthrope*, the sight that gets most laughs in the theater is a virtuous man being made to look ridiculous. Comedy

does not offer an ethical model; it only shows us moralizing in action and pokes fun at it. 'The audience would certainly not want to be like him, because so much righteousness is very uncomfortable; but not one of them would find it disagreeable to have to do with someone who resembled him' (*Letter to d'Alembert*, p. 38). That is to say, we want to avoid at all costs being the objects of ridicule, but we are not averse to having to do with ridiculously virtuous people. He returns to the point a moment later: 'in things that dishonor, no-one laughs with good grace at his own expense' (*Letter to d'Alembert*, p. 42). Thus, speaking as a Genevan, comedy 'ought not to be dreamed of for us' since it would only cause factions and 'frightful disorders among us' (*Letter to d'Alembert*, p. 121).

All of this suggests that the Genevans had little time for the sort of self-mocking ridicule that Critchley describes; they might not have been open to the comic experience in which the ego, faced with the infinite demand of ethics, finds itself ridiculous. That is to say, just as they are, on Rousseau's description, unimpressed by the thought of the human condition as heroic, they also resist the experience in which we are reminded of how modest and limited our condition is (*Letter to d'Alembert*, p. 77ff).

Yet, were these citizens of Geneva so very dour? More to the point, must a citizen of a Rousseauian republic be so self-assured? Can we reasonably think of him as understanding the human condition unironically in terms of high modern subjectivity: self-presence, wholeness, autonomy? While much of Rousseau's political philosophy *seems* built on such a subject—see the distinction between the general will and the will of all in *The Social Contract*—we cannot take this subject for granted. One clue lies in the very fear he has of theater. 'Which of us is sure enough of himself to bear the performance of such a comedy [Regnard's *Le Légataire Universel*] without halfway taking part in the deeds which are played in it?' (*Letter to d'Alembert*, p. 46).

Another clue lies in the great deal of attention he devotes to romance, the one form of drama that he knows will move us all, even the most earnest Genevan. On the one hand, this is a real problem because looking at romances played out on stage by charming young actors will only serve to exacerbate all the problems that come from women and men spending time together. On the other hand, it does promise to promote love, to stir up some of that passionate intensity Yeats refers to, to move and motivate us. Rousseau considers the solution that only decent and legitimate love would be portrayed on stage, inspiring only appropriate forms of passion in the audience, but quickly rejects it. First, no one would go to see plays about respectability and good behavior; they would not be entertaining enough. Second, even when a decent love is acted out on stage, the audience is liable to be impressed by the love and neglect the requirement of decency. He writes: '[t]he harm for which the theater is reproached is not precisely that of inspiring criminal passions but of disposing the soul to feelings which are too tender and which are later satisfied at the expense of virtue' (*Letter to d'Alembert*, p. 51).

If tragedies show us the human condition as heroic, and comedies present it by contrast as modest and limited (to borrow Critchley's terms), what model of the human condition emerges in romances? According to Rousseau, the human

condition turns out to be a loving condition. We are beings who are capable of loving humanity and our country but, most of all, loving one another. We are both passionate and vulnerable. As a result, our self-assurance is always on the point of being undermined; our sense of who we are is always in danger of being displaced; we are always susceptible to the anxiety that the ones we particularly love will go away. In the midst of this precariousness, love is what moves and motivates us and it is what will, in the right circumstances, make us good republicans.

Yet, are plays about love a good or bad thing? Rousseau's answer is complex:

> The most vicious of men is he who isolates himself the most, who most concentrates his heart in himself; the best is he who shares his affections equally with all his kind. It is much better to love a mistress than to love oneself alone in all the world. But whoever tenderly loves his parents, his friends, his country and humankind, degrades himself by a dissolute attachment which soon does damage to all the others and is without fail preferred to them. (*Letter to d'Alembert*, p. 117)

This passage is puzzling in several ways. Rousseau maintains a qualitative continuity between the love of oneself, love for a lover and the love one might have for all humankind. Yet, as Kant acknowledges, love cannot be commanded, and we cannot expect to be in love with all humans. This is why he insisted that love of humankind (for example, Christian love for all) is better described as respect. Rousseau does not make this distinction, which suggests a proto-Freudian grasp of the work of *eros*: the erotic drive becomes sublimated into ties that bind us to family, social group and society at large. If political motivation is our aim, love of country once achieved must be defended against whatever would draw our affection away. After all, as Freud constantly reminds us, the erotic drive towards the sex object forever threatens to conquer all.

Nevertheless, the cool rationality of Kantian respect would not have appealed to Rousseau, and it certainly has too little appeal for the inhabitants of liberal democracies, and fails to motivate the vast majority of us to substantial political action. This is one of liberalism's deepest challenges. In contrast, Rousseau celebrates the specifically social dimension of his Genevan republic and knows that there would be no republic without good, loving republicans. The crucial question is what will be needed in order to produce in them all the masculine qualities that Machiavelli identified as republican *virtù*. The men of Geneva must be capable of love but the love of their country must come before all. These citizens must be able to be *in* love, they must be vulnerable to love, but must also be protected precisely from that part of themselves, and also from the women who would use their very vulnerability against them. Women must therefore be constrained and remain largely withdrawn from public life. Women are naturally dissemblers, and thus naturally hostile to a republic where all must be transparent to all.

Rousseau celebrates this phenomenon in his account of the charming, sometimes spontaneous festivals that occupied the place of drama in his Geneva. At the end of the *Letter to D'Alembert* he describes one such moment in considerable detail. The passage is worth quoting at length:

> I remember having been struck in my childhood by a rather simple entertainment, the impression of which has nevertheless always stayed with me in spite of time and variety of experience. The regiment of Saint-Gervais had done its exercises, and, according to the custom, they had supped by companies; most of those who formed them gathered after supper in the St. Gervais square and started dancing all together, officers and soldiers, around the fountain, to the basin of which the drummers, the fifers and the torch bearers had mounted. A dance of men cheered by a long meal, would seem to present nothing very interesting to see; however the harmony of five or six hundred men in uniform, holding one another by the hand and forming a long ribbon which wound around, serpent-like, in cadence and without confusion, with countless turns and returns, countless sorts of figured evolutions, the excellence of the tunes which animated them, the sound of the drums, the glare of the torches, a certain military pomp in the midst of pleasure, all this created a very lively sensation that could not be experienced coldly. It was late; the women were in bed; all of them got up. Soon the windows were full of female spectators who gave a new zeal to the actors; they could not long confine themselves to their windows and they came down; the wives came to husbands, the servants brought wine; even the children, awakened by the noise, ran half-clothed amidst their fathers and mothers. The dance was suspended; now there were only embraces, laughs, healths and caresses. There resulted from all this a general emotion that I could not describe but which, in universal gaiety, is quite naturally felt in the midst of all that is dear to us. My father, embracing me, was seized with trembling which I think I still feel and share. 'Jean-Jacques,' he said to me, 'love your country. Do you see these good Genevans? They are all friends, they are all brothers; joy and concord reign in their midst. You are a Genevan; one day you will see other peoples; but even if you should travel as much as your father, you will not find their likes'. (*Letter to d'Alembert*, p. 135.

It is a beautiful moment, and anarchic after its fashion. No one could possibly have planned it. Social pleasure cannot be scheduled and prescribed as a duty, and the most expertly choreographed political spectacles cannot guarantee these lively sensations and surges of shared emotion. Yet the spontaneous festival can happen only in the place where tightly controlled social spheres abut, and at a time when they can safely open onto one another. The men have spent their day engaged in drills and exercises and pretend war, training in the service of their community's security. Now, in their happy exhaustion, the constraints of rank can slacken and officers and soldiers can permit themselves to grasp one another by the hand and dance. There is no danger in it, only friendship and brotherhood. The imagined enemies of the day are vanquished; the women are safe in bed. The dance is danced for its own sake; the dancers dance for themselves and for one another.

Then the women get up. In another place they might shout to their drunken husbands to come home. In a less regimented social existence, one or two of them might go down to the square while others went back to bed. Yet if the spheres of men and women are to open to one another, it must happen on the men's terms. Genevan men will not be whipped into line by scolding wives or let their brotherly love be interrupted by the sort of women who wander the square unsupervised after bedtime. The gossip circles have done their work; whatever one woman does, all will do in a spirit that could be solidarity but is indistinguishable from surveillance. They all get up and look, and those windows full of women generate an irresistible surge of masculine energy in the dancers. The women all come down, the children running after them, and they come out into the public square as wives and mothers

and managers of household life. There are caresses and embraces but, even though the men have shown themselves capable of being moved and susceptible to love, these are domesticated women who pose no erotic threat to fraternal passion. True, the communal dance breaks off with their arrival, but wives are needed if there is to be a new generation, and this is the moment for Jean-Jacques's father to articulate all his patriotic feeling to his son.

Rousseau recounts this as a memory of spontaneous communal emotion, and his father's trembling still resonates through him. But we must beware of celebrating only this holiday face of social bonding. When we hear that real participatory democracy can only happen in small, civil states, we think of their small size as necessary for facilitating the practices of political participation. My argument has been that small size also facilitates the practices of participatory social control and that these practices are not incidental to the project. If, as Rousseau claims, political life is established by a people, a people is formed by a shared social life and set of social mores. This will surely involve festivals, where we all appear to one another as members of the community. Yet, more important by far is the daily, hour by hour appearance we make before our fellows, offering all our deeds, words, movements, all we are to the surveillance of the town gossips. This is social Calvinism. It is the unrelenting form that moralizing inevitably takes and, for Rousseau, in his Geneva, there is no political life without it.

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Chapter 6
Nihilists, Heroes, Samaritans and I

The Question of Moral Motivation in Secular Politics

Jill Stauffer

Introduction

What motivates a person to act for the common good in a way that transcends or even contravenes private interest? Widespread agreement seems to be emerging across diverse theoretical concerns that there is a motivation deficit at the heart of secular liberal individualism.[1] The neutrality of secular public reason seems to produce, on the one hand, subjects whose focus is socialized self-interest, which amounts to a collection of persons who lack a sense of justice beyond institutional legality and a community or nation's self-interest; or, on the other hand, subjects whose lives are lived in constant awareness that what passes as neutral isn't neutral, but rather brackets or mutes some ways of life while encouraging others. This paper takes up the question of what motivates persons to act on behalf of the good, fraught as such a question is in an age when we cannot assume a shared conception of the good. How are we to undergo and then take up the demands of ethics while also cultivating pluralism? Because any answer to this question will have to negotiate the problem of agreement amongst disagreement, my focus in this paper will be on two thinkers whose disagreements on first glance may seem to dwarf their shared concerns. Charles Taylor and Simon Critchley have undertaken serious engagement with the motivation problem within secularism in recent works. Both of their critiques help us imagine how we might think secularism anew such that it might become more compatible with pluralism.

[1] As a start, see Wendy Brown *Regulating Aversion* (2008); Joan Scott, *Politics of the Veil* (2010); Talal Asad, *Formations of the Secular* (2003); José Casanova, *Public Religions in the Modern World* (1994); Judith Butler, *Precarious Life* (2004); William E. Connolly, *Why I Am Not a Secularist* (2000). This list is far from exhaustive.

J. Stauffer (✉)
Haverford College, Haverford, PA, USA
e-mail: jstauffe@haverford.edu

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A. Welchman (ed.), *Politics of Religion/Religions of Politics*,
Sophia Studies in Cross-cultural Philosophy of Traditions and Cultures 8,
DOI 10.1007/978-94-017-9448-0_6

Taylor argues that the Christian worldview leaves its believers open to transcendence and thus more likely to embrace a vertical dimension of thinking that opens up new possibilities, for life and justice—as well as the motivation to pursue them. Critchley, on the other hand, makes an atheist argument about political subjectivity—he wants to introduce a qualification into Kantian autonomy at the level of ethical experience, arguing that a self is formed in response to an ethical demand placed upon it by others. The demand isn't chosen, but the manner of response can be—thus the self is shaped both by passive reception and active approval of the demands of others. It might seem, then, that Critchley argues for a motivation inherent in subject formation while Taylor finds it in an outside source. However, both Critchley and Taylor argue that subjectivity is heteronomous—formed by outside sources—rather than strictly autonomous (Critchley will say as much; Taylor will use a different terminology). Either way, for these philosophies, my self is not only my own. For this reason, for both philosophers, philosophy and politics are opened up to new sources of motivation and community.

However, there are real limits to the agreement we might eke from their accounts of moral motivation. Taylor might call Critchley a heroic nihilist (though Critchley's aim is to offer an antidote to modernity's nihilist bent) and Critchley might accuse Taylor of adhering to a theory of tragic sublimation (though Taylor would likely deny that his form of authenticity is tragic in structure). In what follows I'll show what these two thinkers share thematically and where they break from each other, and then I'll try to draw some conclusions from the productive collision of their ideas, with the aim to theorize why motivation to act is a problem for secular liberalism, and how we might begin to think—and act—differently.

The Vertical Dimension

Charles Taylor argues in *A Secular Age* (2008) that a secular era is characterized not by a definition of public space free from religion, or by a retreat from belief in god, but by its conditions of belief: in a secular age, people know that belief is one possibility amongst many, and that people are free to change their minds about their faith or lack thereof at any moment.

Taylor contends that we *ought* to view secularity as a frame from within which some people—secular thinkers—view the world. But secularity more often, according to Taylor, gets taken as a *fact* of how the world is. That is a problem when it does not allow us to see secular liberalism as a moral choice made about how to order the world.[2] For Taylor, this invisibility of secularist bias to itself

[2] This is similar to Alisdair MacIntyre's (2007) argument—in *After Virtue* and *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?*—that, though Enlightenment thinkers and their descendents tend to think that they are leaving tradition behind and pursuing a rational ordering of the moral and political world,

leaves us with two motivation problems: (1) if secularism is fact rather than value, no one has to work to sustain it, and (2) at the heart of secular liberal public space is a form of disembodied rationality incapable of motivating people to act for a common good that transcends private interests.

There is nothing really new in that claim. Taylor acknowledges a great deal of work that precedes his, but he also fails to recognize a mass of contemporary work in political theory and continental philosophy that sheds light on the exclusionary, non-neutral premises and procedures of secular liberalism.[3] That blindness on his part comes, I think, from his tendency to place any thinker whom he would call 'postmodern' in a file that he might label Derrida-Foucault-Camus or 'the heroic nihilists.' I'll return later to what he has to say about the contents of that file.

Taylor gives the name 'disengaged buffered self' to the autonomous self of secular liberalism, the one famously capable of choosing its commitments and prey to nothing beyond the conditions to which it might consent. That self is set in opposition to a self who could, in Taylor's terminology, stand in 'open space,' feel 'cross-pressured' between knowledge and belief, and understand the possibilities of transcendence, of making a 'vertical leap' in thought rather than staying on a horizontal plane. Such a self feels a pull in multiple directions, toward rationality and spirituality, and that cross-pressure opens up a self's thinking to possibilities that the secular and radically autonomous liberal individual self (who resides in a horizontal plane or 'immanent frame' devoid of transcendence) would miss.

A concrete example might help here. As Taylor points out, when South Africa sought to become an inclusive democracy, it could have held legal trials and found all participants in the oppressive apartheid regime guilty, sentencing them to prison terms. But that was not feasible—not only because it would have prolonged violent struggle if that had been the known intent of the proposed new form of rule. South Africa settled on a Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) rather than traditional legal trials because the work of becoming a nation required a focus on future and forgiveness rather than past and vengeance. It was far from unanimous that the TRC was the way to go, and it is still not clear that South Africa has achieved forgiveness. But the TRC is one example of what Taylor would name a 'vertical dimension' in politics, where people rise to another level, bringing participants out of a zero-sum situation to a plane where a win-win is conceivable.[4]

The vertical dimension is another name for transcendence. Indeed, Taylor's main argument is about transcendence, because he thinks that those who live a life open to it are more likely to embrace the vertical dimension of thought and thus resist the fetishization of rules that can happen on a horizontal plane. He thinks secularism gives us a flattened out world, an 'immanent frame,' from which no

in fact they are simply participating in a different and relatively new tradition, one that furthermore bears the *hubris* of taking itself as neutral and universal.

[3] See footnote 1 for a partial listing.

[4] This strategy, of changing the terms of an otherwise immovable argument, has been part of the practice of Rhetoric since its dawning as a practice; Taylor names it 'the vertical dimension' and attaches it to a Christian form of transcendence.

vertical leap to a higher dimension of thought is likely (though he does admit that the 'immanent frame' doesn't rule out transcendence altogether). The Christian faith, for Taylor, is important here, because it produces subjects more likely to believe in transcendence and thus more likely to feel cross-pressured between knowledge and belief, and thus is more likely to give politics and life a vertical dimension. But he qualifies that position in two important ways: (1) it is entirely clear to him that the bulk of Christian practice tends toward rule fetishization, adherence to unbending set rules, and thus to the refusal of a vertical dimension, and (2) there is also a history of atheist commitment to justice beyond strict rules that he cannot dismiss, though he worries about its effects. I'll say more about both of these qualifications.

About Christian practice, he writes:

> Take the best code possible in today's circumstances, or what passes for such. The question always arises: could one, by transcending/amending/re-interpreting the code, move us all vertically? Christ is constantly doing that in the Gospel. That's why there is something extremely troubling about the tendency of some Christian churches today to identify themselves so totally with certain codes (especially sexual norms), and institutions (liberal society). (2008, p. 707)

Some Christian practices don't strike Taylor as very Christian, and that is, of course, a well traveled lament internal to Christianity. So it isn't that Taylor is saying that Christians have it all figured out. But he does argue that, because there is a sensitivity to a vertical dimension built into the Christian tradition, Christianity opens up a way of addressing the motivation to act on behalf of the good missing from modern moral philosophy.

Are Good Acts Possible?

But what, then, about the atheist commitment to justice?[5] Before we pursue Taylor's position farther, let's consider briefly how Critchley's thesis reads alongside Taylor's. For Critchley the basic question of ethics is: 'How does a self bind

[5] Or, really, non-Christian but still faith-based commitment to justice? Wendy Brown does a good job taking Taylor to task for his Eurocentrism. See 'Idealism, materialism, secularism?' on the blog *The Immanent Frame*: http://www.ssrc.org/blogs/immanent_frame/2–7/10/22/idealism-materialism-secularism/. However, it is worth noting that José Casanova faults Talal Asad for taking secularism as hegemonic, because that 'fails to recognize the extent to which the formation of the secular is linked with the internal transformation of European Christianity, particularly through the Protestant Reformation' (Casanova 2006, p. 21). Asad argues that 'the genealogy of secularism has to be traced through the concept of the secular—in part to the Renaissance doctrine of humanism, in part to the Enlightenment concept of nature, and in part to Hegel's philosophy of history' (Asad 2003, p. 192). And of course those influences are weighty. Casanova's point is that if we emphasize only the external pressures on Christianity, be they secular, Western or non-Western, we miss an important story about the way in which Christianity—and religious traditions in general—undergoes internal changes. Thus, while Brown's concern about the insularity of

itself to whatever it determines as its good?' (2007, p. 8) Both Critchley and Taylor are focused on ethical experience, and in particular what motivates human beings to act morally, or what leads human beings to commit themselves to forming and sustaining a meaningful world. Critchley's recent work, *Infinitely Demanding*, begins, as did an earlier book of his, *Very Little… Almost Nothing* (1997), with the assertion that philosophy begins not in the experience of wonder, but in disappointment. Something is desired but has not been fulfilled. One common response to such disappointment is nihilism. Critchley argues that disappointment may create a passive nihilist, someone who looks at the world from a distance and finds it to be without meaning. Or one may become an active nihilist, working to destroy the world in order to bring a new one into being. Either way, the nihilist has declared the current world meaningless, not worthy of the effort humans would undertake to maintain it. Critchley's goal is to balance the nihilist drift of contemporary life with a motivating conception of ethics, one that responds to 'a lack at the heart of democratic life that is intimately bound up with the felt inadequacy of official secular conceptions of morality' (2007, p. 8). I'll develop this point of Critchley's further in section "Are Good Acts Possible?".

We might say that Taylor agrees with Critchley that there is a 'lack at the heart of democratic life' that opens up a possible slide into nihilism, and that nihilism is bequeathed to us by disappointment. Taylor argues that contemporary philanthropy and solidarity, whether humanist or religious, are Janus-faced: 'On one side, in the abstract, one is inspired to act. But on the other, faced with the immense disappointments of actual human performance, with the myriad ways in which real, concrete human beings fall short of, ignore, parody and betray this magnificent potential, one cannot but experience a growing sense of anger and futility' (Taylor 2008, p. 697). That anger and futility, Taylor tells us, sometimes leads 'us' to develop a picture of the world where all evil is located outside of 'us,' authorizing use of violence against those who are not 'us' (p. 698). Thus we are pushed out of a wider solidarity and into hypocrisy by disappointment and a mistaken sense of superiority.

Taylor thinks that 'the force of modern atheism lies more in its ethical stance than its epistemological considerations:' (Taylor 2008, p. 702) put otherwise, even in a meaningless world, an atheist can choose philanthropy, and that is ethically admirable. Such a choice amounts, for Taylor, to absolute heroism. Why? Because the atheist has no motivation, having given up on transcendence and found the world meaningless. (The implicit definition here would of course raise protest from most atheists.) But heroism, while admirable, is not a solution to the problem of nihilism for Taylor, at least in part because 'the heroism of gratuitous giving has no place for reciprocity' (p. 702). He means that heroic gratuity can help in particular circumstances but is not a solution to a systemic problem. Not everyone can be a hero, and an exceptional practice cannot provide the reliability required of a system.

Taylor's narrative of secularism does point to important questions about the realities of power in a world where secularism is hegemonic, we should be mindful of the ways in which traditions do shift over time for reasons internal and external.

So how does Taylor think we should get at the motivational deficit at the heart of what Critchley calls secular democratic liberalism and Taylor names 'a secular age'?

Taylor considers the Christian idea of agape,[6] the one hand, and Camus' affirmation of human happiness in the face of absurdity, on the other, as two ways of sustaining 'philanthropic action, such as humanitarian action or a defense of human rights' (Taylor 2008, p. 701). That is one definition of an overlapping consensus—different people, atheists and Christians, reach a similar conclusion from different starting points. A too-quick glance at Critchley's work might lead us to place him on the side of Camus. However it is important to note that, though Critchley would accept being teamed with Camus, it would be on terms starkly different from those offered by Taylor. For Taylor, Camus embraces what Taylor calls a heroism that continues to live in the face of the worthlessness of life. The Camus-type of hero indulges in nonreciprocal gratuitous action, and 'touches the outermost limits of what we can attain to when moved by a sense of our own dignity' (p. 702). But Taylor doubts whether that is what human life is about, really, and asserts that Christian faith offers a different view.

As an analogy of what he means, or perhaps a parable, Taylor describes how a parent, in raising a child, is not just performing a service, gratuitous or not. There is in the parent–child relationship (one hopes) a bond of love, 'where each is a gift to the other... and where the line between giving and receiving is blurred. We are quite outside the range of 'altruistic' unilateralism' (Taylor 2008, p. 702). Taylor then asks: 'Could it be that, in a very different way, something analogous lies behind the sense of solidarity between equals that pushes us to help people, even on the other side of the globe?' (p. 702) Taylor calls the push we feel to help others a 'response to the image of God in others' but fears that 'one might not be able to make sense of this notion of our being given to each other' (p. 703). He continues:

> I think this can be real for us, but only to the extent that we open ourselves to God, which means in fact, overstepping the limits set in theory by exclusive humanisms. If one does believe that, then one has something very important to say to modern times, something that addresses the fragility of what all of us, believer and unbeliever alike, most value in these times. (p. 703)

Taylor sees, then, that contemporary ethical positions are fragile, in part because of the pluralistic cast of the immanent frame—we all know there are other ways to order the world; thus, if we are looking for a universal truth, we might despair at the thought that there isn't one. Taylor seems to posit the possibility of his proposed ethic over and against what he calls 'post-modern' thought—he writes that if we aren't open to God, then we are left with the 'awe-inspiring, Stoic courage of a Camus or a Derrida' as our highest aspiration (p. 703).

It seems clear that Taylor experiences the Camus-Derrida option as one kind of loss imposed on the world by a secular age. In fact he calls it a victory of the forces

[6] Definition of *agape*, *per* Taylor: 'the love which God has for us, and which we can partake of through his power' (20).

of darkness (Taylor 2008, p. 376). It isn't that he finds such aspirations unworthy, but that, to his way of thinking, valuing them over openness to God is achieved 'at the expense of turning oneself, and possibly many others, away from the path towards a much more powerful and effective healing action in history' (p. 703). (This makes it clear that for Taylor atheism = nihilism.)

For Taylor, it seems, a good act is motivated by encountering the image of God in others. Such an encounter presumes a form of Christian universalism. A secular/pluralist world moves counter to such universalism. Thus, such encounters are rare. And that is how, for Taylor, secular liberalism is beset by a motivational deficit.

The Self and the Good

Critchley, however, gives us an avowed atheism that expressly combats nihilism and thus may escape the shortage of motivation that Taylor fears atheism tends to create. Critchley contends that 'the self is something that shapes itself through its relation to whatever it determines as its good' (2007, p. 20). That could be Christ, Torah, the moral law, community, humanity, and so on. Ethics comes to pass when subjects approve demands placed upon them; in order to approve a demand one has to experience it as a demand and experience its approval as given by a self. Thus, ethical experience 'presupposes the existence of an experiencing subject.' That is a fairly straightforward deductive claim. Critchley then attaches it to a more controversial claim that the demand of the good (placed upon us by others) *founds* the self, 'or, better, that the demand of the good is the fundamental principle of the subject's articulation' (p. 20).

Critchley's subject is derived from the work of Emmanuel Levinas, who bequeaths to us a subject for whom passive subjection to others is prior to freedom.[7] For Levinas, the self is formed in an affective response to others that saddles it with a responsibility that far exceeds its capacity to shoulder it, long before choice becomes possible.[8] For Critchley, that thing which we call the self is formed in response to or approval of certain core values and commitments—the good. This is true because we are experiencing, sensing subjects, undergoing the presence of others to us in the world prior to any capacity we develop to order the world as individuals.

A self formed by a chosen commitment to the Good might sound Kantian; however, for Critchley 'ethical experience turns around the facticity of a demand that does not correspond to the subject's autonomy, but which rather places that

[7] This is the theme of much of Levinas' work throughout his career, explored most prominently in his late work Otherwise than Being (1998).

[8] As Levinas would put it: 'Has not the Good chosen the subject with an election recognizable in the responsibility of being hostage, to which the subject is destined, which he [sic] cannot evade without denying himself, and by virtue of which he is unique?' (Levinas 122). The subject's individuality is the outcome of its subjection rather than a liberation from it.

autonomy in question. Ethical experience is heteronomous'—this is not the Kantian subject. For Critchley and Levinas, as an ethical subject I respond to a demand that comes from an other, and thus 'my autonomy is called into question by the fact of the other's demand' (2007, p. 56). For philosophies of autonomy, freedom is the highest value. But Levinas will have shown us that autonomy is a later value built on an anarchic foundation of human responsiveness. Critchley's aim, then, is to 'introduce a significant qualification into the concept of autonomy at the level of ethical experience' (p. 127). Subjects are formed by the demands of others, demands that affect subjects prior to choice, but that subjects (may) approve. Democratic politics is at least in part based on such approval. It's not that you get to consent to the conditions of the world, but that you recognize and then accept the demands placed on you by those conditions. Taylor argues that the conditions of belief in a secular age are that belief is one possibility amongst many; Critchley shows that conditions of belief in a secular age present us with a freedom that arises out of a necessity: we are of necessity affected by others, but we are also free to accept or refuse the demands that have been placed on us.

The acceptance or approval of these ethical demands is part of what defines an autonomous subject, but the subject who approves is formed by an experience of ethics as unchosen and heteronomous rather than as the outcome of rational will. Compare Hannah Arendt's argument that 'the moral code... rests on experiences which nobody could ever have with himself, which, on the contrary, are entirely based on the presence of others' (1956, p. 238). We approve such a code, when we approve it, for reasons (and beyond-reasons) that exceed what we could ascribe to human autonomy. We are given to each other even when we can't agree about a God, or about how one would open oneself to a God. Thus we might find in ourselves a motivation arising from experiences that *are not rare*.

Tragedy and Comedy

Remember that Taylor found in our response to others a response to the image of God in others, but feared that 'one might not be able to make sense of our being given to each other' (2008, p. 703) unless we are open to God. It is important to note that thinkers (such as Critchley) who Taylor would classify as post-modern have been making a lot of this notion of being given to each other without turning explicitly to God. Judith Butler, in *Precarious Life*, writes:

> Many people think grief is privatizing, that it returns us to a solitary situation and is, in that sense, depoliticizing. But I think it furnishes a sense of political community of a complex order, and it does this first of all by bringing to the fore the relational ties that have implications for theorizing fundamental dependency and ethical responsibility. If my fate is not originally or finally separable from yours, then the 'we' is traversed by a relationality that we cannot easily argue against; or, rather, we can argue against it, but we would be denying something fundamental about the social conditions of our very formation. (Butler 2004, pp. 22–23)

This is a sense of our being given to each other that does not rely only on responding to the image of God in others. It is heteronomous ethical experience—the laws we give to ourselves come from others, and that is not even a paradox once we understand how we are formed as subjects. We are dispossessed not only by our chosen relations, but simply by virtue of being in the world. Such a position has a political register. For instance, per Butler:

> If I am struggling for autonomy, do I not need to be struggling for something else as well, a conception of myself as invariably in community, impressed upon by others, impinging upon them as well, and in ways that are not fully in my control? (2004, p. 27)

What would autonomy mean in a world without others? The points made by Critchley and Butler gesture toward what Arendt called 'the existence of a freedom which was given under the condition of non-sovereignty' (1956, p. 244).

Taylor thinks motivation comes from the vertical dimension of thought, opened up by transcendence, which is in turn made possible by the sensed context of a subject living in a world that isn't only an immanent frame. Such a subject feels cross-pressured between knowledge and belief and thus catches sight of something beyond immanence. Is Critchley's account open to transcendence? And if not, can he still theorize the subject's motivation?

To answer this question Critchley focuses on aesthetics. He notes that a turn to aesthetics often embraces a tragic paradigm in order to reconcile freedom with causal determinism, or to redeem human life in the face of the inescapable fact of human finitude. But the move towards tragedy strikes him as wrong, because it leads to a philosophy of authenticity.[9] In tragedy, the subject is thought to attain authenticity by facing resolutely her own finitude. But Critchley thinks that's just too heroic to be tenable for an ethic (and here he seems to agree with Taylor that a heroic ethic can be admirable in a particular instance but does not give us a structure applicable to a wider or more systematic demand—the existence of heroes does not solve the problem of motivation for the rest of us.). Instead, Critchley argues for 'a notion of originary inauthenticity at the core of subjective experience which opens in relation to the facticity of an ethical demand that I cannot fully comprehend and to which I am not adequate' (2007, p. 78). A tragic hero (such as Antigone) who stays committed to her desire, conforming her actions to it even in the face of a world in which she will not win, attains authenticity by coming to understand finitude. This might seem congenial to Critchley's position, inasmuch as he argues that an ethical subject is rooted in the admission that the demands of ethics exceed the capacity of any individual to meet them—the demand exceeds my capacity, but I shoulder it anyway (and that is a straightforward Levinasian claim). However, for Critchley (and for Levinas, from whom he derives much of this argument), the excess of demand over capacity doesn't make of the subject a tragic hero who clings to an autonomous singular truth in spite of every exterior demand. Nor does it mean that the ethical subject turns to nihilism and despairs of all action. Rather, the very

[9] Here, perhaps, we find the real source of his divergence from Taylor—it isn't atheism as much as a Critchleyan commitment to *inauthenticity*.

fact of the subject's experience of being split (undergoing a heteronomous demand and thus not fully autonomous) implants ethics as response to others within subjectivity—the self is *formed* in response to a demand that comes from an Other, not just once but continuously.

That is why Critchley chooses comic acknowledgement over tragic affirmation. What he theorizes isn't radical passivity, but nor is it unproblematized self-sufficient autonomy. Comic acknowledgement accepts finitude, and recognizes that the self is not capable of freely assuming the ethical demand made by the other. Ethics' 'radically one-sided unfulfillability sunders my ethical subjectivity in a manner that entails the endless inadequacy of my action' (2007, p. 78). I act, but I also acknowledge the inadequacy of my action. I embrace my inauthenticity. For that, humor is of service:

> Humour is a more minimal, less heroic form of sublimation that allows the subject to bear the excessive, indeed hyperbolic, burden of the ethical demand without that demand turning into obsessive self-hatred and cruelty. (2007, p. 79)

The tragic hero shields herself from others by clinging to a singular truth. For the humorous 'hero' there is no such refuge. Still, the ability to find oneself ridiculous can be a tremendous consolation. It is a form of sublimation other than that associated with tragedy, one that 'acknowledges both the ubiquity of the finite and its ungraspability' (Critchley 2007, p. 78). As human I will always run up against my limits. But that is neither an excuse for not acting, nor a license to become a tragic hero. Humor is a way of expressing the experience of a subject catching herself in the midst of her inauthenticity—her inadequacy to a task that nonetheless cannot be abandoned.

Thus humor is a relation of self-knowledge, but one in which we find a non-heroic sublimation—it holds human beings back from the *hubris* involved in believing they could be authentic (Critchley 2007, p. 84), whereas 'the problem with tragedy is that it risks distorting the picture of finitude by making the subject heroic, by seeing tragic action as a conflict between freedom and necessity that culminates in authenticity or autarky' (p. 85).[10]

Let's be clear here. Critchley is *not* saying, 'listen, don't worry, you're only human, so don't try to do more.' When he says that the problem with tragedy is that it distorts the picture of finitude and puts freedom and necessity in conflict, he means that in the formation of human subjectivity, freedom *arises out of a fertile field of necessity*. Without necessity, no freedom. Critchley's argument is: Freedom (to act or not act, to be who you are, and so on) grows out of necessity (that you are thrown into a world not of your choosing and affected by others whether or not you would choose it) because of an ethical demand (that you respond to others, even

[10] Of course, if we took tragedy to be about love instead of (or in addition to) authenticity, then it might present to us a modality of dealing with finitude more up to the task Critchley undertakes (Adam Thurschwell makes this point). Then we could call politics the work of sacrifice—of time, energy, money, even life—as Paul Kahn (2008) has argued, following Carl Schmitt. And that might be motivation. Though it would likely not be pluralist.

despite yourself) wherein the self undergoes finitude (you are not equal to the infinity of that demand) while simultaneously challenging it (you are not equal to it and yet you approve of the demand, and thereby take it up). Again: Freedom grows out of necessity because of an ethical demand wherein the self undergoes finitude while simultaneously challenging it.

Taylor seems to think that atheists have to be either nihilists (those who do nothing or who actively destroy what exists) or heroes (who are heroic because they act even though they lack what others would call motivation to act)—either way, for Taylor, an atheist can give us neither a model for action nor motivation to act. Critchley's humorous hero—who is precisely not a hero because she simply does what life requires of her, even when the demand exceeds her capacity—acknowledges the human condition, which just is an excess of demand over capacity, and keeps going. Taylor would say there is no motivation to do such a thing. But Critchley has shown that the very formation of my self as human is wrought in a passive subjection to demands that I either refuse or take up. The motivation behind this ethic is as fragile as that behind any other, but it is unequivocally there: the world makes some part of you, and you make some part of the world.

Humorous Pacifism?

Critchley believes that the political task, post-Marx, is the 'the reactivation of politics through the articulation of new political subjectivities' (2007, p. 91). These will be formed at a distance from the state but still within the state (what Taylor might term transcendence within immanence), by an anarchism oriented around responsibility rather than freedom (or perhaps by Taylor's Christian subject embracing a vertical dimension to politics). Critchley continues:

> Democratization is action based on an ethical demand. That is to say, political action does not flow from the cunning of reason, from some materialist or idealist philosophy of history or indeed some more or less secularized eschatology. Rather, it feeds from… a meta-political moment. (2007, p. 119)

That moment is the 'experience of infinite responsibility at the heart of subjectivity' (Critchley 2007, p. 119). What motivates us is a particular situation or moment of injustice or desire. Such a moment is more likely to be found in shared experience of wrongs (ours or others') than deduced from political theories. It leaves us a pile of work that must be done—'dirty, detailed, local, practical and largely unthrilling' work (p. 132). But the work of politics, like the practice of humor—and unlike the heroism of tragedy or, per Taylor but not Levinas, the face of God in the other[11]—*is not rare*: if we are formed by demands we approve by taking them up, then we truly are political animals.

[11] An expanded version of this argument would have to delineate the difference between what Taylor calls the 'responding to the face of God in others' with what Levinas (a non-atheist who

If we are defined by responsibility, formed by a heteronomous ethical demand, and yet nonetheless free, then we ought to judge ourselves for what we do and have done, and take responsibility for a world full of demands that far exceed what we might will or intend—a world that bequeaths to us more responsibility than we could ever shoulder. Motivational force, then, comes from an infinite ethical demand that renders me undone, and requires more of me.

> not in the name of some sovereign authority, but in the namelessness of a powerless exposure, a vulnerability, a responsive responsibility, a humorous self-division. Politics is not the naked operation of power or an ethics-free agonism, it is an ethical practice that is driven by a response to situated injustices and wrongs. (Critchley 2007, p. 132)

How would such a thing work? Critchley cites protest tactics used by groups like Ya Basta!, the WOMBLES, Pink Bloc, and Billionaires for Bush, described by David Graeber:

> Ya Basta! for example is famous for its… white-overalls tactics: men and women dressed in elaborate forms of padding, ranging from foam armour to inner tubes to rubber ducky flotation devices, helmets and chemical proof white jumpsuits. As this mock army pushes its way through police barricades, all the while protecting each other against injury and arrest, the ridiculous gear seems to reduce human beings to cartoon characters…. At the American Party Conventions, Billionaires for Bush dressed in high-camp tuxedos and evening gowns and tried to press wads of fake money into the cops' pockets, thanking them for repressing dissent. (cited in Critchley 2007, p. 124)

Using humor and satire, groups such as these demonstrate peacefully that other forms of life and social organization exist. What is 'exposed, self-ridiculing and self-undermining' about these forms of protest is also what is powerful, or perhaps this is a performance 'of powerlessness in the face of power… in a powerful way' (124). One can use one's own weakness to expose the power of others. History may be written by those who have the means of violence, and perhaps one cannot expect to defeat them with rubber ducky flotation devices. But Critchley reminds us that, 'as the history of ultra-leftist active nihilism eloquently shows, one is lost the moment one picks up the guns and sticks…. This is a difficult pacifism that constantly has to negotiate the limits of violence' (p. 124). For Critchley, humor partakes of a 'collective will formation,' across diverse constituencies in modern secular polities. And, indeed, his politics aims at the kind of transformation possible in a situation where diverse constituencies might share some common purpose that would bring them together across their differences. It is unclear whether what he proposes could replace 'guns and sticks' in the face of violent oppression, or, for that matter, if it could replace the single-minded and non-humorous driven character of the pacifism of Gandhi or King. Humor, like irony, sometimes fails to translate across diverse audience positions.

Critchley describes humorous protest as horizontal—he sees political actors 'forging horizontal chains of equivalence;' (2007, p. 124) Taylor seeks the vertical

inspires Critchley's atheist argument) might also call a response to an other that brings God to the mind of human beings. What is rare about encountering God for Taylor is less so for Levinas.

dimension. Does this mean they cannot see eye to eye? Yes and No. Critchley contends that humor is a non-tragic practice of sublimation that brings human subjects to recognition of their inauthenticity, the questionable status of all human claims to Kantian autonomy. Thus Critchley has argued that ethics—as can be embodied in daily practices of humor—arises out of a split subject who has, in being split, transcended the concern for self-only or self-first that characterizes too many secular conceptions of the autonomous self. Humor as sublimation, forming bonds across diverse horizontal subject positions, already relies on a transcendence of concern for self-only, and thus it places a vertical step between the brute fact of being-in-a-body and being a human being inhabiting a world with others. In other words, our very predicament as human beings living in plurality with others requires of us vertical movement in addition to relations transpiring in a horizontal plane. This is another way of forming the Levinasian claim that ethics is prior to politics.

Christian Forgiveness?

Taylor worries that the 'heroic atheism' of Derrida and Camus closes off paths to meaningful ways of life. But I worry that his embrace of the power of European Christianity is blind to resources that could motivate a wide array of persons, religious and not, and contribute to forming alliances across boundaries that at the current moment seem rather well-armed against trespass.[12] Taylor acknowledges that aspiration can come from other sources. But I doubt that what Taylor thinks comes from Christianity is in fact of a purely Christian heritage. Taylor writes:

> The vertical dimension I've been talking about here is one of reconciliation and trust. And this, incidentally, is one of the central themes of a Christian understanding of these dilemmas. The above discussion [about the vertical dimension] indeed shows how Christian faith can never be decanted into a fixed code. Because it always places our actions in two dimensions, one of right action, and also an eschatological dimension. This is also a dimension of reconciliation and trust, but it points beyond any merely intra-historical perspective of possible reconciliation. It can, however, inspire vertical moves in history, like those of Mandela and Tutu. (Taylor 2008, pp. 706–707)

Taylor thinks the vertical dimension is more likely to come from a Christian conception of the world, because that conception accepts transcendence rather than living the world as a closed immanent frame. To continue his earlier example, in the horizontal dimension of right action, it would have been perfectly just for South Africa to set up war crimes trials and punish all perpetrators. But, taking a leap vertically, to a higher horizontal dimension, South Africa, inspired by leaders

[12] And this, the goal to rethink boundaries and how they get formed, to me, is the import of much of the work done by Bill Connolly in the past 20 years on pluralism and secularism. See, for instance, *Why I Am Not a Secularist* (2000) and *Capitalism and Christianity, American-Style* (2008).

like Mandela and Tutu, chose reconciliation and forgiveness. Taylor thinks this is a resource given to us by Christianity, but Critchley gives us an ethics where the subject transcends concern for self-only, and doesn't have to rely on belief in a god to do so.

That Taylor does think Christianity is a factor here is revealed in a parenthetical statement he appends to the above quotation: '(Tutu's faith is well known; I don't know what Nelson Mandela actually believes, but his whole move was obviously deeply inspired by Christianity, if only historically; forgiveness is a key category, however downplayed as a term here)' (2008, p. 707). If Taylor means that Tutu would come up with a conception of political forgiveness because of his immersion in a religious tradition associated with a teaching of forgiveness, or that some of the people of South Africa would accept a Truth and Reconciliation Commission because of their Christian faith, that strikes me as a fair assumption, but one that does not tell the whole story and may even distort the story beyond recognition. It is of course possible that an atheist (in Taylor's 'atheist = nihilist or hero' definition) or a coldly rational political strategist would realize that forgiveness was going to be a better option than legalized vengeance in the particular situation in which South Africa found itself: blacks outnumbered whites, whites had power, whites would resist if they knew they would end up in jail, blacks would fight, lives would be lost on all sides, and it might never end. But it is also the case that the South African concept of *ubuntu* which, in the Bantu languages of South Africa, means something like 'a person is a person only through other people' played a definitive role as well. That is the sensed context in which many South Africans live, and we can't easily assimilate it entirely to Christianity.

Mandela may have been moved by Christianity—he is a Christian. But, given that he has made many clear statements in the last 50 years that his goals of equality and an end to racial domination by either side of the struggle are politically motivated, it is at least equally as likely that he experienced the call to ethics inherent in a particular situation as exceeding his capacity to shoulder the demand, and then moved forward anyway. The weight on his shoulders was immense—beyond any human being's capacity. What he did was made up of compromises—amnesty for torturers, lack of closure for victims and survivors who wanted to emphasize retribution over than forgiveness—and yet he did what he could rather than clinging to a singular truth. Applying Critchley to a reading of Mandela's choices and decisions makes as much as if not more sense than does Taylor's hopeful parenthetical assertion of Mandela's Christian motivation. But Mandela would likely refuse to accept humorous pacifism as adequate to political struggle against violent oppression.

There is a further point to be made. Forgiveness is not the property of Christianity. The mere fact that Jesus Christ practiced it and preached it does not make it his property. It is a human capacity wrought out of the needs of human beings who must live together. Hannah Arendt makes this point well in *The Human Condition*:

> The discoverer of the role of forgiveness in the realm of human affairs was Jesus of Nazareth. The fact that he made this discovery in a religious context and articulated it in religious language is no reason to take it any less seriously in a strictly secular sense. It has

> been in the nature of our tradition of political thought… to be highly selective and to exclude from articulate conceptualization a great variety of authentic political experiences, among which we need not be surprised to find some of an even elementary character. Certain aspects of some of the teachings of Jesus of Nazareth which are not primarily related to the Christian message but sprang from experiences in the small and closely knit community of his followers, bent on challenging the public authorities in Israel, certainly belong among them, even though they have been neglected because of their allegedly exclusively religious nature. (1956, p. 239)

I find singularly offensive the assumption that any truck with forgiveness spells Christian motivation. Again, to be clear: it's not that Taylor is arguing that only Christianity can solve the problem of moral motivation plaguing modern moral philosophy. Taylor thinks that Christianity *may* do this, and he does not think that it does it perfectly already, and he acknowledges that there are other possible motivators. For instance, he writes: 'The human need for meaning also takes on more specific, concrete forms; and I believe these can be read in our present predicament, even by those without a faith commitment—although such a commitment probably prepares you better to notice them' (2008, p. 679). Having a faith commitment, according to Taylor, may render you more open to the kinds of motivation missing from modern moral philosophy but needed in modern social, political, and cultural settings. But it will do so only if you take faith to be a matter of openness rather than a closed and certain universe of set rules. And, really, what has Christian inspiration meant in politics lately? A closed and certain universe of set rules. Still, in terms of philosophical possibility, if you take faith as openness to transcendence, then you may be in a position to cast a critical gaze on your society and its institutions.

But if you experience your secular self as formed by others prior to your own freedom, rather than as an autonomous unit capable of consenting to its conditions, you may also be open to transcendence—or to some other way of encountering the demands of ethics such that they motivate you to act on them.

Beyond the Rules

Taylor writes: 'the 'code fetishism,' or nomolatry, of modern liberal society is potentially very damaging. It tends to forget the background which makes sense of any code, the variety of goods which the rules and norms are meant to realize, and it tends to make us insensitive, even blind, to the vertical dimension. It also encourages a 'one size fits all' approach: a rule is a rule' (2008, p. 707). Immanent thinking is a problem not only for secular liberals or for atheists, but for modern Christians who have interpreted Christian life as conforming to the norms of western civilization. According to Taylor, 'something is lost when we take the way of living together that the Gospel points us to and make of it a code of rules enforced by organizations erected for this purpose' (p. 737). The loss occurs when the lessons of scripture (or any moral lesson, I would add) are put in the register of rules, strictures about how we ought to behave. To do that fails to grasp what is at issue, Taylor

argues. We should not find—or even be looking for—'a set of universal rules, applying anywhere and everywhere.' Instead what the Gospel gives us is 'another way of being. This involves on the one hand a new motivation, and on the other, a new kind of community' (p. 738). Of course, that is precisely what Critchley argues for, persuasively, from within a standpoint of atheist political commitment. We aren't the selves we think we are, if we think we are the autonomous self-sufficient subjects of secular liberal democracy. Sure, we give the law to ourselves. But what that means is not so simple: in giving the law to ourselves, we find that our 'selves' are not unproblematically ours. We are who we are through other people, or, as subjects we are formed by others before we are free and autonomous. And this law that we give to ourselves, it is not only a system of set rules.

In seeking to make a different way of being understandable, Taylor undertakes a reading of the parable of the Good Samaritan that draws him into proximity with Critchley's argument. According to Taylor, the pre-modern self was based on a strong sense of 'we' and thus also of insider/outsider, as well as powerful ideas about what is 'fitting'; hence the need to propitiate deities and reinforce an existing sense of order. But 'the Samaritan is moved by the wounded man; he moves to act, and in doing so inaugurates (potentially) a new relation of friendship/love/charity with this person. But this cuts across the boundaries of the permitted "we's" in his world. It is a free act of his "I"' (2008, p. 738). It sounds, at first, like what we have here is the birth of the autonomous self. But Taylor continues: 'It is not something he generates just out of himself; it is that he responds to this person. He feels called to respond, however, not by some principle of "ought," but by this wounded person himself. And in so responding, he frees himself from the bounds of the "we"' (p. 738). Perhaps what he really encounters here is a wider, less provincial sense of 'we.' The Samaritan acts not by the dictates of a set code, but in response to another person whose demand he encounters. We recognize here Critchley's Levinasian description of ethical experience as a subject experiencing the demand of an other, a demand that the subject takes up by approving it. Taylor's point is that such a form of response shakes up the pre-modern society's proportionalities, to be sure, but it does so without denying the concept of fittingness. It rather inaugurates new ideas—and practices—of what is fitting. What we encounter here is the affective ground of ethics, something brought to pass within me by the mere existence of others in the world, what Critchley calls 'the irruption of a heteronomous fact that can strike without warning' (2007, p. 60). When Taylor calls this a 'belonging together' where Samaritan and wounded Jew are 'fitted together in a dissymmetric proportionality' of *agape*, made possible by the 'enfleshment of God,' we know he agrees (an agreement that both Taylor and Critchley might undergo only 'despite themselves'—and what, I wonder, does that say about the possibilities of pluralism for either of them, or for any of us?).

The Samaritan undergoes a demand that erupts heteronomously—a demand from elsewhere but experienced internally, having 'struck without warning' rather than having been taken on voluntarily or prescribed by rules or norms. Rather than a sharp distinction between insider and outsider given to us by a set code, the relation between Samaritan and wounded Jew is a network, 'not a categorical grouping' but

'a skein of relations which link particular, unique, enfleshed people to each other, rather than a grouping of people together on the grounds of their sharing an important property' (Taylor 2008, p. 739). This is akin to what Critchley means by 'collective will formation,' 'forging horizontal chains of equivalence' (2007, p. 124). These horizontal chains are made possible by a prior vertical move, of transcendence of concern for self-only to the responsiveness of the one to the other, and the decision to take up that response and act on it. Such response is the purview of an enfleshed being responding to others and formed by others pre-rationally, as surely as Taylor's *agape* is a gut-level reaction and not a response steeped in Kantian rational access to universal law. What is fitting now is not that I cast out the outsider because he threatens me as a category, but rather, a demand reaches me from an affective dimension that I can't refuse but also may approve, and then act to do what I can. That is ethical experience, for Critchley and for Taylor, an atheist and a Catholic.

Conclusion

Secular thought often names anything outside the realm of neutral public reason 'irrational' or 'private.' Much has been written about the limits to that approach. At the very least we ought to admit that secular public reason is not neutral: it facilitates some forms of thinking and speaking while ruling out or muting others. Secular public reason may also lack the power to motivate those who are not included in or moved by the values it promotes. Indeed, every ethic is fragile in an age that we might name secular according to Taylor's definition—of 'secular' as a description of the conditions of belief in which modern human beings live. If everyone knows that all beliefs are not universal, that everyone can choose what to believe freely, and change his or her mind freely as well; and if human beings tend to live in diverse communities that cannot be united by a common religious morality; then every ethic is fragile. An ethic given to free persons motivates only those who are persuaded of its value. And an ethic forced on those who do not choose it loses something of its *ethical* force (becoming something more like a positivist's set of rules). What, then, would persuade us, across our disagreements, to agree to be good to each other—especially when we cannot agree about what it means to be good to each other?

Taylor tries to counter the fragility of the morality left by our Enlightenment inheritance with a plea for what Christianity has to offer. (There is an elephant in this paragraph who professes that Enlightenment thought *is* Christian, but we'll leave him be today, because Taylor's point is about the potential of a certain kind of Christian worldview more than it is about any current doctrine or practice.) But Critchley and others show that, though we may need what Taylor thinks we need, we don't have to get it from Christianity. I have no problem with people finding resources within Christianity

(continued)

for a renewed understanding of how we live together that embraces pluralism without falling prey to rule fetishism. I think it has been a mistake of some left/secular thinking to equate religious belief *tout court* with backwardness, irrationality or a refusal of equality. It even seems that sometimes claims made for an affective or bodily dimension in political thinking are suspected of being hidden religious claims.[13] But I prefer Critchley's approach not only because he brings thought back to the body more successfully than does Taylor, but because it seems to me that a new secularism, if there can be such a thing, might succeed best if it is truly non-denominational. If selves are formed in response to demands made by others, then we are all called upon to shoulder responsibility for justice. In other words, I do not think, as Taylor does, that the so-called atheist path can be pursued only at the coast of 'turning oneself, and possibly many others, away from the path towards a much more powerful and effective healing action in history' (2008, p. 703). There is enough evidence for the divisiveness of religion in political life that those who want to rethink secularism must approach religion's appearance in the public realm carefully, even when they realize—as they should—that they cannot dismiss it altogether and still be truly pluralist. And those who want to reinvigorate the public realm with Christian values need also be mindful of the history and contemporary realities of struggles over religious truth.

Taylor and Critchley have both given us a sense of the background that makes possible any code of law, or any morality we might embrace. That background is the basis on which we judge the justice of the present and its rules, and decide whether to follow or resist them. Taylor thinks the Christian background of being open to transcendence rather than inhabiting a flat immanent frame will lead us to embrace a vertical dimension, rising above impasses and unjust circumstances to better futures; Critchley wants us to become aware of demands made on us by others, demands that we approve only by taking them up. For him politics is made concrete in a situated universality: a demand that is universal, but which can only arise in a particular situation.[14] Both thinkers suggest that we need a sense of *what*

(continued)

[13] The content of this assertion can be verified not so much in what people publish, as in how they choose the questions they will pursue, and what questions or topics are beyond the pale. I have often found myself involved in heated misunderstandings at conferences due to my use of the word 'transcendence,' when all I mean is 'transcendence of the self's own self-interest' or 'transcendence of an immanent understanding of an institution,' and not any form of reliance on a god or theology. (Of course, in order to write anything further about this, I'd need to have more than an assertion of anecdotal evidence!)

[14] This idea is derived from the work of Alain Badiou. In *Being and Event* (2006), Badiou argues that a subject commits itself to an ethical demand that it receives from a situation. For instance: 'the demand that flows from the situation of the discriminatory treatment of immigrant workers in Paris by the city authorities.' (Critchley 2007, p. 42) But the demand will not be reducible to the

responsibility is that differs from the ideas or senses we have inherited, and that such a sense will inevitably also leave us with different ideas about community, and a different motivation for supporting diverse ways of life. Taylor worries that many people will not be able to make sense of 'responding to the image of a God in others'—that it is perhaps a rare experience, or at any rate one not open to everyone. Critchley, on the other hand, describes for us the everyday experience of being affected by others, and thereby reminds us that the sense of responsibility for morality or politics need not be rare, and that what morality or politics *will be* can be defined by how we take up the demands that *are* placed on us, on a daily basis, whether we like it or not.

Acknowledgments I thank Adam Thurschwell for his productive comments on an earlier draft of this essay.

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situation; an *ethical* demand is situated but it is also addressed to everyone. So, while the situation of me wanting a sandwich today at 3:04 pm is particular to this time and place, the example of discrimination against immigrant workers in Paris gives us 'a general claim for equality that exceeds that situation' (pp. 42–43): it is situated, placed in a particular site; but the demand transcends the particularity of the situation. However, rather than calling an event that is addressed to everyone 'universal' and thereby conceiving justification of ethics in terms of universality, Badiou thinks in terms of truth-formation (and that is where Critchley's term 'concrete universality' parts ways with Badiou's formulation—but that is the subject of another paper).

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Chapter 7
Exposures and Projections

Simon Critchley's Ethics of Appearances

Davide Panagia

[T]he closest kind of association is not mere perceptual cognition, but, rather, a handling, using, and taking care of things which has its own kind of 'knowledge.'
Martin Heidegger (Being and Time, p. 63)

Introduction

There is a curious and revealing reaction to the desire to own new digital reading devices such as Amazon.com's Kindle, the Stanza application on an iPad, or the Sony Portable Reader System. Those of us who have been tempted by the possibility of carrying the library of Alexandria in the palm of our hands are immediately paralyzed by the fear that though we may be able to read digital texts with ease and convenience, we won't really be reading them because we won't be able to mark up those objects, write in their margins, underline relevant passages, and make them our own. And it has been one of the challenges in designing and programming such devices to make them user friendly in precisely the kinds of ways that allow these devices to mimic paper well enough to be considered a viable substitute for it. The inevitable transformation of text into image raises concerns about hapticity; that there is an intrinsic '*noli me tangere*' dimension to an appearance, as Jean-Luc Nancy has recently argued (2008); and that, try as we might, we can never adequately point to what touches us in an image in the same way in which we believe we can point to a text. The shift from text to image-of-text that the Kindle and other such devices represent suggests a different mode of handling and thus, a different order of awareness, that accompanies visual objects.

I signal this curiosity not because I think there is anything especially mystifying about our desire to substitute one technology of reading for another, but because I think that the desire to want to underline or highlight and mark up a text with marginalia is allegorical of a certain set of concerns about aesthetic experience.

D. Panagia (✉)
Trent University, Peterborough, ON, Canada
e-mail: davidepanagia@trentu.ca

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A. Welchman (ed.), *Politics of Religion/Religions of Politics*,
Sophia Studies in Cross-cultural Philosophy of Traditions and Cultures 8,
DOI 10.1007/978-94-017-9448-0_7

These concerns regard the problem of indexicality, or of pointing to features of an aesthetic object and making them count as relevant to our appreciation of it (Ferguson 2007). Indeed, I would go so far as to suggest that the practices of pointing and highlighting sensorial aspects of an object—whether picture, tune, morsel of food, etc.—is what makes that object count as an aesthetic object. The way in which we go about inventing modes of emphases that give value to those things that touch our senses is what an ethics of appearance is concerned with.

What I wish to offer in these pages is a set of preliminary considerations regarding the possibility of an ethics of appearances as the basis for thinking about how we relate to one another in pluralist democratic societies. To posit this is to admit that our political ideas and practices are imbued with certain aesthetic sensibilities; specifically, it is to posit that the relationship between photography, spectatorship, and sensation is symptomatic of the difficulty of making available to others our sensations of aesthetic objects and our ultimate inability (despite every effort to the contrary) to make perceptible those sensations. Our practices of confronting and contending with this impossibility of sharing sensation, as well as our admitting to our inevitable disappointment when faced with this limit of shareability suggests, I contend, the availability of a dissensual core to our understandings of citizenship. My thesis, if you will, is that democratic citizenship is not grounded in a consensual being-in-common but in a dissensual event of intangible hapticity.

In conventional approaches to the study of citizenship, as I have argued elsewhere, the central concern is the achievement of consensus as the motivating force for political inclusion (Panagia 2006, 2009). Here political subjects have identities and the task of political thinking is to find ways to negotiate and incorporate those identities (and the expectations that those identities hold) in a *sensus communis* that will accommodate in a fair and just manner the inevitable diversity characteristic of modern pluralist democracies. We might characterize the *sensus communis* of citizenship as a kind of touch, or contact; a hapticity that wants to penetrate to the core of one's subjectivity in order to know an other in such a way as to access or indicate, point to and verify, the status of their existence. I have referred to this as political theory's commitment to narratocracy. To share in a sense that is common means that I must know that your ability to sense is consistent—if not the same—as mine, that we share a sensibility, and that we can make the same sense, or formulate a con-sensus. The hand of the Doubting Thomas that touches the wound and penetrates to the truth of a belief is the same hand that extends admittance into a community of sense.

My project of an ethics of appearances takes a different approach by asking the following question: What are the theories and practices of beholding that inform the iconophilia of contemporary democratic thought? My ambition in asking this question is to explore the following proposition: individuals or groups in pluralist democratic societies attend to the emergence of political subjectivities at the level of their appearances. A political subject, on this account, does not refer to a specific cultural group or identity-formation but rather to a force of appearance, or power of monstrance, whose contour remains undetermined. I argue that the beholding we lend to the advenience of an appearance is of critical concern to contemporary democratic theory because the event of appearance solicits acts of admission, of a

letting-in and an admitting-to, that-which-stands-forth. How we attend to that-which-stands-forth requires an exploration of our handlings of aesthetic objects—those images, sounds, flavors, and textures that surround us on a daily basis and that comprise the ontological sources for an ethics of appearances.

I want to begin, then, by sketching out what an ethics of appearances might mean or look like by turning to a set of provocative remarks that Simon Critchley makes in *Infinitely Demanding* (2007). In that book Critchley outlines with care and attention the core features of his ethical project that he connects to his conception of democratic politics: 'Democratization,' he says, 'is a dissensual praxis that works against the consensual horizon of the state . . . [Democratization is thus] conceived as a dual sequence of both micro-political articulations, movement and blocs at the level of civil society, and as a sequence of macro-political, transnational articulations' (Critchley 2007, p. 119). Compelling us, once again, to face up to Levinas's ethical provocations, Critchley confronts us with the sense of powerlessness that arises when facing the other and the ethical demand that such powerlessness presents. We are powerless, that is, because the hetero-affectivity of the encounter *dividuates* us, splits us, divides us from our selves, but also discomposes us from the organoleptic assurances that guarantee at once the slumber of our subjectivities *and* our ways of making sense of the world. We don't merely recognize the face of the other, according to Critchley's extension of the Levinasian insight, but we face the other in such a way that the sheer intensity of that event of interface discomposes our subjectivity to the point of no longer being able to rely on the networks and conventions for sense-making that have—up until this point—comforted us. There thus arises an *interstitial distance* that is at once the source of our facingness but also the crux of that which makes any concrete relationality, community, or consensus impossible. Interface potentially procures the discomposition of subjectivity and ethical separation, the burden of which I must bear and affront. To make the same point using terms I develop in what follows, the appearance of the other is an event of advenience which sources our practices of admittance of that-which-stands-forth. The cultivation of such practices of admittance is the project of an ethics of appearances as I wish to develop it.

As is well known, Critchley's ethical thinking refuses the potential paralysis arising from the tragic affirmation of ethical separation by introducing the idea that aesthetic reparation is possible in the face of ethical separation. Humor, but also acts of sublimation that trace the contours of the sublime, ethical Thing at the heart of the aesthetic object (Critchley 2007, p. 85), provide occasions for 'an acknowledgment of both the ubiquity of the finite and its ungraspability' (Critchley 2007, p. 78). The aesthetic object on this rendering is not merely a device that helps us work through the trauma of finitude and separation, it is also an event of advenience that sources our abilities 'to bear the excessive, indeed hyperbolic, burden of the ethical demand without that demand turning into obsessive self-hatred and cruelty' (Critchley 2007, p. 79).

Such occasions of aesthetic experience constitute the ontological sources of our senses of citizenship. More to the point, our handling of aesthetic objects affords us acts of concernful awareness—or absorption—with a world of permanences that

body-forth. The potential (and hopeful, because there are no guarantees) avoidance of the crushing weight of the ethical demand is made available by our handling of such objects and—I want to insist—by our handling of them in such a way that we retain or acknowledge their status as aesthetic objects. By this, I mean to say that at the heart of Critchley's ethics of appearances—encapsulated in his claim that there is the possibility of aesthetic reparation from ethical separation—there is a profound respect for the experience of wonder that accompanies an engagement with alluring objects and that mirrors the wonderment that arises when we encounter an other's face. The facingness we afford aesthetic objects, in other words, mirrors the facingness we afford one another and in both instances of interface we confront the luminosity of the appearance that advenes. 'What I want to emphasize' Critchley affirms in one of the most challenging and compelling passages of *Infinitely Demanding*,

> is the way in which sublimation produces a kind of *aesthetic screen* which allows the profile of the Thing *to be projected* whilst not being adequate to its representation. The aesthetic cuts across the trajectory of the ethical in a way that both places the subject in relation to the source of the ethical demand, but which protects the subject from the direct glare of the Thing. (73).

What I take Critchley to be pointing to here in the distinction between projection and representation is a founding distinction in approaches to the study of aesthetics and politics between exposure and projection. On one rendering, aesthetic objects need to be exposed in order to illuminate their underlying collusiveness. Thus an aesthetics of politics on this rendering must make available the ideological knowledge-claims that such objects express: Aesthetic objects are things that must be known and rendered intelligible. By contrast, Critchley's ethics of appearances shows that by attending to the projectual power of aesthetic objects—their sublimation (to use his language) or their advenience (to use mine)—we may overcome (or if not overcome at least sidestep) the tragic and potentially devastating effects of ethical separation. From the perspective of an ethics of appearances for democratic life, I will argue, much rests on the difference between exposure and projection.

Part I: Exposure

Let me begin by explaining what I might possibly mean with these introductory remarks by turning to another thinker who, in her most recent writings, raises a similar set of questions as Critchley does. In *Frames of War* (2009) Judith Butler also isolates certain aesthetic objects as sources of our ethical attentions: that is, the photographs taken by embedded journalists during the Iraq war propagated by the Bush regime. In these pages Butler raises once again the issue of ethical responsiveness that has been a guiding thread of her thinking since the publication of *Precarious Life* (2006) and *Giving An Account of One's Self* (2005). More to the

point, Butler's concern is the practice of embedded journalism itself, and the at once implicit and explicit regulation of perception that this practice brings about. Here Butler's argument is both straightforward and subtle. The photographs of the Iraq war that we see are images that we are allowed to see by a state authority that is 'clearly interested in regulating the visual modes of participation in the war' (2009, p. 65). Embedded journalism makes it so that the visual field has already been established even before the shot has been taken (one might begin to think here of Jeff Wall's 'near documentary' photography that, though arising out of a substantively less dramatic series of concerns, nonetheless raises some of the same issues). As the title of her book suggests, Butler wants to shift our attention within the visual field from picture to frame and argue—against the position established by Susan Sontag in *Regarding the Pain of Others* (2002)—that the frame is the site, source, and object of a pre-ordained interpretation instituted by state regulatory power. More to the point—and again contrasting Sontag's claim that textual narration permits interpretation while photographs do not—Butler highlights the frame as the site or point of political criticism: 'The regulation of perspective,' she asserts, 'thus suggests that the frame can conduct certain kinds of interpretations' (Butler 2009, p. 66). And further: 'if the notion of a 'visual interpretation' is not to become oxymoronic, it seems important to acknowledge that, in framing reality, the photograph has already determined what will count within the frame—and this act of delimitation is surely interpretive, as are, potentially the various effects of angle, focus, light, etc' (p. 67).

Butler argues that interpretive constraints aren't merely the product of certain subjective interests but exist by virtue of structuring constraints that configure the scene of interpretation. In other words, the visual field is never neutral but is available because made available by a series of regulative norms that crop the image. The mistake that Sontag makes according to Butler is to assume that we need words (or captions) in order to interpret photographs and thus she fundamentally misunderstands the way that non-verbal objects make arguments, or possess an illocutionary force, that makes claims upon us. Thus, the mind/body split between being affected (by a photograph) and understanding (a text) that Sontag has so much confidence in is, in fact, not sustainable for Butler precisely because if one takes things like the cropping of the frame into consideration as part of the picture, then the implicit affect/reason distinction of the image/text binary is, itself, untenable. Indeed, that binary is not a binary at all but a reciprocity precisely because photographs possess an illocutionary force that acts upon our bodies and our minds. Here is Butler one last time:

> We do not have to be supplied with a caption or a narrative in order to understand that a political background is being explicitly formulated and renewed through and by the frame, that the frame functions not only as a boundary to the image, but as structuring the image itself. If the image in turn structures how we register reality, then it is bound up with the interpretive scene in which we operate. The question for war photography thus concerns not only what it shows, but also how it shows what it shows. The 'how' not only organizes the image, but works to organize our perception and thinking as well. If state power attempts to regulate a perspective that reporters and cameramen are there to confirm, then the action of perspective in and as the frame is part of the interpretation of the war compelled by the

> state. The photograph is not merely a visual image awaiting interpretation; it is itself actively interpreting, sometimes forcibly so. (Butler 2009, p. 71)

The state is the photographer who calls the shots. The thrust of Butler's contention is that if you look at, point at, and underline the frame rather than the picture you discover first, that what is accessory is actually essential to the political potency of an aesthetic object and second, that in order for that discovery to come about one must consider the frame and other similar accessories as sources of state interpellation that are as forcible as Althusser's policing cry of a 'Hey, you there!' The dramaturgy of state violence, in other words, occurs at the framing margins of aesthetic objects. According to Butler, Sontag's confidence in the body/mind, affect/reason, photo/text dualism makes it so that we cannot attend to the demagogic perceptual dynamics at work in the production of the image. Moreover, Butler's own invocation of the 'how' that accompanies the 'what' of the image works to emphasize where the political value of photographs may be situated. By looking at the frame we see that such photographs don't actually represent a scene but operate to confirm a view so that, in a stunning and ironic twist, rather than celebrating the political potential of the failure of representation (as she has been known to do) Butler isolates that failure as the problem that must be overcome because it is a source of violence; that is, the fact that the images we see fail to represent the truth of the situation obscures the suffering that the Iraq war perpetrates.

Several more conclusions can be drawn from Butler's engagement with Sontag. By indicating the frame as the locus of state power and thus the object of political interpretation, Butler manages not to give value to the image qua image so much as to sublimate the image into a word. In this regard, she actually bolsters Sontag's claim regarding the difference between text and image. Where Sontag saw, in the photograph's lack of words, a difficulty of interpretation, Butler's frame turns the photograph into an object with intentionality that has the illocutionary force of words and is thus available for interpretation. Like words, photographs say something, they make nonverbal arguments that are indistinct from speech utterances. Thus, by imagining interpretive structures as potentially everywhere (because state power is potentially everywhere) Butler makes it so that all objects possess intentions and that the task of the political criticism of aesthetic objects is one of exposure—of knowing and through that knowledge, exposing, the intentionality of objects. In this regard, she actually offers a solution to the Kindle dilemma with which I began: in affirming the argumentative force of photographs she reinstates a haptic relation with the image. If pictures are statements, then we can handle them like words, underline them, point to their features, touch them. Of course, to say this is to suggest that with this mode of handling what really ought to matter is not so much the picture itself but what the photographer is saying.[1]

[1] In the case of Butler's example of embedded journalism the situation is even more complicated because it isn't even the photographer that is taking the picture but the normative conditions of

In Butler's engagement with war photography we are presented with a mode of handling aesthetic objects that I am calling 'exposure.' Exposure's handling of plurivalent entities makes available the symptomatic analysis of aesthetic objects that potentially unveils hidden structures of domination which such objects—and the institutions that generate them—are said to conceal. Here a commitment to various forms of emancipatory politics is wedded to an interpretive strategy equally committed to a hermeneutics of suspicion regarding the modes of intelligibility (i.e., the knowledge claims) that such objects may convey. What results is a kind of policing function that regulates the relationship between forms of expression and structures of reference. Any aesthetic object—whether written text, film, musical score, painting, photograph, and so forth—is said to exist within a fixed relation of expression and reference. What the object expresses is markedly different from what it represents and its referential relation to the world betrays either an imposed or endured mode of domination.

Exposure's approach to the aesthetics of politics relies on a strict association between what plurivalent objects express and that to which they refer, a relation that also correlates to a concrete correspondence between perception and sensation. The result is the classification of aesthetic objects as objects with intentionality whose primary value is an instrumental one. I refer to this general approach to the aesthetics of politics as *the betrayal of aesthetics*. It is a betrayal of aesthetics because this critical approach refuses to confront the primordial convention that art is artificial, and thus admits that the only way to engage aesthetic objects is to treat them as epistemological objects (like one might a linguistic claim). In other words, such approaches to the aesthetics of politics treat the artifice of art as if it were a kind of veil intended to obscure the realities of misrecognition. The task of a radical politics is thus to unveil—or subtract—the artificiality of aesthetic objects in order to expose the concealed substrata of their referential functions. This suggests that our forms of attention vis-à-vis aesthetic objects are reducible to the determination of their use or uselessness: that is, the value of aesthetic objects is either useful because they promote a political and cultural agenda that we endorse, or useless (by which I mean unhelpful, detrimental, or even collusive) because their demagogic properties veil the emancipatory potential of that same political and cultural agenda. In either case, and ironically so, the betrayal of aesthetics sanctions a commodification of culture to the extent that aesthetic objects become cultural commodities for the endorsement or rejection of certain specific political and theoretical ends. Exposure's approach to an aesthetically inflected mode of political and cultural theory requires us to engage plurivalent objects at their symptomatic level in order to reveal structures of domination and to lift the burden of misrecognition.

But it is exposure's commitment to the knowability of images that troubles me when thinking about the relationship between politics and aesthetics. More to the

perceptual governance established by the state apparatus that allow the photographer to take the picture; in short, there is no escaping the divine omnipresence of the state.

point, the idea that an aesthetic object is politically relevant because it satisfies our conventions of intelligibility, and that the mode of attention that we lend to aesthetic objects like photographs, paintings, songs, meals, and other such adveniences, is an epistemological one offers me an occasion for pause; in short, my concern is the seemingly uncontestable verity that in order for aesthetic objects to be political they must look and sound like argumentative claims. I wonder, then, whether Butler could sustain her own argument about the collusive effects of war photography if exactly the same photograph were taken by someone who wasn't a state sanctioned, embedded journalist. Would the photographic image still possess a political valence if the *mis-en-scene* that led to the exposure of the film were different? The issue, I believe, is one of candidness as an aesthetic and political criterion. And my inclination is to think that displaying an object's lack of candidness does not get at its politicality.

A way in which we can begin to rethink the political value of aesthetic objects, then, is to suggest that the interpretive commitment that exposes the collusive effects of images is insufficient in accounting for the experience of the advenience of an appearance, of the practices of looking and indexing points of emphasis, and of our markings and remarkings of and about pictures. Such remarkable features of our ways of handling the sensorial world are not reducible to interpretive acts that expose a presumed intentionality within a picture, or to disciplinary acts of demystification—that is, to claims about our knowledge of the object world. Rather, what aesthetic experience affords is practices of relaying emphasis about the value of an object which has no way of determining on its own accord what is essential and what is accessory about its appearance. To say this means that we can never know what is essential or what is accessory about the value of an aesthetic object (i.e., is it the *punctum* or the *studium*,[2] the camera or the photograph, the canvas or the brushstroke, the frame or the image?) which is a way of saying that aesthetic objects do not lend themselves well to the enterprise of expository knowledge. This doesn't mean that we can't have a critical account of them, nor does it mean that we can't convey our concernful awareness of these objects with the kind of conviction that mimics our emphatic insistences when making knowledge claims. Put thusly, the kind of forceful convictions that aesthetic experience awards seem less like an accurate schemata that draws a geometrical line between word and picture than a sort of absorbed juggling or even a curatorial handling of the slippery complementarity between an essential feature and its accessories. Such jugglings, I will suggest, constitute the ontological sources of our senses of citizenship.

[2] See Barthes (1982).

Part II: Projection

Photographs don't merely expose a position; they also project a view. And in projecting a view, they show us how to hold a view, how to bear a picture of the world. What, then, could it mean to reflect on the political value of aesthetic objects if we attend to projection rather than exposure as the ontological condition of a photograph's medium? What does it mean, in other words, to care about a cultural object (whatever its material form) in such a way that we turn our political attentions to it; in such a way, that is, that we attend to its politicality? The answer, I want to say, lies not in exposing a meaning but in bearing an appearance.

Ludwig Wittgenstein's considerations on acts of naming and other related practices in his *Philosophical Investigations* seem relevant to this practice of the bearing of an appearance. And here I want to suggest that Wittgenstein's account of naming is part and parcel of what he means by attending to a picture, of his reflections on seeing aspects. Because the problem of naming something—and of teaching the child what a name is—is first and foremost a problem of having to point to a feature of a view, of handling, or holding, or actively concerning yourself with a view that is in front of you. Consider section 38 of the *Philosophical Investigations*:

> Naming appears as a *queer* connexion of a word with an object.—And you really get such a queer connexion when the philosopher tries to bring out *the* relation between name and thing by staring at an object in front of him and repeating a name or even the word 'this' innumerable times. For philosophical problems arise when language *goes on holiday*. And *here* we may indeed fancy naming to be some remarkable act of mind, as it were a baptism of an object.

Philosophers like Saul Kripke (1984) and cultural theorists like Slavoj Žižek (1989, pp. 90–105) have characterized this famous passage in Wittgenstein's writings as expressing a committed concern regarding the possibility of branding—or of fixing a name to a thing through time. But this famous reading of this famous passage seems to insist that the italicized word 'here'—a word that suggests an act of pointing if there ever was one—is referring to, or indicating, or indexing the philosopher's effort in naming as described a few lines earlier in terms of her repeated and obsessive compulsive 'this.' In other words, a philosophical rendering of Wittgenstein's indexical gesture marked by the italicized word 'here' points us to the effort in affixing a name.

In contrast to this rendering, I would say that this passage projects the complexities of naming that it displays. Here—and throughout the *Philosophical Investigations* more generally—I don't see Wittgenstein expositing an argument about naming; I do, however, see him holding up a picture—or, more to the point, of *projecting* a picture—of the ways in which we respond to the advenience of appearances. He might just as easily have talked about a cowboy branding cattle instead of the philosopher pointing and saying 'this' over and over again—it would have been equally funny, absurd, and poignant. Either way, in this scenario what 'here' points to is not explicit (that's Wittgenstein's point) and, interestingly

enough, one has the sense that Wittgenstein is using the word 'here' just as he does the word 'this;' that is, to indicate the at once ordinary and remarkable nature of our willingness to afford the world emphasis. The other words he also emphasizes—'queer', 'the', and 'goes on holiday'—suggest that there is something more at stake than exposition. I want to say that these other words are not merely accessory but are essential to Wittgenstein's projected picture. For these words give us moment for pause—they hold us captive, to use another of his famous expressions—and in doing so they give us a sense of an absorbed looking at a world that appears. In this case, what does appear are the activities we practice in order to give names to things; though it isn't the naming that matters so much as the acts of emphasis that an apparent world compels. Such acts of emphasis—like pointing, but also branding—speak of a poignancy that marks a mode of attention or a concernful awareness of that-which-stands-forth. And this concernful awareness is what Wittgenstein means when he says that 'Naming appears as a *queer* connexion of a word with an object.' It appears as a queer connexion because what naming does is make apparent that world's appearance so that the practice of naming is, for lack of a better word, a technology for expressing our absorption with an apparent world.

Think of a recipe book: when we read a recipe and the image of the dish appears somewhere in our bodies—in our mind, our mouth, our stomach, our nose—is it the name that strikes us or is it the queer set of connections triggered by the appearance of a sensation? Now ask yourself what is the 'queer connexion' between these different registers of experience? Will your response be to expose the connection, or to indicate it, point to it, express your enthusiasm for it—to project it? Now think of a photograph and ask yourself what needs to be removed from your experience of this projected image in order for it to become an epistemological object that commands your exposition? What aspects of the photograph need to 'go on holiday' in order for us to attend to it as an expositive? When language goes on holiday, philosophy's power of exposition intervenes and we have to turn to some remarkable act of mind that is akin to the mystical act of baptism to solve the philosophical problem. But as we well know, language rarely—if ever—goes on holiday. Wittgenstein is famous for telling us this; that is, for telling us that the 'queer connexion' between word and object is not the result of some 'remarkable' act of philosophical exposition (i.e., this, this, this, this, this, this, this). The name appears as a queer connexion because all we can do when an appearance advenes is invent ways of connecting with the object; and these ways seem remarkable precisely because we have not attended to them previously, despite the fact that they may have always been apparent.[3] In other words, 'naming' here is a synonym for expressing the kind of emphasis we give to objects when we desperately attempt to emphasize our experiences of them.

[3] Describing a similar kind of experience, Heidegger speaks of 'the environment [*Umwelt*] announc[ing] itself afresh' (*Being and Time*, p. 105) or 'how we rediscover ourselves in things' (*Basic Problems*, p. 161).

In a related passage of the *Philosophical Investigations* Wittgenstein goes on to affirm the following (§122):

> A main source of our failure to understand is that we do not *command a clear view* of the use of our words.—Our grammar is lacking in this sort of perspicuity. A perspicuous representation produces just that understanding which consists in 'seeing connexions'. Hence the importance of finding and inventing *intermediate cases.*
>
> The concept of a perspicuous representation is of fundamental significance for us. It earmarks the form of account we give, the way we look at things. (Is this a 'Weltanschauung'?)

Once again, Wittgenstein raises the problem of 'seeing connexions' as central to our experiences of an apparent world. On his account, we lack the ability to extract ourselves from our picture of the world in such a way that would enable us to explain or justify how those pictures work. However, this is not a problem for him; or rather, that our grammar is lacking in a certain kind of perspicuity is not an insurmountable challenge to our ability to operate in the world. Hence his insistence on our abilities to see connections and to invent intermediate cases. Our ways of handling pictures, including our pictures of a language, compel us to develop affinities between ourselves and the world that appears, and these affinities are what give perspicuity to the world. That is, the capacity to invent queer connexions between ourselves and the world represents a modality of caring for the world; a practice by which we allow things to stand forth and through which we express our own absorption with the appearances that circulate about us. Finally, the perspicuous representation that arises from our practices of seeing 'queer connexions' is a projection that we give to the appearance of things; it is our mode of touching and handling without ever penetrating or exposing: we see queer connexions because people and things ingress in the world. Moreover, such connexions are queer precisely because our capacity to connect with that which appears is stifled by an inherent impossibility of touching, or of definitively indicating what it is in the appearance that absorbs us. The experience of absorption discomposes our sensibilities and compels a reconfiguration of our modes of association, not only with ourselves and the world but also between ourselves and others.

Another way of addressing this peculiarly photographic aspect of Wittgenstein's thought would be to say that our perspicuous representations of the queer connexions that arise between word and object have a certain weight and that our invention of intermediate cases—our creative speculations of the ways of relating to the appearances that advene—speak of our willingness to bear their weight. That is, to bear an appearance means to draw a connection, to see it as something, not as a likeness so much as to see it as an aspect of something else with which it is unfamiliar—and in projecting that unfamiliar resemblance which we hold and that holds us, we express a curatorial concern (or a caring) for appearances.

Yet another way of expressing this is to say that the kind of concernful touch that comes with our handling of the advenience of appearances is allegorical of the caress that occurs between projection and screen. And here, briefly, let us recall Critchley's claim that 'sublimation produces a kind of aesthetic screen which allows the profile of the Thing to be projected whilst not being adequate to its

representation' (Critchley 2007, p. 73). To get at what I might possibly mean by the relationship between projection and screen—and what I think Critchley might mean by this—I turn briefly to a series of disparate though, I think, related remarks developed by Stanley Cavell whom Critchley also invokes in *Infinitely Demanding*.

In a section entitled 'Projecting a Word' of his magnum opus, *The Claim of Reason*, Cavell describes how one of the complexities surrounding ordinary language—the language we use on a diurnal basis to express ourselves—is its capacity (and our capacity) to insert words in situations that are unusual to them. We say that we can 'feed the monkey' but we also say that we 'feed the meter;' and so we project the word 'feed' into diverse contexts (Cavell 1999, p. 181f). Though we might be able to explain such practices in terms of the metaphorical power of language, this does not get at what Cavell might mean by 'projecting a word' precisely because metaphor operates on the basis of projection. A projection is not merely a metaphorical use of language but is the engine that enables the metaphoricity of metaphor.

These considerations are less compelling than the ethical basis that structures Cavell's discussion of projection; and here, what becomes crucial is our capacity to bear or absorb the weight of a projection—or what Critchley refers to as 'the obsessive experience of a responsibility that persecutes me with its sheer weight' (Critchley 2007, p. 60). In the 'surrealistic' (Critchley 2007, p. 65) example—as Critchley calls another of Cavell's examples—that Cavell gives of 'feeding the meter', we could just as easily say 'put money in the meter', thus applying a more general verb to the sentence which gets us just as far with communicating our intention or meaning. But to do so would be to refuse a projection, to not want to hold it up, or to want to avoid a certain way of doing things. For Cavell we are always in a position to either admit or ignore a projection (and here I quote from *The Claim of Reason*):

> An object or activity or event onto or into which a concept is projected, must *invite* or *allow* that projection; in the way in which, for an object to be (called) and art object, it must allow or invite the experience and behavior which are appropriate or necessary to our concepts of the appreciation or contemplation or absorption . . . of an art object. What kind of object will allow or invite or be fit for that contemplation, etc., is no more accidental or arbitrary than what kind of object will be fit to serve as (what we call) a 'shoe.' (1999, p. 183)

There is an indirect correlation for Cavell between our capacities to admit a projection of a concept—to look and see it—and our abilities to be receptive to a work of art. That relationship is the same kind of association that occurs between a projected image and a screen; what a screen does is allow or admit a projection—the screen holds it in place, if you will, handles it, or concerns itself with it. What is fascinating about this account of our relations to the world and the things in it is Cavell's unique way of likening an ethical experience to an aesthetic practice. For us to allow or invite a projection regards a capacity to act upon and with our aesthetic sensibilities; or rather, it suggests that our ethical practices project certain aesthetic sensibilities, and vice versa. Here the words 'allow' and 'invite' work hard to express the hetero-affectivity of admittance (or hospitality) that one invokes in practices of aesthetic receptivity. It is just as easy for us to refuse an appearance as it

is to admit it, and just because something is projected does not mean that that projectile will accede—not every surface is effective as a screen. An aesthetic object, on this account, has nothing specific about it other than a capacity to call our attention, to call us to attend to it. In this regard, and following from the discussion raised earlier, we might say that an aesthetic object possesses a certain perspicuity that calls forth a glimpse and that this calling-forth of a glimpse belongs to a set of practices, or modes of concern, that admit the advenience of an appearance. Cavell insists in a very discreet manner that projection is not the property of an object just as much as any one particular kind of object—say a photograph—is not necessarily an art object. An object's capacity to project regards a set of interrelated handlings between spectator and object that mirror the relationship between projection and screen. To admit an appearance—to invite or allow a projection—is to act like a screen does, it means to bear the weight of what appears in the most delicate and discriminating manner.

Here I am reminded of Cavell's other famous discussion of screens and projections in his treatment of Frank Capra's *It Happened One Night* (1934)—a discussion that focuses on a blanket that, Cavell wants to say, is a certain kind of barrier that screens the two protagonists of the movie (Cavell 1979, pp. 23–25). The scene of the movie in question involves Clark Gable and Claudette Colbert who are unmarried, on the run, and hiding out for the night in a motel room with two beds. Bed-time is upon them. Clark Gable's character devises the use of a blanket as a barrier between the two beds to create a private space that divides the room: 'behold the Walls of Jericho!' he exclaims. Cavell's reading of this scene is much too detailed for me to recount here. Suffice it to say, however, that what becomes important to his handling of this projected image of the barrier-screen is his claim that the screen invites a series of Kantian reflections on the limits of our knowledge about ourselves, and on the limits of the knowability of things screened. The screen in this case is not only a barrier between male and female spaces, but also represents a kind of metaphysical barrier signifying the unavailability of knowledge we may have of other people, of a certain unintelliginbility of the other to me, despite their appearing before me—there, standing in front of me, 'screened', if you will. Everything hinges on our sense of admittance of this screened projection and—ultimately—of my admittance of the fact that I cannot penetrate an other's behavior so as to access the source of her sensations, that I cannot know an other in that way, nor can I generate criteria that will allow me to know whether her ability to reference an experience—to give voice and project a sensation of suffering, or joy, or humiliation, or grief—is accurate or not. And the point here is that the relation of projection and screen is itself a projection of how we relate to the advenience of appearances. The screen invites a projection but it also creates a veil, a blocked or cropped view: Gable can't see Colbert undressing, though he is painfully aware of her presence when the blanket is dented and rippled by her movements while she disrobes. The barrier-blanket suggests that our inclination to relate our experiences to others in a knowing manner is screened (i.e., thwarted or interrupted); what would it mean here to know the blanket? At best, we can relate our experience of the blanket's foldings and its sensorial affinities. But once we

have done that, have we related a knowledge? Rather than knowing an other, I want to say, we admit their advenience as a screen admits a projection.

Cavell had already worked out some of the ethical, aesthetic, and ontological implications of the relationship between projection, screen, and knowledge in *The World Viewed*. There, in a short but incisive chapter entitled 'Photograph and Screen,' he claims the following:

> The world of a moving picture is screened. The screen is not a support, not like a canvas; there is nothing to support, that way. It holds a projection, as light as light. A screen is a barrier. What does the silver screen screen? It screens me from the world it holds—that is, makes me invisible. And it screens that world from me. That the projected world does not exist (now) is its only difference from reality. (There is no feature, or set of features, in which it differs. Existence is not a predicate.) Because it is the field of a photograph, the screen has no frame; that is to say, no border. Its limits are not so much the edges of a given shape as they are the limitations, or capacity, of a container. The screen *is* a frame; the frame is the whole field of the screen—as a frame of film is the whole field of a photograph, like the frame of the loom or a house. In this sense, the screen-frame is a mold, or form. (1979, pp. 24–25)

Though not the same as a canvas, the screen holds a projection—it handles it by allowing it to shine forth. This is one sense of how a movie pictures something screened: it is light projected upon a smooth surface. But a screen is also a threshold, or a blanket. In order to see the projected light, the spectator must be screened from the projection—one could say, here, that the spectator or viewer does not count to the projection, she is made invisible. The light does not shine on the spectator; rather, the shining of the light upon the screen obscures the viewer. This is a necessary condition for viewing a projected image. And it is only through this projection onto the screen that the appearance of the image can advene. That is, in order for the image to advene, I must be obscured; my *I* that is me—my subjectivity in light of this light, with all its expectations and desires to touch—must be darkened. This is the significance of the screen's capacity to screen me from the projected world, to render me invisible to it. The 'I' must be vanquished, it must be obscured—or, better yet, it must be discomposed—in order for the projection to project. And this screening also screens that world from me. The two worlds cannot touch because screened form one another: 'existence is not a predicate.' The presence of another projection is not predicated on my having to be present, to be visible, to be there to touch it. The appearance advenes and the best that I can do is admit the projection once it is screened; but to do so is not to touch it, or to penetrate it, or to expose the image. If we expose the image, the appearance vanishes; just as if we were to let ambient light into a room where an image is being projected, the image would no longer be visible. There is nothing we can do to penetrate the appearance and anything we might do risks disturbing or destroying it. This is the lightness of the projection that advenes but does not admit illumination. We must be very careful as to how we handle pictures. The screen is a limit to our knowing and to our being able to handle the world in a knowing manner—to our wanting to contain the world by knowing it. The screen thus has no frame (as might a canvas)

but is said *to be* the frame that holds the projection. But what is the nature of this holding and how can one hold something as light as light?

One holds it by attending to it, by turning our attentions to it, by allowing ourselves to be absorbed or be held by it, by admitting it. In his account of the ontological relation between screen and projection I see Cavell making an ethical claim about our aesthetic ways of relating to one another that indicates at least two possible senses of touching, two distinct hapticities: on the one hand there is the sensibility that Wittgenstein isolates in the image of the philosopher and his desire to touch the source of our sensations with his insistent 'this'. I have characterized this sense of touch in terms of an expository power directed at appearances. The hapticity of the expositive wants to point and touch the source of our experiences in order to affirm them and provide evidentiary support for our convictions, as if it were possible to penetrate one's bodies and confirm the exact source of our sensations. To invoke Critchley's insights once again, an expositive attitude cannot acknowledge the infinite demand of the ethical. Consider here the image of the Doubting Thomas who must thrust his hands into Christ's wound in order to accept the presence of the image and refuse the weight of the appearance. The Doubting Thomas is a picture of exposure.

Another order of hapticity is that of projection, of an image that is as light as light and that touches as light might, but that also invites an ungraspable touch that cannot penetrate. What would it mean to penetrate light? At best, we could cast a shadow, or create another, superimposed projection. Here I am taken by Cavell's expression of a world held by the screen. To the extent that the world is a projection, it is a world of surfaces whose depths cannot be plunged and plundered. And yet, it is not merely superficial either. There is a profundity of surface here that calls for a different kind of handling—for the kind of handling that is attentive to the adventitious dimensions of appearances. It is this kind of handling that sources an ethics of appearances. The standing forth of an appearance projects a luminosity that calls our attention. Attending to such an advenience—by which I mean to bearing its weight as does the screen that holds the light of a projection—requires a willingness to care for that which bodies forth and a manner of handling that resists the temptation to touch the image in order to expose and relate it.

Part III: Conclusion

What I want to say, by means of concluding this set of remarks sparked by Critchely's reflections on screens and projections, is that our ways of admittance—of our facing up to and at pictures—are a projection of our ways of admittance of one another. Exposure and projection are, in this regard, two distinct hapticities for handling the world that carry with them a certain ethical orientation. The former is indebted to a desire to know the source of an appearance, to dissect our pictures, and penetrate their references; the latter is born of the conviction that comes with aesthetic experience and that

(continued)

admits of the limits of our knowability precisely because such experiences do not afford a commanding access to the sources of our sensorial affections. I call this latter sensibility an intangible sympathy.

By intangible sympathy, I refer to the hetero-affective relationship between projection and screen that I have contrasted with the expository mode of handling pictures. Attending to the projection of an appearance involves a concernful awareness of the ways in which a person or a thing enters a scene, stands forth, luminates, or advenes. To project an image on a screen invites a dissensual touch because the projection can never really make an impression. The screen arrests a projection and by arresting it, it bears its weight—it holds the appearance. We could say, in this regard, that the screen concerns itself with the projection; it beholds it; it bears the projection without knowing it.[4] And the manner of this concernful handling is one attentive to the experience of an intangible sympathy that comprises the event of advenience.

In a passing remark towards the end of *Infinitely Demanding*, Critchley says that the political task of democratization 'is one of inventing a name around which a political subject can be aggregated from the various social struggles through which we are living' (2007, pp. 103–104). It is precisely this activity of inventing names for the sensations of conviction that arise from the advenience of an appearance that I deem crucial to the aesthetico-political dimensions of democratic part-takings. To say this is to suggest that an alternative way to think about the relationship of aesthetics and politics is to consider how our handlings of aesthetic objects are ontological sources for our handling of one another. And to the extent that such handlings admit to a fundamental intangibility—or an interstitial distance—I want to echo Critchley's affirmation that we might begin to acknowledge a dissensual core in our conceptions of democratic citizenship. The appearance of a new political subjectivity, a new cultural group, or social formation—on this

(continued)

[4] In the forward to the revised edition of *The World Viewed* (1979) Cavell recounts the difficulty of talking with some accuracy about films when, writing in the 1970s, all that he had available to him were his memories of them. As such, he recounts repeated acts of 'mistaken memory' that appear in the original edition of the book. Such mistaken memories remain uncorrected in subsequent editions. The question is why? In one sense, Cavell answers this by claiming that despite the mistaken memory, the interpretations he gives of films remain intact. But there is a subtext—or an underlying set of questions—here that bears rehearsing. Most importantly, I read Cavell's relationship to the memories of films seen as asking a similar kind of question as Wittgenstein does when he ponders as to what might happen when language goes on holiday? That is, what forgettings must we achieve—what memory images must go on holiday—in order for one to be responsive to a film? What knowledge must we forego, in other words, so that we are able to say something about these images? Here, the foregoing of knowledge seems essential to aesthetic experience.

rendering—does not demand our consent but enlists our attention; the appearance claims admission through a kind of handling that attends to the intangibility of its advenience. Citizenship is dissensual because it discomposes our ways of indicating and touching what is at once essential an accessory. In short, our willingness to admit an advenience is a projection of our willingness to admit of one another.

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Chapter 8
Simon Critchley's Problem of Politics and Hannah Arendt's Idealism for the USA

Roland A. Champagne

Introduction

Hannah Arendt (1906–1975) was trained as a philosopher and made her mark as a political theorist. Having studied philosophy with Martin Heidegger and Karl Jaspers, she gathered insights that led her from philosophy to political theory. I will examine her intellectual migration from a personal concern with philosophy to a political involvement in community. Hannah Arendt's journey toward the discovery of ethics in politics is a model for how a stranger discovers community and can make politics responsive to difference.

During her lifetime, she became especially well known for having described both conservative (right wing) and progressive (left wing) governments as capable of totalitarian rule (Arendt 1951). In the 1960s she was involved in delineating American democracy as typically pluralistic and was engaged by discussions about civil rights and the Vietnam War (Arendt 1972). The continuing relevance of her thinking over time is especially apparent when her methods are applied to the issue of politics as isolated by Simon Critchley in his appreciation of the impact of the ethics of Emmanuel Levinas: 'the problem of politics [is] that of delineating a form of political life that will repeatedly interrupt all attempts at totalization' (Critchley 1992, p. 223). If the word 'totalization' can be defined as a closed, inclusive world view that solves all known problems, like a metaphysical theory, then Arendt's framing of the problem of totalitarian government as an ideological formation that closes political options for those it governs is a projection of philosophy into politics. Arendt advocates an ethical stance in relation to alterity as a response to totalizing politics, what she called 'totalitarianism.' Hence Arendt's thinking addresses 'the problem of politics' and gives this problem a particular pertinence

R.A. Champagne (✉)
Trinity University, San Antonio, TX, USA
e-mail: rchampag@TRINITY.EDU

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A. Welchman (ed.), *Politics of Religion/Religions of Politics*,
Sophia Studies in Cross-cultural Philosophy of Traditions and Cultures 8,
DOI 10.1007/978-94-017-9448-0_8

not only for the USA but for the universal nature of the moral issues confronting the USA and its particular form of democracy.

In this post- 9/11 era, ethical issues have become governmental problems for the USA. Moral dilemmas have arisen in the decisions within the American government regarding the use of torture at Abu Ghraib, the recurring debate over a woman's right to decide whether to have an abortion or not, the moral responsibilities of the arbiters of the housing market, gay rights, and immigration. More than ever, Arendt's insights have relevance in the debates over these issues arising from entrenched and polarizing ideological positions. For example, the use of torture in the second Bush Administration was closely allied with support for the war on terror, and hence rejection of torture as ethically compromised connected ideologically with support for terror. Arendt's ethical principles encourage a more nuanced approach to such issues, in particular by means of the close connections she makes between *conscience* and *consciousness* (see below).

In her universal appeal to our current age, Arendt is first of all a humanist whose philosophical and political thinking is grounded in language.[1] For example, she comments on how critique—etymologically derived from the Greek word *krinein*, 'to divide,'—constitutes a culturally embedded vision for her: 'When I only knew one language, I had the impression of a universe in which anything that was different cluttered up my thinking. When I learned the romance languages, I appeared to go through an incredible transformation, I changed my view of the world, I could no longer call things by their name' (Daniel and Ricoeur 1998, p. 10, my translation). From this process of learning French and English in addition to her native German, Arendt's critical thinking begins. For example, inspired by the French word *conscience*—which means both 'consciousness' and 'conscience,'—she defines 'conscience' as 'the relation between me and myself' (Arendt 1987, p. 84). This dialogue within herself initiates her journey as a stranger toward a receptive body politic within the context of her study of philosophy.

With the guidance of Heidegger and Jaspers, Arendt read Greek philosophy. From these heady university days, she developed an appreciation for Plato's description of thinking as 'the two-in-one of the soundless dialogue' (Arendt 1971, p. 446). This 'soundless dialogue' recalls the distinction/identification she made between conscience and consciousness and directs her perspective about the individual as a thinking being. For her, the ideal of the 'the man of action'—as promoted in such novels as Drieu la Rochelle's *Gilles* (1939), André Malraux's *Man's Fate* (the English title of *La Condition humaine*, 1933), and Louis Aragon's *Aurélien* (1944)—embodies an ideology that, in the middle third of the twentieth century, precludes thought. Arendt reacts to this 'man of action' by developing Socrates's dictum that 'an unexamined life is not worth living.' We can see a similar recourse to action as opposed to reflection in the aftermath of 9/11 when

[1] The problems of time and timeliness are paramount in Arendt's work, and in what follows I will use the present tense to in discussing Arendt's work in its continuing pertinence to current political crises and will employ the past tense only to describe events during her lifetime.

the USA rushed into Iraq under the misguided intelligence about the WMD (weapons of mass destruction) presented to the United Nations and to the American people as fact. Indeed, critical thinking at that time could have been the more responsible act in a world obsessed with action. Hence, self-reflection is counter-intuitive in a society that is obsessively focused on military action, as was the European world which she left during the 1930s and1940s, and as also is our post-9/11 world, in which a terrorist act generates calls for knee-jerk revenge.

Arendt's awareness of the crucial role that community plays for the self leads her to provide parameters for the survival of the conscientious self. Within community, the self develops a critical conscience or conscientiousness that is receptive to and promotes friendship by means of concerted effort among the members of a body politic. She admires the idealist ethics of Immanuel Kant. For her, the virtuous pursuit of friendship within the politics of a community is the ultimate Kantian categorical imperative and becomes the basis for her vision of 'the reciprocal action of humans one toward the other' (Finkielkraut 2009, p. 116, my translation).

Arendt's mature political vision develops through five stages: her awareness of her status as a foreigner (I. The Stranger as Political Spectator) leads her to make political distinctions about space (II. The Private in the Public); the protection of personal privacy through law reveals a gap in the lack of protection for minority groups (III. Self-Conscious Pariah) within a democracy ruled by the majority; this results in her arguing for an interrogation of the interaction of law and the moral values of majority groups (IV. Questioning Political Space) in order to underwrite an ethics of hospitality toward others; and such a politics of alterity includes her advocacy of community action (V. Ethics in Community) as a generator of social change.

Arendt is close to Levinas here in that when he proposes 'infinity' as a vantage for opening the discussion of ethical thinking in opposition to 'totality' as a closed system that does not recognize the otherness of others. For Arendt eternal time plays a crucial role in authorizing an ongoing vision of the nature of friendship within an ethically conscious political community. Friendship develops innately from the individual's internal ethical dialogue between consciousness and conscience for the infinite development of ever-expanding concepts of tolerance between the self and its others. Arendt's view of friendship re-directs the isolation of pariahs by involving others in discussing the ethical parameters of democracy. Her own story as a foreigner gaining civic recognition exemplifies this case for ethics in political community.

The Stranger as Political Spectator

Arendt saw herself as marginalized early in life. Fleeing the Nazi Holocaust as a German Jew, Arendt was a stranger in France and then in the USA. She found comfort in philosophy that welcomed her into 'the supremacy of the spectator's way of life' (Arendt 1982b, p. 55), what she calls the *bios theoretikos*. The Greek

verb *theorein* means 'to look at' and lends dramatic context to Arendt's reflections. She sees herself as a player in political theater, that is, as a speaker on the moral stage of the political action being described (Collin 1992, p. 31). Arendt's look at politics is an ethical opportunity for her consciousness and conscience to interact prior to her moving into the arena of action. She prefers to see her conscience as the awareness of knowledge to create the basis for political decisions. Her struggle to determine what she knows or believes provides the moral setting for her political observations. She brings her reading of Kant into her reflection about moral perspective because, while she insists that 'in the course of speaking of [the world] we learn to be human' (Arendt 1955, p. 25), she is struck that 'the inhumanity of Kant's moral philosophy is undeniable' (p. 27). So she injects humanity into his ethics by describing the self struggling with the world through the twofold operations of conscience and consciousness. This anguish is opposed by the need to attain understanding internally and a political presence of the self externally. While establishing a moral perspective, she moves onto the political stage where she finds herself being narrated by others despite her conscious efforts to look outward toward these others.

Arendt's present drama of politics came out of her past and her struggles with that past. The nineteenth-century Rahel Varnhagen's conflicted self, trapped between being a pariah and her assimilated Jewishness, is the subject for Arendt's narrative, subtitled *The Life of a Jewish Woman* (Arendt 1974), a life pattern echoing the author's own identity in New York City after her immigration as a 'stateless person' in 1941 (Young-Bruehl 1982, pp. 115–163). After ten years as a resident foreigner she became a citizen of the USA. Citizenship enabled her to look from the inside of her adopted body politic. Unlike the French and German nationalities, which are tied to their languages, American citizenship is the participation in a pluralism that is practiced in its democratic form of government. Arendt claims that this pluralism is the distinction of democracy in the USA. She is continually interested in looking beyond identity patterns because, for her, 'clichés, stock phrases, adherence to conventional, standardized codes of expression and conduct have the socially recognized function of protecting us against reality, that is, against the claim of our thinking attention which all events and facts arouse by virtue of their existence' (Arendt 1971, p. 418). Hence, she looks beyond the identity politics of a single ideology for ways to promote the acceptance of alterity without assimilation. Once again, Arendt needs to complicate the space in which she finds herself. This need to 'divide' (*krinein*) leads her to advance distinctions that enable her to have multiple identities simultaneously.

The Private in the Public

Turning the individual toward community involvement is Arendt's primary political agenda. She scoffs at the ideal of individualism fostered in democracy as practiced in the USA. While the private/public distinction may appear unfortunate

to those who see the distinction as an opportunity to restrict women to the home, in fact Arendt advocates the extension of private space into public space, for the individual to reach out and become political. She observes that 'the two realms [of the public and the private] indeed constantly flow into each other like waves in the never-resting stream of the life process itself' (Arendt 1958, p. 33). Arendt admires the embodiment of the inter-penetration of private and public spaces in Rosa Luxembourg, one of the founders of the Spartacus League that evolved into the German Communist Party. Luxembourg became German by marriage and linked her private life to the public space of the Sparticist uprising in 1919. Luxembourg thus exemplifies Arendt's promotion of the awareness of 'the web of human relationships' (Arendt 1958, p. 184) where the most private expression of human action can be realized in the public space 'where freedom can appear' (Benhabib 1992, p. 78).

The temporal concerns of political action involve the moral voice of conscience as Arendt investigates political rituals relating private and public spaces. Her identification of religion with its etymon *religare* ('tying back together'), in speaking about the Roman and American models of revolt, requires the existence of rituals of the public space where participants seek 'to bind themselves back to a beginning' (Arendt 1963b, p. 199). Time relates political spaces through the moral choices the individual makes to enter the public space from the private one. The collective search for a beginning implies a common search for origins, not unlike the common ethical code that binds a community together and recalls what Arendt identifies in Kant's morality as 'the coincidence of the private and the public' (Arendt 1982a, p. 49). She is also haunted, however, by the personal view of how the community, such as the German one during the National Socialist rule, can also produce 'collective guilt' (Arendt 1945, p. 20) that erases individual responsibility for heinous communal acts such as genocide.

The Self-Conscious Pariah

Arendt's own political involvement during the 1920s in Germany made her conscious that Zionism would provide the means to make ethical distinctions between parvenu and pariah. Prior to the hope of Zionism for Jews, political anti-Semitism totalized (in the Levinas sense of restricting ethical otherness to intelligibility) Jews as others who could only be pariahs if they rejected assimilation. In her biography of Varnhagen (Arendt 1974), Arendt questions the assimilation of Jews that led to the distinction between the parvenu and the pariah. She sees herself also as a pariah from the mainstream, as one who values independent thinking. For her, Zionism was not primarily the ambition of Herzl, with his idealistic promotion of a nationalist identity for Jews in the middle of Palestine, but rather the thoughtful case made by Bernard Lazare during the Dreyfus Affair, and later by Kurt Blumenfeld in Germany during the 1920s. Lazare's Zionism valued being a politically conscious pariah rather than the parvenu who represented a false equality for assimilated

Jews. Instead of Varnhagen as the model of a Jewish woman who 'spent most of her life using her gender in an attempt to escape her Jewishness' (On 1997, p. 296), Arendt uses her own time as a model when she decides to struggle with the insider-outsider paradigm of Jewishness and to declare herself a stranger. Her own historical setting places her politically in the world as she writes that 'every single person needs to be reconciled to a world into which he is born a stranger and in which, to the extent of his distinct uniqueness, he always remains a stranger' (Arendt 1994, p. 308). These words resound in the feminism of Julia Kristeva for whom women must remain in the margins to better see themselves in their distinctiveness (Moi 1987, pp. 150–176).

Arendt does not ignore the importance of these margins. In fact, she advocates moving from the margins of the private life to an accessible public life. By distinguishing the public from the private, Arendt builds upon the prior difference attributed to the parvenu/pariah distinction, as insightfully described by Benhabib: 'the *public* is a term of inclusion as well as exclusion. . .based upon defining the 'we' and the 'they,' that which is properly public and that which is private' (Benhabib 1996, p. 206). Hence either term is implied in the other such that the space of the margins remains for the woman who can enter the public arena of politics. Arendt retains her pariah status as one who is in the margins of the private arena, which invests the public with ethical meaning. Such ethical activity places time as the lock-step succession of past-present-future in the context of infinity whose temporal openness allows differences to be accepted without historical prejudice. This is the realm of Arendt's intellectual model of 'the pearl diver' whose 'thinking delves into the depths of the past' (Arendt 1955, p. 205) and retrieves lessons that promote alterity like the pearl of an oyster. Sometimes, however, the pariah uses this exceptional status as an excuse to become part of 'inner emigration' (Arendt 1955, p. 22). Such a condition marks the individual who accepts the calling of pariah to avoid dealing with being in the world and that is 'the great privilege of being unburdened by care for the world' (Arendt 1955, p. 14). This care for the world draws one into the public space of work.

The validation of the public space involves the balance between conscience and consciousness so crucial for the condition of women in the workplace. Equality of working conditions and fair compensation are working goals that are often not realized because working women are identified by gender to the exclusion of their condition as workers. Benhabib isolates Arendt's contribution to this predicament: 'Arendt ontologizes the division of labor between the sexes, biological suppositions which have historically confined women to the household and to the sphere of reproduction alone' (Honig 1995, p. 98). There is much more that must be recognized in the political self-awareness of the pariah. Arendt insists that 'implicit in the urge to speak is the quest for meaning. . . ' (Arendt 1978a, v. 1, p. 99). She narrates her own story concerning the Zionism of Bernard Lazare, who inspired her 'to rouse the Jewish pariah to a fight against the Jewish parvenu' (Arendt 1978a, v. 2, p. 68). In this process women can also learn to fight their assimilation into mainstream society and thus to question the single dimension of the word 'woman.' Arendt sees herself as a questioning pariah who cannot simply accept the place of the margins

but rather questions the others by reference to her position as an outsider. This marginalization leads her to the questioning of all essentialist identities, including her Jewishness, which entails much struggle because, as she admits, 'the trouble is that I am independent' (Arendt 1978b, p. 250). Her independence brings her the strength of her probing questions, sometimes without ready answers, and also the concomitant sense of conscience, which ensues and promises comfort. She does not pursue independence calmly simply to seek her own identity. Instead, she leads with her questions about the very nature of the space where the pariah can be at home with her otherness.

Questioning Political Space

Haunted by the worldlessness of the parvenu as embodied by Varnhagen, Arendt focuses on being in the world and letting the world know about her presence. This situating of the self entails negotiating time and space with the self, that is, the identity of the self as perceived by others. Identity politics has been a shadow of cultural history, especially for the last 50 years. 'Identity crises' (Dunn 1998) have been magnified by the global tensions of the post 9/11 era. While Arendt refuses the issue of a single identity for herself, she also questions the practice of assimilation into a political identity. By marking the political alternatives of fascism, communism, and capitalism as equally capable of totalitarian rule (Arendt 1951), Arendt points to the dangers of political assimilation. Arendt rejected the label of either left- or right-wing. This refusal recalls her analysis of totalitarian government as being characteristic of neither progressive nor conservative rulers. Instead, it is identity that becomes a prison in the public space.

Whether for her time and space or ours, Arendt questions the totalization of ideology whereby a parvenu is assimilated and figuratively 'disappeared' in a foreign environment. She wrestles with the direction and the parameters of a politics that could promote an ethics of hospitality toward others. Rather than to reduce others to the sameness of the self, such an ethics would accept difference in others. Arendt's awareness that moral conduct is still possible leads her to search for the values that human thinking promotes in the body politic. She advocates for moral qualities in the public space. She was especially concerned with forgiveness as a political virtue. This is not Christian forgiveness, rather it is the forgiveness learned from the Jewish rituals of the High Holidays, Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. Forgiveness of this kind has no mediator and is an annual act that is interpersonal rather than divine. Kristeva brings the psychoanalytical perspective to bear in explaining that, for Arendt, '... forgiveness is addressed to the person, not the act' (Kristeva 2001, p. 80). This forgiveness comes into play in the political application of tolerance, during her lifetime between the Arabs and the Jews in the settlement of Israel, then between blacks and whites during the 1960s in the civil rights movement. She even dared, in her *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, to question why 'there was no mention of decent Arabs' (Arendt 1963a, p. 13) while the Nazis and

the Arabs were lumped together and portrayed as the enemies of civilization during the show trial.

Questioning without receiving answers is frustrating and generates hostility in the disenfranchised who are looking for answers. Arendt admires Rosa Luxemburg's 'commitment to revolution [as] primarily a moral matter' (Arendt 1955, p. 51) rather than the armed, military action planned by Lenin. Civil disobedience is always an option. The democratic form of government is no better at responding to questions from minority groups than other forms of government because the real hindrance to questioning is in capitalism, which refuses to be subject to the demands of pluralistic democracy and alterity. Sounding like Theodor Adorno or Jean Baudrillard, Arendt recognizes, along with Marx, the inhumanity of capitalism in 'the alienation that results from the commodity fetishism inherent in money relations between people' (Arendt 1982a, p. 77). This interest for capital is the political question of 'inter-est,' which she defines as that which 'lies between people and therefore can relate and bind them together' (Arendt 1958, p. 182). In theory, politics should provide such a glue; but often capitalist greed divides political discussion between those who have capital and those who do not. Arendt nevertheless looks within political discussion for that which lies 'between people.' The binding power of community attracts her as she seeks answers to her political questioning. From her story of the public, self-conscious pariah, she finds redemption in ethical politics.

The Ethical in the Community

Arendt finds hope that ethics is possible in political life. The plurality inherent in the democracy of the USA is a source of ethical activity by virtue of the dialogic opportunities it affords. While espousing the survival of moral conduct in the body politic, Arendt moves toward the identification of infinity as the working concept of political time. As with storytelling in which she observes that 'the end of the story itself is in infinity' (Arendt 1982a, p. 77), so concerted action of members of a community working and struggling together toward common moral goals participates in the openness of infinity, that is, in change that accepts the otherness of others. Her positioning of ethical infinity as openness to difference parallels what Levinas's *Totality and Infinity* (1969) does in opposing infinity to totality and hence defining ethics as an affirmation of alterity.

Arendt locates the workshop for ethics in political communities. Individuals of varying backgrounds and interests come together for a common political purpose, even if it is a violent plurality entailing civil disobedience. One of her desired goals for such political cohesion is a quality that Arendt borrows from Heidegger: *Gelassenheit*—the calmness that allows others to be, to exist in their otherness rather than to be assimilated through understanding or identity. The differences of others must be respected in an ethical setting for politics and government. Democracy that functions through plurality in the USA can place the self in a relationship

of tolerance with respect to others. Arendt's work in the public space of the civil rights movement exemplified her own commitment to this ideal. She thus posits *Gelassenheit* as a calmness that allows others to be within the common political purposes of friendship. Her vision of consciousness and conscience as part of a mutual, dialectical thinking process also recalls that responsibility within a community is not merely responding to the moral imperatives of Kant's system, but 'it flows naturally out of an innate pleasure in making manifest, in clarifying the obscure, in illuminating the darkness' (Arendt 1955, p. 75). In such a new Enlightenment, consciousness and conscience go hand in hand with what Arendt calls 'collective responsibility' (Arendt 1987, p. 46), that is, whether an individual's conduct is good for the world in which she or he lives.

The context of the individual's conduct is a key to Arendt's ethics. She finds community as the public space for the individual within the ties of friendship. The common moral interests of friendship form the basis of community. Arendt derives this insight from Lessing's *Nathan the Wise* wherein 'Lessing... considered friendship...to be the central phenomenon whereby alone true humanity can prove itself' (Arendt 1955, p. 12). Arendt's vision for individuals joined by friendship is the basis for an ethical politics. Returning to Critchley, he places both ethics and politics within the scope of justice: 'At the level of justice, I and the Other are co-citizens of a common *polis*' (Critchley 1992, p. 232). In this sense, both Critchley and Arendt visualize ethical politics as a worldwide model for universal justice.[2]

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[2] Many thanks to Nina Ekstein, Peter Fuss, and Brian Vandenberg for their assistance with the thinking and the writing of this article.

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Chapter 9
The World as Farce

Costica Bradatan

Prelude

In the second chapter of his *Se questo è un uomo* (significantly called 'On the bottom'/'Sul fondo'), Primo Levi describes the experience of his first encounter with the concentration camp. In an attempt to make some sense of it, he first seeks to convey his experience using the imagery of the Inferno—an out-of-the-ordinary imagery, no doubt, but still, in a certain sense, a familiar one, if one may say so:

> This is the hell. Today, in our time, the hell must be precisely like this, a large and empty room, with us dead tired standing on our feet; there is a faucet from which water drips, but the water is undrinkable, and we are waiting for something certainly terrible to happen and nothing happens and nothing keeps not happening [*non sisuccedeniente e continua a non succedereniente*]. (Levi 1986, p. 31)[1]

Let us notice that the word 'nothing' (*niente*) occurs twice, in quick succession, within the same sentence. Then, Levi goes on with his account, trying to record, with characteristic matter-of-factness, as much as possible. One may reasonably expect that he will produce a faithful description of what he saw, heard, felt, however terrible that must have been; after all, he is known for his precise prose. Nevertheless, only a few pages later, despite Levi's best intentions, we reach a point where his narrative is about to collapse. It is obviously not a matter of skill: no writer, no matter how good he is, could say it. The problem does not lie in the writer, but in the language itself. Levi ends up confessing that he lies on a threshold beyond which language is overtly impotent: 'our language lacks the words to express this indignity [*offesa*], the demolition of man [*la demolizione di unuomo*] (1986, p. 36). Such an experience is simply too much for the poor language to bear.

[1] Unless otherwise noted, all translations are my own.

C. Bradatan (✉)
Texas Tech University, Lubbock, TX, USA
e-mail: Costica.Bradatan@ttu.edu

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A. Welchman (ed.), *Politics of Religion/Religions of Politics*,
Sophia Studies in Cross-cultural Philosophy of Traditions and Cultures 8,
DOI 10.1007/978-94-017-9448-0_9

To put this infinite *offesa* into words would be like attempting to pour the ocean into a cup.

The absolute silence that thus environs him turns out to be a form of revelation. Ordinarily, revelations compel one to speak (if in tongues); in Levi's case, however, revelation makes him mute. The 'reality that is revealed' to him, through a 'quasi prophetic intuition,' is that he, along with the others around him, has 'reached the bottom [*siamo arrivati al fondo*]' (Levi 1986, p. 36). Deeper than this they cannot sink simply because there is nowhere to go:

> Lower than this one cannot go: a more miserable condition than ours is not possible, not even thinkable. Nothing is ours anymore: they have taken away our clothes, our shoes, even the hair from our head; if we speak, they don't listen to us, if they listen, they don't understand. (Levi 1986, p. 36)

In the process of their demolition, these people seem to have unwittingly crossed the line that separates humanity from non-humanity: '*se parleremo*, *non ci ascolteranno*, *ese ascoltassero*, *non ci capirebbero*' (Levi 1986, p. 36). If you happen to find yourself beyond this thin line, you are not recognizable as a human anymore: you speak and your words die at the very moment you utter them. Jean Améry, who went through the same experience, says something very similar, although in a slightly different context: 'In the camp the intellect. . . could be used for its *own abolishment* . . . it nullified itself when at almost every step ran into its uncrossable borders' (1980, p. 19). Yet, ontologically, if you cross the boundary that separates humanity from non-humanity, you don't just bump into some other animal species, but into *nothing*—you find yourself, if you do at all, in a state of total void, of 'solid nothingness,' as Leopardi would have put it (2004, p. 85). Had the word not been overused and turned into a fashion by philosophers, we may call this a state of utter 'nihilism'.

Then, we come across, in the same chapter two of Primo Levi's book, an extraordinary insight, one that may help us get a firmer footing on this particularly unfriendly ground. Overwhelmed by the experience of his first encounter with the camp, Levi observes, '[m]y impression is that all this is a huge machine [whose purpose is] to laugh at us [*la mia idea è chetutto questo è una grande macchina per ridere dinoi*]' (1986, p. 33). He drops this note somehow in passing and does not seem to pay much attention to it. Yet, his insight can be of enormous importance for making some sense not only of the otherwise meaningless situation in which Levi personally found himself at that time, but also for understating other, equally meaningless, totalitarian contexts. For, paradoxical as it may sound, if somebody or something is laughing at your suffering, this suffering becomes somehow graspable. If you can say that your ordeals, terrible as they are, have been *meant* by some entity—if an evil one—as a way of laughing at you, that's already a *promise of meaning*. There is something here that transcends the sheer factuality of suffering, pointing to the possibility of a broader frame of reference, one within which meaning can still be possible. This is a point that Nietzsche makes brilliantly in his *Genealogy of Morality*. What's particularly humiliating about an experience like Levi's is not so much the physicality of pain, hunger, exhaustion, as it is the

infinite mental anguish that accompanies the whole process: the realization that your unspeakable suffering is, and will remain forever, utterly meaningless. Let me give an example: Roberto Benigni's *La vita è bella*. There is in Benigni's story as much suffering as in any other Holocaust movie. Yet, what distinguishes Benigni's approach is the formal angle from which he decides to tell his story, the framework that he uses to tame the anguish: the suffering he describes become part of a game (*gioco*), the cruelest of games, no doubt, but still a game, something you can play, engage in, or just follow. The cathartic laughter that the film occasions in the viewer is triggered precisely by the realization that Guido Orefice decides to play along. To the extent that he *can* still join the game, he is not completely crushed. The 'machine' laughs at him, but at the same time this is precisely what 'saves' him in a way. He joins in the laughter and, in so doing, shows that he still has some autonomy left: that he can decide to do or *not* do certain things, perform or *not* perform certain actions, which still means a lot when you are in a limit-situation. The machine kills him in the end, but it cannot crush him. He is 'saved' by his laughter, and ours. There is thus a sense in which Benigni's film comes very close to Levi's insight, if it is not born right out of it.

In this chapter, I propose to examine the following issue: how is meaning possible in *a world* (experienced) *as farce*—be it a political, historical, metaphysical, or cosmic farce? One of the assumptions guiding my approach is what Simon Critchley sees as a redefined 'labor of interpretation.' In *Very Little, . . . Almost Nothing* he observes that 'the task, the labor of interpretation—whether religious, socio-economic, scientific, technological, political, aesthetic or philosophical—is *the concrete reconstruction of the meaning of meaninglessness*' (Critchley 1997, p. 27). Primo Levi's world—the world of Auschwitz and of the Gulag, the world of the totalitarianism—is by definition a world of meaninglessness, and what I seek to do here is precisely to show how meaning can be created against a background of meaninglessness. Even though this approach may take me in a different direction, I owe Critchley the framing of my exploration precisely in these terms.

I will therefore be approaching the issue of meaning creation in totalitarian conditions from a specific situational angle (the world considered as farce). Thematically, this perspective could be seen as part of *theologia ludens* tradition (see Bradatan 2009, pp. 58–63), the vision according to which God creates the world just like an artist creates a work of art—that is, by way of playing with it (see Huizinga 1950). For a *Deus ludens*, we are nothing but a 'plaything,' something' very little. . . almost nothing' at the mercy of a playful divinity (see Mazzotta 1993, p. 227). In this chapter, I take farce to be a form of play and 'world as farce' to be part of *theologia ludens*. Moreover, I take *Deus ludens* to be a 'god of many names': those who come to experience themselves as being 'toyed with' don't always call it 'God'; sometimes they see it as 'the Will' (as Schopenhauer does in *The World as Will and Representation*) or 'history' (as Milan Kundera does in *The Joke*, which I discuss below), or, as we just saw in the case of Primo Levi, the 'laughing machine'.

My chapter has several parts. First of all, since it is necessary to provide a brief philosophical clarification of the notion of the world as farce, I will discuss its

presence in *The Brothers Karamazov*. Dostoevsky's work is worth engaging with here not only because of its intrinsic literary merits, but also because the notion of the universe as a divine joke, as the novel presents it, could offer a glimpse into the mechanisms of the more general vision that the world in which we live may be a farce of some sort or another. We can easily remove God from this *schema* and replace it with some other string-puller (the Will, Auschwitz, history itself); yet, the fact remains that the individual thus trapped, should she have a voice, will always recognize herself in Ivan Karamazov's rebellious philosophy; above all, just like Ivan, she will likely make the same desperate attempts to extract, in Simon Critchley's terms, concrete meaning from the experience of the meaninglessness. In the ensuing section I will explore the notion of history as 'God's playground' (or 'laboratory'). The notion is quite popular among members of the Central European intelligentsia, who have at times gone to great lengths to articulate collective self-representations almost drunk on historical pessimism and geographical fatalism. This vision of Central Europe as 'God's playground' is present, in rather spectacular fashion, in the work of Milan Kundera, to whom I will dedicate another large section. In particular, I will discuss his novel *The Joke* (one of his most autobiographical), where one comes across a clearly articulated vision of the world as farce and history as fond of playing cruel jokes. Finally, in the last section of the chapter, I will sketch a possible philosophical response to the 'totalitarian laughter' that people sometimes hear when a farce-loving history comes to crush them.

The 'Cosmic Farce' Argument for God's Existence

Curiously enough, we owe the notion of the world as a (divine) farce not to any philosopher 'in flesh and blood,' but to an *imagined* philosopher, namely Ivan Karamazov. The unspoken assumption on which my account of Ivan Karamazov 'the philosopher' are based is Mikhail Bakhtin's insight that Dostoevsky's characters are relatively autonomous creatures, independent from their author, that they are 'voices' whose utterances are not at all reducible to Dostoevsky's personal opinions and beliefs (Bakhtin 1984). Trying to identify 'Dostoevsky the thinker,' as does, for example, James Scanlan in an eponymous book (2002), to single out one voice that speaks through all his characters, is, it seems to me, a reductionist approach; it is an impoverishing hermeneutic exercise that not only does injustice to Dostoevsky's work, but also undermines the meaningfulness of literature as such. According to the interpretation I propose, Ivan Karamazov has the right to be considered an actual, full-time philosopher. That he never authored philosophy books or published papers in academic journal cannot be a counterargument: neither did Socrates. What has survived from each of the pre-Socratic philosophers is significantly less than what Ivan Karamazov says in *The Brothers Karamazov*. By pre-Socratic standards, 'The Legend of the Grand Inquisitor' is quite a lengthy treatise. My primary interest here is in Ivan Karamazov as the proponent of a vision

of the universe as farce, something God has 'made in mockery.' Truth be said, Ivan is not completely original in this respect as he, appropriately enough, borrows the topic from his clownish father Fyodor Karamazov. In one of his few moments of intellectual brightness, Fyodor has the following exchange with Ivan:

> Is there a God or not? But seriously. I want to be serious now.
>
> No, there is no God. . .
>
> And is there immortality, Ivan? At least some kind, at least a little, a teeny-tiny one? There is no immortality either.
>
> Not of any kind?
>
> Not of any kind.
>
> Completely zero? Or is there something? Maybe there's some kind of something? At least not nothing?
>
> Completely zero. . . .
>
> Lord, just think how much faith, how much energy of all kinds man has spent on this dream, and for so many thousands of years! Who could be laughing at man like that, Ivan? For the last time, definitely: is there a God or not? It's the last time I'll ask.
>
> For the last time—no.
>
> Then, who is laughing at mankind, Ivan? (*The Brothers Karamazov*, p. 14)

'If God does not exist, then who is laughing at us?' This is an indeed an extraordinary statement. No wonder that, in the economy of Dostoevsky's novel, it takes a profoundly vicious person, a compulsive liar and a constantly inebriated person like Fyodor Karamazov to utter it. As I showed above, the topic of the world as God's plaything has a long history. Importantly, as Giuseppe Mazzotta argues (1993, p. 227), the tradition of the *theologia ludens* conceals an aesthetic program that involves a celebration of God through the beauty of his creations. Fyodor Karamazov, however, twists the central argument of the *theologia ludens* in such a way as to make it almost unrecognizable. Whereas in *theologia ludens* an artist-God is first postulated in order to account for the beauty of the created world, Fyodor first notices the senselessness of the word only to infer from it not God's inexistence (as any orthodox atheist would do), but precisely its scandalous . . . existence. To put it differently: the world in which we find ourselves is so poorly conceived, so unpalatable and fundamentally flawed, that there is no better way to describe it than to call it a farce, a bad (metaphysical) joke.[2] Yet, any farce must have an author, someone has to *want* to make fun of us ('laugh at us'), because cosmic farces don't just happen to float around. Therefore, God must exist.

[2] Of course, Fyodor Karamazov touches here on the old Dualistic (Gnostic, Manichean, Cathar) notion of the world as the creation of an 'evil god' ('principle of darkness'). Fascinating as it is, a discussion of Fyodor and Ivan's position in relation to the Dualistic theology exceeds the scope of this paper.

The Return of the Admission Ticket

Notwithstanding his initial reluctance, Ivan ends up adopting and refining Fyodor's idea of the world as a cosmic farce. One of his most characteristic passions is to collect peculiar facts and anecdotes, expressive incidents that can cast an embarrassing light on God's creation: 'I am an amateur and collector of certain little facts; I copy them down from newspapers and stories, from wherever, and save them …, certain kinds of little anecdotes' (*The Brothers Karamazov*, p. 239). Dostoevsky is quite unequivocal: Ivan gathers these 'little facts' in the way someone gathers 'evidence' to build a 'case.' Moreover, we should remember that, at the beginning of the novel, Ivan is introduced as a writer, already of some fame: he is the author of 'ten-line articles on street incidents, signed "Eyewitness"' (p. 16).

Later on, when he has the crucial conversation with his brother Alyosha, Ivan does not forget to bring with him and make extensive use of the huge file on God he had been compiling. What he reveals in this discussion is a complex philosophy of divine playing, a paradoxical theology according to which the world—as the site of the most incomprehensible of sufferings—is nothing else but a farce of enormous proportions that God is continually staging for its own amusement. Following closely in his father's footsteps, Ivan sees the human beings as 'unfinished, trial creatures created in mockery,' just as he observes how 'millions' of 'God's creatures have been setup only for mockery' (*The Brothers Karamazov*, p. 261). To him the universe was only created to satisfy God's strange sense of humor—at any rate, there is no other way of making sense of such a senseless world. To support this claim, Ivan produces a long list of indignities, absurdities, and anomalies (torturing of children, sadistic killing of innocent people, etc.). Right at the top of Ivan's list, there figures prominently the special pleasure some adults find in torturing little children:

> I positively maintain that this peculiar quality exists in much of mankind—this love of torturing children, but only children. These same torturers look upon all other examples of humankind even mildly and benevolently, being educated and humane Europeans, but they have a great love of torturing children, they even love children in that sense. It is precisely the defenselessness of these creatures that tempts the torturers, the angelic trustfulness of the child, who has nowhere to turn and no one to turn to—that is what enflames the vile blood of the torturer. (*The Brothers Karamazov*, p. 241)

Yet, despite the overwhelming evidence, Ivan wants to remain a fair judge. He is ready to admit that, from a strictly philosophical standpoint, there may be some mysterious superior order, some abstract harmony for whose accomplishment sufferings are needed: 'absurdities are all too necessary on earth. The world stands on absurdities, and without them perhaps nothing at all would happen' (*The Brothers Karamazov*, p. 243). The unpleasant things may be necessary precisely to make the good things appear more prominently. As it were, it is precisely through the dialectical play of contrasts and antinomies that the beauty of the world is made possible; without contrasts the entire universe would be nothing but an amorphous mass: no form, no configuration would ever be possible. God's creation is not a

static, dead entity, but a dynamic whole, one in which the beautiful is born out of the ugly, the truth out of falseness, the good out of evil, the virtue out of sinfulness and remorse. Thus, Ivan Karamazov is not an atheist in any conventional sense. On the contrary: he theoretically accepts God's existence and his role as director of the cosmic show: 'I accept God, not only willingly, but moreover I also accept his wisdom and his purpose, which are completely unknown to us; I believe in order, in the meaning of life, I believe in eternal harmony, in which we are all supposed to merge' (*The Brothers Karamazov*, p. 235).

Ivan's considerations so far are in agreement with the Christian theodicy traditionally conceived. Moreover, this also turns out to be the expert opinion of the devil himself, when it visits Ivan in the famous scene. In a most ironical manner, the devil's speech echoes Ivan's views I have just examined. For 'a simple devil,' the old gentleman is a remarkably orthodox theologian:

> By some pre-temporal assignment . . . I am appointed 'to negate,' whereas I am sincerely kind and totally unable to negate. No, they say, go and negate, without negation there will be no criticism, and what sort of journal has no 'criticism section'? Without criticism, there would be nothing but 'Hosannah.' But 'Hosannah' alone is not enough for life, it is necessary that this 'Hosannah' pass through the crucible of doubt, and soon, in the same vein. . . So they chose themselves a scapegoat, they made me write for the criticism section, and life came about. (*The Brothers Karamazov*, p. 642)

The devil's role is precisely to add to God's creation the necessary dark shades so that the luminous entities in it can appear more magnificently and be better perceived. The devil is in the spice business, so to speak. His job is precisely to make sure that the cosmic comedy is sufficiently tasty: it intensifies the plot, keeps it in motion, and makes it as entertaining as possible. Without the devil's work God's directorial job would be not only incomplete, but also terribly boring:

> We understand this comedy: I, for instance, demand simply and directly that I will be destroyed. No, they say, live, because without you there would be nothing. If everything on earth were sensible, nothing would happen. Without you there would be no events, and there must be events. (*The Brothers Karamazov*, p. 642)

At this point, Ivan takes a significant step in a new direction, a step that Dostoevsky calls 'rebellion.' Ivan decides that, although he has to accept God philosophically, he does not want to accept God's creation: 'I do not accept this world of God's, I do not admit it at all, though I know it exists' (*The Brothers Karamazov*, p. 235). He can see the greatness of the divine project, but precisely for this reason he *rejects* it. For him, there are in God's world indignities, wounds of such a grave nature that no 'final harmony' can redeem them. Whether we place them within a bigger picture or not, they will always remain unaccounted for:

> If everyone must suffer, in order to buy eternal harmony with their suffering, pray tell me what have children got to do with it? It's quite incomprehensible why they should have to suffer, and why they should buy harmony with their suffering. Why do they get thrown on the pile, to manure someone's future harmony with themselves? (*The Brothers Karamazov*, p. 244)

For Ivan Karamazov there is a structural incommensurability, so to speak, between the notion of a final harmony, on the one hand, and the suffering of the innocent, on the other. Certain sufferings are simply unjustifiable, no matter what standards we use. They are sufferings of such a unique nature that they will remain eternally unjustified: even if God himself would be an accountant, he could not, in Ivan's view, come up with anything to justify them. Sufferings of this kind are a *metaphysical scandal*: in a certain way, they are imputable not only to those who actually caused them, but also to God himself:

> I do not … want the mother to embrace the tormentor who let his dogs tear her son to pieces! She dare not forgive him! … she has no right to forgive the tormentor, even if the child himself were to forgive him! … I don't want harmony, for love of humanity I don't want it. I want to remain with unrequited suffering. I'd rather remain with my unrequited suffering and my unquenched indignation, *even if I am wrong*. (*The Brothers Karamazov*, p. 245)

Then, Ivan does something extraordinary: he 'respectfully' returns the 'admission ticket.' God's world may a great show, but he finds it far too expensive:

> They put too high a price on harmony; we can't afford to pay so much for admission. And therefore I hasten to return my ticket. And it is my duty, if only as an honest man, to return it as far ahead of time as possible. Which is what I am doing. It's not that I don't accept God … I just most respectfully return him the ticket. (*The Brothers Karamazov*, p. 245)

The 'return of the admission ticket' is one of the most vivid images of Ivan's rebellion: in a straightforward, highly expressive fashion, he turns his back on God's world, unwilling to pay the price for the show and not at all interested in watching it. There is an irresolvable crisis at the heart of God's creation, a structural ontological flaw, which turns the whole thing into a farce, and Ivan does not want to be part of it, not even as a passive spectator: 'If the suffering of children goes to make up the sum of suffering needed to buy truth, then I assert beforehand that the whole of truth is not worth such a price' (*The Brothers Karamazov*, p. 245). In short, Ivan indicts God for running a metaphysically indecent show.

God's Playground

'God's Playground' is the title of a classic history of Poland (Davies 1984). For obvious reasons, the author (Norman Davies) feels that an explanation would be in order: the title he chose for his book is one of the possible translations of an old Polish phrase (*BożeIgrzysko*), which first appears as the title of a sixteenth-century verse, *Człowiek–BożeIgrzysko* ('Mankind—Bauble of the Gods'). The term has since been a recurrent presence in Polish literature and, says Davies, it can be' aptly used as an epithet for a country where fate has frequently played mischievous tricks, and where a lively sense of humor has always formed an essential item of equipment in the national survival kit' (Davies 1984, Vol. 1, p. xvi). To the extent that Davies is right, the Poles, squeezed as they are between various empires, seem to

have developed a collective self-representation according to which they have perpetually been 'toyed with': they have never decided for themselves, always others have; never been the 'agents' of history, always its 'victims.' To be a Pole is to experience history as an oppressive force, something that will always play tricks on you and that 'laughs' at you. In good Polish tradition, Krzysztof Kieślowski notices at one point:

> I really bear a grudge against history, or perhaps against the geography which treated this country the way it did. No doubt, that's how it has to be—that we'll get thrashed, that we will try to tear ourselves away from where we are and will never succeed. That's our fate. (Stok 1993, p. 141; see also Bradatan 2008)

Moreover, there is a sense in which the Poles' self-representation as 'guinea-pigs' of history is not limited to Poland, but can be found, under various guises, throughout Central-East Europe. This type of historical pessimism (the vision of history as an enslaving force) seems to characterize many Central-East European thinkers; despite whatever divides Eastern Europeans ideologically, philosophically and culturally, history as 'God's playground' is one of the few things they always tend to agree on. For example, in his memoirs (*Arrow in the Blue*), Arthur Koestler christens Central Europe 'the laboratory of our time.' What he has in mind, more specifically, is that, especially during the twentieth century, this place has been cruelly 'experimented with.' His own biography was, in a substantial way, part of a grand-scale historical experiment during which he first witnessed' the financial, then the physical destruction of the cultural stratum from which I came.' Koestler's assessment doesn't need any commentary:

> At a conservative estimate, three out of every four people whom I knew before I was thirty were subsequently killed in Spain, or hounded to death at Dachau, or gassed at Belsen, or deported to Russia, or liquidated in Russia; some jumped from windows in Vienna and Budapest, others were wrecked by the misery and aimlessness of permanent exile. (Koestler 2005, p. 131)

A few decades later, Milan Kundera will use an almost similar terminology: 'in Czechoslovakia . . . history staged an unprecedented experiment' (Kundera 1980, p. 13). It would not be completely accurate to say that life under these conditions is unfree. What characterizes life, according to this collective self-perception, is not so much one's *lack of* freedom, as it is the fact that everything here is done systematically *against* one's freedom. To live in Central-East Europe is to experience not just collective imprisonment, but rape on a grand historical scale.

There is possibly no better illustration of this intrusiveness of history than the story of a street in twentieth-century Prague, which Kundera tells in *The Book of Laughter and Forgetting*. It is the street on which one of the characters (Tamina) was born. The name of this street was Schwerin:

> That was during the war, and Prague was occupied by the Germans. Her father was born on Cernokostelecka Avenue—the Avenue of the Black Church. That was during the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy. When her mother married her father and moved there, it bore the name of Marshal Foch. That was after World War I. Tamina spent her childhood on Stalin Avenue, and when her husband came to take her away, he went to Vinohrady—that is,

> Vineyards—Avenue. And all the time it was the same street; they just kept changing its name, trying to lobotomize it. (Kundera 1980, p. 158)

Other writers from the region will convey a similar impression: here it is not people that make history. On the contrary, it is history that makes and remakes the people (see Bradatan 2010).

Ein Meister aus Zentral Europa

Much of Milan Kundera's *œuvre* is a constant engagement with the theme of the historical world (especially in Central Europe) as a grand-scale 'laboratory,' a space specially designated for toying with people, nations and ideas. Kundera's lifelong obsession with 'the tragedy of Central Europe' is equaled in intensity only by his passionate preoccupation with the farcical aspects of existence and the theatrical side of life. On one hand, he perceives history as 'an alien force' that we 'cannot control' (Kundera 1995, p. 16), openly admitting that 'all my novels breath a hatred of history, of that hostile, inhuman force that—uninvited, unwanted—invades our lives from the outside and destroys them' (Kundera 1995, p. 16; see also Kundera 1984). On the other hand, he praises Jaroslav Hašek for creating an unforgettable character whose main task is to undermine systematically the presumptions of the *status quo*, wherever he could find it: 'Jaroslav Hašek's brave soldier Švejk imitates the ceremonies of the surrounding world with such zeal that he transforms them into an enormous joke' (Petro 1999, p. 42). Kundera is one of Hašek's greatest admirers and does not hesitate to place him in the proximity of Rabelais, as brilliant representatives of the same tradition of the European novel of popular inspiration.

One of the most obvious instantiations of this characteristic of Kundera's work is to be found in Kundera's novel *The Joke* (*Žert*, 1967), which many scholars consider to be one of his most autobiographical pieces. The whole plot is set in motion by what, under normal circumstances, should pass as an innocent joke. It is the early 1950s. Ludvik Jahn, a promising Prague student and supporter of the freshly installed Communist regime, sends a postcard to a female colleague whom he saw as a bit 'too serious' about everything and whom he was trying to seduce. The postcard reads, 'Optimism is the opium of the people! A healthy atmosphere stinks of stupidity! Long live Trotsky!' In no time the joke is denounced as subversive anti-Communist propaganda; Ludvik is expelled from the university and from the Party and has to go into the army and work in the mines, in almost murderous working conditions, for the next several years. However, he manages to rescue himself and to resume his studies. Even though the experience doesn't completely ruin his life (he eventually becomes a successful scientist), it shatters profoundly his trust in society and turns him into an embittered cynic. One day he chances to meet Helena Zemanek, a radio journalist and the wife of Pavel Zemanek, former university colleague who had played an important part in his expulsion and public disgrace. Realizing that he could finally exact revenge on Pavel, Ludvik

elaborates a complicated plan to seduce his wife. The plan is successful, the wife seduced, and Ludvik is about to savor his long-waited and carefully prepared revenge. It is then that he realizes that he has fooled nobody, except himself: Helena didn't actually have to be seduced as her husband didn't care very much about her and was only too happy to let her go (they had not lived like a married couple for quite a while). This is, very briefly, the plot of the novel.

Beyond the plot level, however, *The Joke* occasions a serious of meditations on the political world as an immense farce and on history as fond of making jokes, of setting traps and turning us into its 'playthings.' The topic of the world as a stage, where opposite forces continually clash, appears early on in the novel, as if to frame its underlying philosophy. Ludvik, who plans on using Kostka's apartment as a 'stage' for accomplishing his original revenge, has an enlightening conversation with the latter. Kostka, unaware of all the details of Ludvik's plan, expressed hope that his flat would bring him 'something beautiful.' Yes, yes, 'a beautiful demolition,' says Ludvik. When Kostka wonders how a 'demolition can be beautiful,' Ludvik reveals his vision of the world as grand theater:

> I know you're a quiet workman on God's eternal construction site and don't like hearing about demolition, but what can I do? Myself, I'm not one of God's bricklayers. Besides, if God's bricklayers built real walls, I doubt we'd be able to demolish them. But instead of walls all I see is stage sets. And stage sets are made to be demolished. (Kundera 1992, p. 7)

Ludvik speaks convincingly, as one does of things one has learned from painful personal experience. His political disgrace and subsequent underground life must have given him access to a deeper form of wisdom, which allowed him to see beyond the skin of things. He has developed a special sense for deconstructing the surrounding world and seeing it *sub specie ludi*, as Huizinga would have put it. The people he encounters are nothing but 'masks' and 'actors,' the objects he sees around are 'stage sets,' and so on. For instance, coming across a group of youngsters who were having fun in a country pub, he notices with contempt: 'I could see nothing but actors, their faces covered by masks of cretinous virility and arrogant brutishness' (Kundera 1992, p. 314). He talks of the 'eternal theatre of shadows' (295) and cannot help seeing the world as a fake reality, the province of poor imitations. He becomes a Platonist *malgré lui-même*: watching a bronze statue, for example, he has the impression that

> we too had been *cast out* into this oddly deserted square with its park and restaurant, cast out irrevocably, that we too had been broken off from something; that we imitated the heavens and the heights in vain, that no one believed in us; that our thoughts and our words scaled the heights in vain when out deeds were as low and the earth itself. (Kundera 1992, p. 179)

Under Ludvik's disenchanting gaze, nothing remains untouched; everything is deconstructed, reduced to its bare essence. His is a life now fully dedicated to exposing the theatrical nature of the world around. Employing an image dear to many Central-East Europeans, Ludvik sees history as nothing but a playground:

> history is terrible because it so often ends up a playground for the immature; a playground for the young Nero, a playground for the young Bonaparte, a playground for easily roused

> mobs of children whose stimulated passions and simplistic poses suddenly metamorphose into a catastrophically real reality. (Kundera 1992, p. 87)

Despite his deep insight into the 'theatre of shadows,' however, Ludvik's understanding of the world as theatre is still somewhat 'theoretical': to completely internalize this insight, he has one more lesson to learn. For in a world of 'masks,' 'actors' and 'stage sets,' Ludvik still entertains the illusion that he is not an actor like anybody else. He deludes himself that he is somehow different, that he has some directorial role to play; he cannot help framing his own revenge in theatrical terms. Under this illusion, Ludvik conceives the whole affair as a theatric performance that he himself has scripted, directed, and produced: 'Everything that has happened between myself and Helena was part of a precise and deliberate plan. . . . I . . . had from the start acted as a meticulous stage manager of the story I was about to experience, and had left nothing to the whims of inspiration' (Kundera 1992, p. 175).

In the end, the failure of his plan is exactly what it takes for him to wake up—that is, to realize the full depth of his insight that the world is indeed an inescapable farce. For the comedy to be complete, the one who has thought he could fool others, has to be fooled himself: Ludvik has been thinking that he was toying with others, whereas all this time he was in fact *toyed with*. The revenge he has been preparing for a longtime has turned out to be the trap in which he himself fell:

> [Helena's] body was there, a body I had stolen from no one, in which I'd vanquished no one, destroyed no one, a body abandoned, deserted by its spouse, a body I intended to use but which had used me and was now insolently enjoying its triumph, exulting, jumping for joy. (Kundera 1992, p. 201)

This realization is only the beginning of a painful awakening process, the most unwanted of all awakenings: you realize not that you have just got *out of* a nightmare, but that you have got *into* a nightmare. Your own life is nothing but a nightmarish story because it is projected against the background of a cosmic joke. It is now that Ludvik realizes that it is not one joke or another that has affected his destiny. It is way more than that. His entire destiny is nothing but a series of jokes:

> The *entire* story of my life was conceived in error, through the bad joke of the postcard, that accident, that nonsense. . . . I was horrified at the thought that things conceived in error are just as real as things conceived with good reason and of necessity. (Kundera 1992, p. 288)

Moreover, there is no way you can *correct* this fake life you lead, no way to stop the joke, unless you put an end to your life, which would only mean that the joke has finally reached its goal. Then you are a *complete joke*. Ludvik would very much like to 'revoke the whole story' of his life, but he is faced with a very important question:'how could I do so by my own exertions when the errors it stemmed from were not only *my errors*?' These errors, he observes, were 'so common and universal that they didn't represent exceptions or faults in the order of things; . . . they constituted that order' (Kundera 1992, p. 288).

The obvious question is, of course: Who is, after all, the author of the joke? Who is behind the farce? Thus Ludvik joins the large chorus of all those, like Primo Levi

and Fyodor Karamazov, who desperately ask, 'Who is laughing at us?' In Ludvik's case, the accusing finger points to one direction: history itself. For him, history seems to be at the root of all destruction, corruption, and unfreedom:

> What if history plays jokes? . . . I realized how powerless I was to revoke my own joke when throughout my life as a whole I was involved in a joke much more vast(all-embracing for me) and utterly irrevocable. (Kundera 1992, pp. 288–289)

Surviving the Totalitarian Laughter

The Joke ends on this gloomy note, and does not offer any solution for redemption, in case you've expected one. Kundera's silence may well be taken to mean that when it comes to facing the totalitarian laughter, when you find yourself confronted with the grand farce, you are on our own. The solution cannot be but highly individualized. It is up to us, each one of us, to face the farce as we see fit, with the means we can get hold of, and the courage we can muster. If I am proposing something here, it is under the important proviso that this 'solution' is not only personal, but also provisional. It is, incidentally, something that resonates with what I could gather from Kundera's other writings. Here it goes.

If there is a conceivable way out of the oppressive totalitarian laughter, it is to start laughing. More exactly: laughing at yourself. 'Laughing at others' and 'laughing at oneself' is one of the important distinctions that Simon Critchley makes in his *On Humor*. He hastens to add that only the latter is an authentic form of humor: 'true humor does not wound a specific victim and always contains self-mockery. The object of laughter is the subject who laughs' (Critchley 2002, p. 14). It is only by 'laughing at yourself' that you can catch the system off-guard: this is something they expect the least of you. 'Laughing at others' is precisely the principle on which the system is based. Should you laugh at others you would only help it accomplish its mission as it would multiply the totalitarian laughter *ad infinitum*, generating more and more cruelty, making more and more victims; whereas laughing at oneself is something the author of the farce (the totalitarian system, history, whatever it may be) is unlikely to anticipate.

Therefore, the trick we should use to defeat the trickster is to hijack its laughter; we can only break the vicious circle of the totalitarian laughter if we learn how to laugh at ourselves. Laughing at ourselves is what elevates us, precisely because it takes us closer to who we are: we are by nature vulnerable creatures, and by laughing at ourselves we show that we are only too aware of the fact, which is already a significant strength. *Of course* they can destroy you—the whole point is, however, not to let them destroy your sense of who you are, your self-representation and self-respect. If you are the first to laugh at yourself, what else can they do to you?

This superior, redeeming form of humor is what Critchley calls *risuspurus*, which he describes as 'the highest laugh,' the laugh

> that laughs at the laugh, that laughs at that which is unhappy. . . . Yet, this smile does not bring unhappiness, but rather elevation and liberation, the lucidity of consolation. This is why, melancholy animals that we are, human being are also the most cheerful. We smile and find ourselves ridiculous. Our wretchedness is our greatness. (Critchley 2002, p. 95)

Milan Kundera certainly knows a thing or two about the virtues of 'laughing at oneself.' He once said in an interview, 'I was born on the first of April. That has its metaphysical significance' (Nemcova Banerjee 1990, p. 3). Not unlike Critchley's understanding of authentic humor as *risuspurus*, Kundera relates humor to a healthy sense of relativity that we ought to display when judging facts, things and people. True humor means 'to know one's place,' to know that humans' most important quality is imperfection, a statement that—common-sensical as it may seem—in Kundera has something spectacular about it. For example, in *Testaments Betrayed*, he talks in exalted terms about humor as 'the divine flash that reveals the world in its moral ambiguity and man in his profound incompetence to judge others' or 'the intoxicating relativity of human things' or 'the strange pleasure that comes of the certainty that there is no certainty' (Kundera 1995, pp. 32–33).

Moreover, Kundera elaborates what may well be coined as a 'metaphysics of laughter.' In *Testaments Betrayed*, he puts laughter at the foundation of the European novel, and the latter at the very foundation of the modern civilization. His reading of the history of the European novel is certainly idiosyncratic, but it is all the more worth noting that the novelists he values most highly are 'masters of laughter': Rabelais, Cervantes, Hašek. A self-declared atheist, when it comes to humor and laughter Kundera suddenly turns theologian. For example, playing with a Jewish proverb ('Man thinks, God laughs'), he goes almost as far as to suggest that the European novel is of 'divine origin': inspired by the Jewish proverb, Kundera likes to imagine that 'Rabelais heard God's laughter one day, and thus was born the idea of the first great European novel. It pleases me to think that the art of the novel came into the world as the echo of God's laughter' (Kundera 1995, p. 1). Theological insights like this are enlightening, but when they come from atheists, they border on the miraculous.

This is why I would like to conclude my chapter by quoting at length a passage from Kundera 'the theologian of laughter.' The fragment is from what is probably one of the most mysterious chapters in *The Book of Laughter and Forgetting*:

> The first time an angel heard the Devil's laughter, he was horrified. It was in the middle of a feast with a lot of people around, and one after the other they joined in the Devil's laughter. It was terribly contagious. The angel was all too aware the laughter was aimed against God and the wonder of His works. . . . [U]nable to fabricate anything of his own, he simply turned his enemy's tactics against him. He opened his mouth and let out a wobbly, breathy sound in the upper reaches of his vocal register . . . endowed it with the opposite meaning. Whereas the Devil's laughter pointed up the meaninglessness of things, the angel's shout rejoiced in how rationally organized, . . . good and sensible everything on earth was. (Kundera 1980, pp. 61–62)

This quote may well provide the explanation for something otherwise hardly comprehensible: namely, why we laugh so heartily while watching a Holocaust film like *La vita è bella*. We simply laugh at ourselves as we recognize ourselves in

Guido Orefice who is about to be devoured by the laughing machine. We laugh, and in so doing, we are able to come up with an 'opposite meaning.' Guido dies, and so do we, but this meaning remains, and that's almost more than one can hope for.

Acknowledgments Under the title 'To die laughing,' a different, longer version of this chapter has been published in a special issue of the journal *East-European Politics & Societies* dedicated to 'totalitarian laughter' and guest-edited by Serguei Oushakine. I researched and wrote this chapter while holding a Solmsen Fellowship at the University of Wisconsin's *Institute for Research in the Humanities*. I am grateful to the Institute and in particular to its director, Professor Susan Stanford Friedman, for their very generous support.

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Chapter 10
Exhuming the Remains of Antigone's Tragedy

The Encryption of Slavery

Tina Chanter

Myths shape philosophy, figuring philosophical imaginaries in ways that have yet to be fully excavated or exhumed. The myth of Antigone, daughter of Oedipus, has figured a certain philosophical and psychic heritage, one that has been handed down to the west through Freud's narration of the Oedipal complex, and Hegel's adumbration of Antigone in terms of a dichotomy that has staged an ethical heroine who pits the values of the rituals of mourning against those of the order and regulation of the state. A child of incest, Antigone sacrifices marriage, motherhood, and ultimately her life, a sacrifice that is recuperated, in Hegel's narrative, by the necessity of stabilizing a social contract that requires her subordination. Yet, encrypted in this myth of Oedipus, the anti-hero, of Creon, the hero of the modern political state, and Antigone, whose sacrificial act, dedicated to honoring her brother's burial, has made her into a hero of sorts for feminist philosophy, lies another shadowy mythical figuring that has proved itself inaccessible. The celebration of ancient Greece, as the inaugural moment both of philosophy and of democracy (though the fact that this democracy was limited to free, adult males is not always remarked) gives rise to a philosophy that sets itself, in G.W.F. Hegel's narrative, on a path of progressive self-consciousness, one in which the divergent, but equally valid ethical customs of which Hegel takes Antigone and Creon to be representative, come to be formalized as principles that settle into their proper place, according to a hierarchy in which the bonds uniting the kinship of family (aligned with Antigone and femininity) must be answerable to the welfare of the state (aligned with Creon and masculinity). The shadowy figuration that hides in the crevices of this celebratory tale of the twin births of democracy and philosophy, where the *Sittlichkeit* (ethical life) of the essentially pre-legal era of ancient Athens serves as both model and precursor of the modern European state, in which a more nuanced view of individual responsibility is said to emerge, reveals the complicity of the heroes philosophy has made of

T. Chanter (✉)
Kingston University, London, UK
e-mail: T.Chanter@Kingston.ac.uk

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A. Welchman (ed.), *Politics of Religion/Religions of Politics*,
Sophia Studies in Cross-cultural Philosophy of Traditions and Cultures 8,
DOI 10.1007/978-94-017-9448-0_10

the Oedipal family with colonialism and slavery, a complicity that subtends the story we philosophers and critics continue to tell ourselves, even when we offer recuperative readings of Antigone. Such is the wager of this essay.[1]

In order to develop this suggestion, I frame the argument by considering recent poetic/dramatic re-transcriptions of *Antigone*. In particular, I draw on plays that are set against politically and racially combustible backgrounds that emerge out of the contexts of the Anglo-Irish troubles and the U.S. war against Iraq, post-colonial Nigeria and apartheid South Africa. Seamus Heaney's transcription of Antigone, on which I focus initially, might be understood to explore what Simon Critchley refers to as the 'work of mourning' marked by an 'impossible place' within 'the Hegelian system where an ethical moment irreducible to dialectics is glimpsed,' a work of mourning that catches sight of an ethics 'not based upon the recognition of the other, which is always self-recognition' but where the other 'exceeds my grasp and powers.' Critchley goes on to propose this work of mourning as the basis for 'a non-Christian and non-dialectical ethicality and friendship.' (1999, p. 14) The work of mourning to which Heaney attends constitutes a specifically feminine, affective keening; but at the same time, Heaney responds to the loss of dignity incurred by political prisoners when the state interrupts the work of mourning by making their bodies wards of the state.

A rich, international tradition of plays inspired by Sophocles' Antigone has arisen, among them Seamus Heaney's appropriation of *Antigone*, published under the heading *The Burial at Thebes*, which appeared in 2004, 3 years after 9/11. Heaney's poetic reinvention of *Antigone* is only the most recent of Irish appropriations and translations of the play, including those by Brendan Kenelly (1996), Tom Paulin (1985), Aidan Carl Mathews (undated) and Marianne McDonald (1996). Nobel poet laureate of Ireland, Heaney was struck by what he saw as President George Bush's resemblance to Creon. When Bush expressed the notorious sentiment: either you are with us or against us, construing those of us who opposed the war with Iraq as unpatriotic, Heaney was reminded of Creon's autocratic reaction to Antigone's burial of her brother, Polynices: anyone who sided with Antigone was, like Antigone herself, to be considered traitorous. Yet Heaney resists treating Creon as a mere 'cipher for President Bush,' which, as he observes, 'would have been reductive and demeaning … of Sophocles' art,' in which, he adds, the 'issues of loyalty and disloyalty are real.' (2009, p. 134) At the same time, Heaney also acknowledges that 'Creon turns Polyneices into a non-person, in much the same way as the first internees in Northern Ireland and the recent prisoners in Guantánamo Bay were turned into non-persons.' (2009, p. 134) Heaney's work has long articulated itself as a thoughtful response to the political struggle that has characterized Anglo-Irish relations, and *The Burial at Thebes* is no exception. Not only did it respond to the circumstances surrounding the U.S. war against Iraq, but it was also informed by the Anglo-Irish troubles. More immediately, the form it took

[1] The argument I develop in this essay, which I explore at greater length in Chanter (2011), is as much a reworking of my own earlier readings of the figure of Antigone as it is of interpretations of others.

was inspired by a widow's mournful wailing at the death of her husband in 1773, as expressed in 'The Lament for Art O'Leary,' a poem, 'uttered,' Heaney tells us in an address to the American Philosophical Society in 2004, by the widow of O'Leary 'over the dead body of her husband.'[2] This lament, in turn, was evocative for Heaney of the affects circulating at funeral processions for political prisoners in the 1980s, which became occasions for the state to exert its control over the means by which those deemed criminals or terrorists could be mourned.

Originally in Gaelic, this poem of lament resonates for Heaney with the panicked exchange with which Antigone and Ismene open Sophocles' play *Antigone*. Heaney describes *Antigone* as a work 'atremble with passion,' (2009, p. 134) and it is in the affective dimension of a woman's mourning that he hears the note and tempo that will set the metrical rhythm that opens his version of the play. Heaney singles out, as he puts it, the 'outburst of grief and anger from a woman whose husband had been cut down and left bleeding on the roadside in County Cork, in much the same way as Polyneices was left outside the walls of Thebes, unburied, desecrated, picked at by the crows.' (Heaney 2004, p. 77) What captured Heaney's attention, above and beyond the political purchase that the play had for those seeking the independence of Ireland, above and beyond any tribal identification, was a semiotic dimension, the rhythmic mourning vocalized by a woman's grief, the tone, the beat he found in a poetic rendition of a widow's keening.[3]

Heaney's focus on the overriding importance of burial in the tragedy of *Antigone* not only explains his poetic re-inscription of *Antigone*, under the title *The Burial at Thebes*, which drew attention to the violation that takes place when the state—whether in the form of security forces in Ireland or Creon in ancient Greece—'claims ownership' (Heaney 2009, p. 134) of a body.[4] Heaney taps into the 'deep and abiding purchase' that *Antigone* had on the population of Ireland in a context in which the corpses of hunger strikers became wards of the state, so that even in death, politics dictated how friends and relatives were to conduct themselves, even mourning was affected by the politics surrounding these deaths. The question of whether one defined Francis Hughes as a criminal, a terrorist, or as an individual desperately fighting for the autonomy of his country, was thus allowed to inform and regulate the appropriate ways to mourn him. By highlighting the question of whether a state has a right to appropriate a corpse in the name of national security,

[2] Heaney establishes an affinity between Antigone and the hunger strikers Bobby Sands and Frances Hughes, held as terrorists in '[h]er majesty's prison at the Maze, better known in Northern Ireland as the H blocks.' (Heaney 2009, p. 122)

[3] Heaney adopted a three-beat line for Antigone's fevered, opening exchange with Ismene, an 'alliterating four-beat line' for the chorus, and iambic pentameter for Creon (Heaney 2009, p. 135–8).

[4] Heaney describes how the body of Francis Hughes, who died in 1981, was treated: 'before the remains of the deceased could be removed that evening from Toome, they had first to be removed from a prison some thirty or forty miles away. And for that first leg of the journey the security forces deemed it necessary to take charge and to treat the body effectively as state property.' (2009, p. 123)

however one defines the deeds of a given individual in life, Heaney focuses on the affective bond uniting family and friends; he also signals an interpretive issue in *Antigone* that I pursue here in relation to slavery.[5] To indicate the direction of this argument, let me note that had Polynices and Eteocles not killed one another in mortal combat, had Eteocles been the victor over Polynices, had Polynices survived, there is a good chance that his literary fate would have made of him a slave.

Heaney's approach to Antigone makes of her a figure who communicates a universal truth, when he responds to the profound human urge to acknowledge 'patrimony, connection, affinity, and attachment due to descent, due to longstanding, to inherited instinct and natural tendency . . . elevated into a kind of ideal of the spirit, an enduring value' (2009, pp. 124–5) in the expression of grief on the death of loved ones. In this sense Heaney reiterates Hegel's insight into the action of *Antigone* action. For Heaney, *Antigone* dramatizes 'the contest between what Hegel called the "Instinctive Powers of Feeling, Love and Kinship" and "the daylight gods of free and self-conscious, social and political life."' (2009, p. 124) At the same time, Heaney echoes Martin Heidegger's tendency to treat Antigone as revealing a truth about humanity in general, even as he alters the register in which this recognition of Antigone as a universal figure occurs. For Heaney it is affect/*duchas*; for Heidegger it is the uncanny of which Antigone becomes representative.

Following Heidegger's meditation on the sense in which man is the strangest of all (*to deinotaton*), the most *unheimlich*, the trope of the uncanny has marked the reception of *Antigone*. Jacques Lacan also takes up the uncanny in his discussion of Antigone in seminar seven (1992), where he provides a reading of the beauty and splendor of Antigone that rehearses the tendency of the tradition to fetishize Antigone (see Heidegger 1959, pp. 149 ff.). Rather than allowing the oscillation inherent in the fetishization of Antigone, which informs Lacan's reading of *Antigone*, to dictate my interpretation—where, on the one hand, she is figured by her dazzling beauty, admired in her splendor, and revered for her ethical stance, yet on the other hand she is domesticated, purified of the threat she represents to the established order when her character flouts the expectations of womanly conduct in ancient Greece, stepping out of line—I follow through the political logic of Antigone's perpetual renaissance. For Hegel too, Antigone constituted the purest heroine of all, yet at the same time, his response to her intransigence was to contain, quell, or domesticate her unruliness. At a time when feminism threatens to challenge the established order, Hegel's response is to tame Antigone's radical edge. She is allowed to represent an ethical point of view, but that ethical point of view must be strictly circumscribed within the family, purified by religious piety, and must be made to understand its subordinate role to the state. Thus Hegel applauds *Antigone* as the most sublime play, only to echo the Kantian response to the sublime, by re-establishing a relationship of mastery to the disequilibrium

[5] Whatever one had done in life, whoever one is, in death, one deserves to be honored by those by whom one is loved. Whether Antigone follows this insight through all the way to the end is in question, given her distinction of Polynices from a slave.

Antgione's intransigence causes. Hegel puts Antigone back in her place, contains her within domesticity, thereby defusing the terrifying visage of someone who appears to be so in love with death that she sacrifices everything for it, someone who will brook no opposition. It is as if, true to Jacques Derrida's reading of Antigone as a figure of abjection, where sexual difference becomes the stumbling block on which the dialectical machine of thought founders, the threat that the feminine constitutes is tamed by Hegel's substitutive maneuvers (Derrida 1986, pp. 133b–134b).[6] Hegel deals with his sister, who threatens in 'real life' to become more than, other than, a sister, by disciplining Antigone, thereby sublimating, and taming his own desire.

By tracing the contours that describe the subterranean logic of Hegel's containment of the threat that Antigone poses, Derrida departs from Heidegger's tendency to treat Antigone as revealing the truth about humanity in general. Derrida thinks through instead the way in which for Hegel Antigone's recognition of her blood brother constitutes a '[u]nique example in the system: a recognition that is not natural and yet that passes through no conflict.' (1986, p. 150) There are several registers in which Antigone's uniqueness for Hegel must be thought through, and the prism that refracts these registers is sexual difference. A peculiar form of feminine recognition characterizes, according to Hegel, the relationship between the sister and the brother, such that Hegel qualifies the sister as having the 'highest *intuitive* awareness of what is ethical,' while at the same time denying that this particular brand of feminine ethical intuition, which sets apart the sister from the mother or the wife, is accompanied by '*consciousness* of it.' (PhS, p. 274; PhG, p. 325)[7]

Hegel refuses to recognize Antigone as a central actor in the drama of his dialectic, requiring her to play the part of an extra, excluded by the dominant conceptual framework of determinate negation, yet strategically necessary, lubricating the cogs of the dialectical machine. Antigone can stand for religious piety, and familial bonds only insofar as this ethical stance is brought firmly into line with the authority that the state must exercise over it. The family thus comes to be figured as a necessary resource for the state, the authority of which is deemed ultimate; any claim to a legitimate existence that goes beyond, or cuts against the

[6] References to *Glas* are to the left hand column unless followed by 'b.' As Simon Critchley says in his essay on Derrida's Reading of Hegel in *Glas*, 'Antigone's death should bring the system, history and the movement of cognition to a halt, and yet speculative dialectics incorporates this crypt within itself, making Antigone a moment to be *aufgehoben*. For Derrida, Antigone's death *should* exceed the Hegelian system and make spirit stumble on its path to Absolute Knowledge, and yet Spirit barely loses its footing for an instant and relentlessly continues its ascent.' (1999, p. 13–14)

[7] Citations to Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit* will be given in the text in parentheses as PhS (to the English translation) and PhG (the German original), followed by page numbers (see abbreviations for full publication information). For a discussion of this intuition, presentiment, premonition or foreshadowing (*Ahnung*) of the ethical that is not (yet) conscious see Derrida (1986, pp. 149–50), Weber (2004, p. 137) and Critchley (1999, pp. 11–12).

obedience of family to state must be regarded as a threat to the state's absolute control.[8]

There is a formal parity between the separate spheres of action with which Hegel identifies the feminine and masculine deeds of tragic heroes, in that 'each of the opposites in which the ethical substance exists contains the entire substance, and all the moments of its contents,' (PhS, p., p. 268; PhG, p. 319) and in that 'both sides suffer the same destruction. For neither power has any advantage over the other that would make it a more essential moment of the substance.' (PhS, p., p. 285; PhG, p. 337) Yet a pervasive and enduring tension is introduced into this apparent equivalence in accordance with a quasi-foundational law that Hegel assumes without ever bringing into question, namely the law of sexual difference that aligns Antigone, in her femininity, with the family, thereby excluding her from the masculine Spirit (*Geist*) that finds its highest determination, its truth, in the community of the state, where the individual passes out of the family. This tension only mounts as it becomes clear that Hegel's assignment of Antigone to the law of the family underwrites her exclusion, as a woman, from citizenship, and therefore from true freedom, which, within the general scheme that Hegel advances, he acknowledges is only possible within the proper form of community, which finds is highest expression in the state. Hence, despite the fact that both divine law, which has its content in individuality, and human law, which has its content in the nation (see PhS, p. 271; PhG, p. 323), are said to contain the opposite law within themselves, and despite the fact that each suffers mutual 'downfall,' (PhS, p., p. 285; PhG, p. 337) it is the political community of the nation, and not the natural community of the family, that is 'conscious of what it actually does,' whereas the 'other side has the form of immediate substance or substance that simply is.' (PhS, p. 268; PhG, p. 319) Yet this other side—divine law—is 'on the one hand the inner Notion (*Begriff*) or general possibility of the ethical sphere in general, but on the other hand

[8] The family is a necessary resource for the state in that it provides soldiers who must defend the state. Since Polynices, in Creon's mind, is a traitor, he has undermined the relation of authority that should obtain with regard to family and state. Hegel says, in a discussion that implicitly refers to Polynices and Eteocles, who have 'equal right' to government, but from a 'human' point of view 'the one [Polynices] who has committed the crime is the one who, not being in actual possession [of the state], attacks the community at the head of which the other stood, while, on the other hand, *he* [Eteocles] has right on his side who knew how to apprehend the other merely as an isolated individual, detached from the community, and, taking advantage of his powerlessness, banished him; he has struck only at the individual as such, not the community, not at the essence of human right. . . . [T]he government [Creon] will punish him who already proclaimed its [the community's] devastation on the walls of the city, by depriving him of the last honour. He [Polynices] who wantonly attacked the Spirit's highest form of consciousness, the Spirit of the community, must be stripped of the honor of his entire and finished being, the honour due to the Spirit departed [the honor of burial that Antigone insists on according Polynices]' (PhS, p. 286; PhG, p. 338–9). Yet the family is also a necessary resource in another sense, one that Hegel does not pursue. The family is the crucible of legitimacy and inheritance, and it is the rules of inheritance—not just nature—that determine the 'equal right' that Polynices and Eteocles have to kingship. Not only wealth is inherited, but also the legitimate claim to rule over a city. At the same time it is through one's lineage that one's identity as a free or enslaved is established.

equally contains within it the moment of self-consciousness.' (PhS, p. 268; PhG, p. 319) For Hegel, the ethical is 'intrinsically universal,' (PhS, p. 268; PhG, p. 320) yet since what is 'truly universal' is the community (PhS, p. 269; PhG, p. 320), the ethical action of the family finds its higher determination not in itself, but precisely in 'expelling the individual' from the family (PhS, p. 269; PhG, p. 320). The individual who is expelled is the citizen—a privilege reserved for the man, from which the woman is excluded. Yet the ethical deed of the family, as universal, 'must be placed in the relation of the *individual* member of the Family to the *whole* Family,' Hegel tells us, specifying that the ethics of the family 'is not that of feeling, or the relationship of love.' (PhS, p. 269; PhG, p. 320)[9]

Hegel asks, then: in what respect can the family be ethical? There is only one respect, is his answer, and it concerns not the 'living but the dead.' (PhS, p. 270; PhG, p. 321) The ethics of the family resides only in a non-contingent, non-accidental (see PhS, p. 269; PhG, p. 320–1) deed that treats the individual as a whole (a function of the purpose of a family as a whole, a purpose defined in terms of the higher community of the state, a purpose that repudiates any effort of the family to find its end within itself), in a deed that 'embraces the entire existence of the blood-relation,' (PhS, p. 269; PhG, p. 321) neither as citizen nor as individual, but as 'this particular individual who belongs to the Family, but is taken as a *universal* being.' (PhS, p. 270; PhG, p. 321) The duty of burial is a 'last duty' that 'constitutes the *perfect* divine law, or the *positive* ethical action towards the individual.' (PhS, p. 271; PhG, p. 323) In taking on the 'act of destruction' that death is—in burying this particular dead individual as a family member—the family representative commits an ethical deed, one that is premised on the basis of the family as a natural community, on blood-relationship, and yet is also spiritual. 'Blood-relationship supplements [*ergänzt*], then, the abstract natural process by adding to it the movement of consciousness, interrupting the work of Nature and rescuing the blood-relation from destruction.' (PhS, p. 271; 322; and see Weber 2004, p. 126) This supplementary structure indicates that the ethical character of burial will never completely be surpassed by the family's natural aspect—or by the law of sexual difference that assigns to femininity familial tasks. This naturalness will remain. So too, the fact of death is natural—that we die is an unavoidable necessity (see PhS, p. 270; PhG, p. 321)—but how and when death comes is, for the citizen-soldier, at the whim of the government, which shakes things up through war, in order to allay the tendency for isolated and 'independent' interests (PhS, p. 272; PhG, p. 324) to disrupt the good of the whole. In doing so, the government makes individuals (individual soldier-citizens) 'feel death as their lord and master.' (PhS, p. 273; PhG, p. 324) It is through war, which reduces ethical life to 'strength and luck,' that the 'ethical nation' remains determined by 'nature,' and thus the 'ethical shape of Spirit . . . vanishe[s] and another takes its place.' (PhS, p. 289; PhG, p. 341–2) At this point in Hegel's narrative, the immediate ethical

[9] Hence Suzanne Gearhart comments that Antigone 'becomes the undecidable character' of the family's 'affect.' (1998, p. 165)

Spirit that finds its expression in individuality, through the commission of a deed, and which is split into the two separate laws of human and divine, gives way to legal right, which emerges out of the 'ruin of ethical Substance.' (PhS, p. 289; PhG, p. 341). It is, then, through war, that the natural aspect of the ethics of the nation emerges, and it is war that results in the demise of this shape of ethical spirit. The contingency of nature asserts itself, such that ethics must be resolved into the higher shape of law, or legal right.

Through the rites of burial, divine law makes of the dead a member of the community (see PhS, p. 271; PhG, p. 323)—and Hegel leaves it indeterminate here what community, for it is both the familial community and the human community, the community for the sake of which Hegel understands the family to exist, a political community. At the same time, he stipulates that as a member of the family, the individual is 'only an unreal impotent shadow' since it is only 'as a citizen that he is actual and substantial.' (PhS, p. 270; PhG, p. 321) So in the return of human remains to the earth, in the burial that a particular family member receives, a deed understood to be the uniquely ethical familial act, a burial aligned with the feminine, and associated with Antigone, there is an acknowledgement of the mysterious origin of the symbolic universe of human law in the subterranean world of divine law, an inhuman world, riven with unconscious forces. In consecrating death, paradoxically, the familial burial of a family member confers on the individual the reality that was missing in life. Without proper burial, such reality *at the level of the family*, is missing for the individual.

According to this circular, chiasmic (see Derrida 1986, p. 189) structure, governed by the teleology of Hegelian dialectic, whereby the family finds its true purpose in the community, and therefore must be understood to be answerable to the law of government, the divine law that inheres in the family constitutes the possibility of ethics in general, and both the divine and human laws are said by Hegel to be modes of 'self-consciousness.' (PhS, p. 272; PhG, p. 323) At one level, the repetitive self-differentiation of Spirit from its former incarnations is achieved according to a process that is understood in terms of the progression from immediacy to mediation, from abstract to determinate or speculative negation. Yet at the same time, the very possibility of ethics is secured such that what secures it is exempted from the system, or becomes what Derrida calls 'the system's vomit,' (1986, p. 162) the 'excluded' element, or the unassimilable (1986, p. 151). Antigone becomes a stumbling block for Hegel, constituting a condition of both possibility and impossibility for the Hegelian system, that which it requires, depends upon, feeds on, yet that which cannot be incorporated, or assimilated into the system, or sublated by it. This prompts Derrida to characterize the problem of what 'remains' in some sense outside the very system it founds in terms of an 'almost transcendental' structure (1986, pp. 151–62). As Critchley says, '[t]he figure of Antigone is the quasi-transcendental condition for the possibility and impossibility of the Hegelian system, its *Grund* and *Abgrund*.' (1999, p. 13) Or as Kevin Thompson puts it, '[t]o determine the precise moment within the structural logic of the Hegelian system, somehow 'between' abstract and determinate negation, wherein the contaminating negativity of *différance* is marked, is to ascertain

the quasi-transcendental structure of the remains (*reste*) at the limit of the history of metaphysics.' (1998, pp. 242–3)

The natural family, to which men do not cease to belong even as they enter the state—even as they are 'wrenched,' or wrench themselves (PhS, p. 285; PhG, p. 338), away from the family—is presupposed by the state; the family makes the state possible, even as the state requires a going beyond the family. As Charles Taylor puts it, 'as the state comes to its "truth" as an expression of universal reason in the form of law, it brings the individual with it towards his ultimate vocation. . . . Indeed, the free individual cannot realize himself as free outside the state . . . the state is the collective mode of life which is backed by the full power of the community; and thus freedom must be embodied in the state.' (Taylor 1975, p. 120) Women, assigned to the family by the law of sexual difference, help to make the state possible, while they themselves are excluded, for Hegel, from formal recognition in and by that state, from citizenship, and from the true political freedom the state affords the rational subject. It is in order to exacerbate and expose this tension that Derrida organizes his discussion of Hegel in *Glas* around the pivotal role that the family plays within the architecture of Hegel's dialectical system, at the same time as he specifies the unique status that the sister enjoys among Hegel's women with regard to ethics.

Unlike Kant, Hegel does not posit a rational subject in advance of history, but attempts to account for the production of rationality. Reason is not given, for Hegel; it is achieved. Both reason and nature, in Taylor's words, are 'transformed' into a 'higher unity' so that nature is 'made over, cultivated, so as to reflect the higher aspirations of man, to be an expression of reason. And reason, on its side, ceases to identify itself narrowly with a supposedly higher self fighting to hold nature at bay. On the contrary, it sees that nature itself is part of a rational plan, that division had to be in order to prepare and cultivate man for a higher union.' (1975, p. 86) Yet the production of the rational subject through *Aufhebung*, as Suzanne Gearhart points out, entails that something exceeds the bounds of reason 'in the sense that . . . reason . . . cannot be there from the beginning to control the process.' (1998, p. 156) The family figures this excess that the rational subject must leave behind, but which is also indispensable to its production. More precisely, that which must be left behind is the natural diversity that occurs within the family, a diversity that Hegel understands as akin to the natural sexual difference that differentiates, for example—an example that, Derrida argues, has a unique 'almost transcendental' status, both making possible, and ultimately exceeding, dialectical logic—the sister and the brother.[10] In Gearhart's words, 'The law of the family is not one that the rational

[10] See Thompson, who shows how dialectical logic constricts difference, by shaping it according to the requirements of teleological necessity, which privileges the logic of contradiction in such a way that '"difference . . . is already contradiction"' (1998, p. 241). The quotation Thompson provides is from Hegel's 1812 *Science of Logic* (Hegel 1974), a quotation that Derrida cites both in *Positions* (1981a: 101 note 13), and *Dissemination* (1981b, p. 12 note 5). In this case the natural 'diversity' (*Verschiedenheit*) is that which pertains between the sister and the brother, which is raised from the indeterminacy of nature, to the determinacy of ethics, or raised to a higher

subject creates freely for itself, but rather one whose origins are obscure or even unfathomable to human reason.' (1998, p. 156) That is, there is an excess or 'pre-rational' (Gearhart 1998, p. 156) element that the process of *Aufhebung* constitutes, in addition to the rational self-consciousness that it produces. This pre-rationality functions as a 'quasi-transcendental' condition, one that is both excluded from, but necessary to, the Hegelian system (see Thompson 1998, pp. 239–59, esp. p. 251 and pp. 257–8; Critchley 1999, pp. 1–29, esp. pp. 10–15).

Hegel does not assume a transcendental ego, or the unity of the Kantian 'I think,' but rather he situates the subject within the context of familial roles (see Gearhart 1998, p. 155), a context he understands according to the divergent function nature assigns to the sexes (see PhS, p. 280; PhG, p. 332 and Derrida 1986, p. 135). On the basis of what Hegel understands to be this natural assignation, it falls to Antigone, as feminine, to assume the duty of burying her brother, and in doing so to observe the divine law with which she wholly identifies. Equally, it falls to Creon to assume the duty of human law, the law that is open to the clear light of day, publicly accessible, and known to all. This latter law is construed as a conscious law, and is identified with government. Both the rituals that Antigone observes in burying her brother, and the ethics Creon embodies as the figurehead of government (or that Polynices should have embodied), are understood to be aspects of a communal ethic, so that each of them will be understood to identify wholly with what Hegel understands to be two divergent parts of *Sittlichkeit*. Consequently Hegel ultimately construes the ethical action of each to violate the law that the other embodies, such that the ethical order is destroyed or left behind (see PhS, p. 266; PhG, p. 318), giving way to legal right.[11] Of course, since legal rights pertain to citizens, and women are excluded from citizenry, the transition from *Sittlichkeit* to *Moralität* is one that excludes women, even if the later development of conscience reinscribes women within a (Christian) religious community, a community, which, however, in Hegel's time, continues to exclude women from the political community of citizens.

Thus far we have seen that although the ethical duties embodied by the feminine and masculine consciousness form two parts of what presents itself as the whole of

level of consciousness, and becomes an 'antithesis' (*Gegensatz*) between the two sexes—such that natural 'dispositions and capacities' come to be endowed with ethical determinations (PhS, p. 276; PhG, p. 327). Diversity here is already constrained by the law of sexual difference, which apportions, for example, to men the destiny and potency of becoming virtuous citizens (see PhS, p. 269; PhG, p. 320), while apportioning to women the duty of burying the dead, whether or not the dead are judged by the government to be virtuous. On the question of how sexual difference intervenes in the relation between brother and sister, ostensibly a relation that is, for Hegel, 'devoid of desire,' (PhS, p. 275; PhG, p. 326) Derrida poses the question, 'why brother/sister and not brothers or sisters?' (1986, p. 149), thereby indicating the suppression of sexual desire. Not only is it a question of suppressing natural diversity, but also 'natural' (heterosexual) desire.

[11] At the same time, as we have seen, the crucial role of war drives the dialectic forward, so that the downfall of the immediate Spirit of ethical community is as much a result of its mediation through other communities, as it is of the internal conflict of values. Nature intervenes in the outcome of war, such that its outcome is contingent, and as such, it fails to ground ethics is anything essential.

ethical Spirit, and even though neither human nor divine law 'is by itself absolutely valid,' (PhS, p. 276; PhG, p. 328) there are several important asymmetries that organize this discussion. Perhaps the most obvious asymmetry that characterizes Hegel's account of the human and divine laws is that men are destined to become citizens of the nation, while women are destined to remain guardians of the household. 'The husband is sent out by the Spirit of the Family into the community in which he finds his self-conscious being,' (PhS, p. 276; PhG, p. 327) while the 'sister becomes, or the wife remains [*bleibt*], the head of the household and the guardian of the divine law.' (PhS, p. 275; PhG, p. 327) This destiny is said by Hegel to have been arranged by nature. 'Nature . . . assigns one sex to one law, the other to the other law.' (PhS, p. 280; PhG, p. 332) There is, however, a kind of overcoming—although a strange one—of the naturalness of sexual difference. Although Hegel understands both sexes to 'overcome [*überwinden*]' their natural existence, and to 'appear in their ethical significance, as diverse [. . .] beings who share between them the two distinctions belonging to the ethical substance,' (PhS, p. 275; PhG, p. 327) the initial, natural assignation of the female sex to the household, and the male sex to the community that Hegel identifies with the state, with government, is never brought into question, and its overcoming does not amount to sublation. Sexual difference, as such, is not sublated, but remains. 'The difference of the sexes [*Der Unterschied des Geschlechter*] and their ethical content remains [*bleibt*]' (PhS, p. 276; PhG, p. 327) and is subject to a constant becoming of substance. The naturalness of being blood-relatives supplements ethics. In this sense, the natural law of sexual difference, *as a natural law*, thoroughly permeates Hegel's account, without itself ever being subject to thought, or surpassed by thought. That is, sexual difference is taken to be an absolute law—absolute in the sense of outside the realm of interrogation for Hegel—just as psychoanalysis takes it to be. And Derrida. It is uncircumnavigable. This accounts for why Hegel (and not just Hegel) distributes certain capacities and qualities to women and certain traits and capabilities to men, and then grounds these, in a retrospective projection of that which *must be* natural, in their allegedly natural disposition, such that the very nature of sexual difference is now said to account for the cultural and historical restraints and constraints a given culture places upon women, due to their alleged natural lack of rationality. This circular reasoning, in which a cultural cause is taken to be natural, and now appears foundational, and then this allegedly natural ground is taken to be a causal explanation for a specific cultural difference, has been called to attention by Luce Irigaray (1985), Judith Butler (2000), and others.

It should not come as a surprise then that, for Hegel, while man passes out of the family and into the ethical life of the community, the sister, or the wife, remains, where she is, even as both the man and the woman overcome their natural ethical assignments according to sexual difference (see Derrida 1986 and Thompson 1998). The slippage between the sister and the wife is instructive, especially in the light of the fact that the figure who is implicitly evoked throughout Hegel's discussion, Antigone—daughter of Oedipus, product of Oedipal incest, sister of Polynices—goes to her death for burying her brother instead of to her marriage

chamber to become the wife of Haemon.[12] The sister, of course, is said by Hegel to have no desire for the brother. Be that as it may, whatever the exact nature of the strange overcoming of sexual difference, an overcoming that leaves sexual difference in place, this overcoming, for the sister (or the wife) consists in not moving, but in staying exactly where she is; her overcoming constitutes a remaining in the household, while that of the man constitutes a going beyond. After all, woman is pre-destined to remain in the household, according to the way that Hegel takes up specific cultural traits (women's exclusion from citizenship in ancient Greece or modern Germany) and reads them back into nature.

One way of approaching the complexity of the asymmetries that striate the apparent symmetry according to which Hegel construes the human and the divine law as two equally valid parts of a whole is by focusing on the status of self-consciousness in Hegel's account. The question is complicated by the fact that self-consciousness in a sense pertains to the process of self-realization by Spirit, and yet its specific configurations are organized according to the asymmetries that permeate Hegel's account according to the specificity with which citizenship is construed in relationship to sexual difference. For Hegel, the Spirit that Hegel calls 'human law' realizes itself in the community, which consists of 'citizens' of a 'nation.' (see PhS, p. 267; PhG, p. 319) In this form, Spirit is 'a reality that is conscious of itself.' (PhS, p. 267; PhG, p. 319) The universal aspect of this form is 'the *known* law, and the prevailing custom,' (PhS, p. 267; PhG, p. 319) while its individual form is 'the actual certainty of itself . . . as government.' (PhS, p. 267–8; PhG, p. 319) It is this 'ethical power of the state' to which Hegel attributes 'the movement of self-conscious action,' (PhS, p. 268; PhG, p. 319) and which he opposes to the Divine Law, which has a 'simple and immediate' existence in the '*natural* ethical community' of 'the Family.' (PhS, p. 268; PhG, p. 319–320) The family is associated with the '*unconscious*' and is opposed to the 'actual self-conscious existence' of the ethical order that finds its proper expression in government (PhS, p. 268; PhG, p. 320). Thus although both the human and the divine law 'contains the entire [ethical] substance, and all the moments of its contents,' (PhS, p. 268; PhG, p. 319) nonetheless, self-consciousness is reserved for the individual who passes into community, which, for Hegel, finds its true expression in the state, and not in the community that Hegel designates as natural, namely the family. What complicates this, is that at the same time that Hegel reserves self-consciousness for the ethical duty that he associates with the man, that of the community, a duty embodied in the human law that citizens of a nation enshrine in government, nevertheless, insofar as the natural community of the family constitutes the ethical sphere from which the male citizen departs, the family also plays a necessary, albeit preliminary, role in

[12] It is, perhaps, in this context that Derrida's observation that 'it falls to the married woman to manage, strictly, a corpse.' He goes on: '[w]hen a man *binds himself* to a woman, even were it in secret (marriage does not depend, according to Hegel, on a formal contract), it is a matter of entrusting her with his death.' (1986, p. 142)

shaping the citizen. The family is that which the male citizen must leave in order to enter into the community.[13]

As a result of the asymmetries that organize Hegel's account, whereby the masculine citizen enters the community, but the feminine sex stays within the family, self-consciousness is attained only by the male, as citizen. While the feminine, at least in the form of the sister, can achieve recognition through the brother (PhS, p. 275; PhG, p. 326), the feminine (also in the form of the sister) can only attain an '*intuitive* awareness' of the ethical, and does not attain '*consciousness*' of it, governed by the 'implicit' law of the '[f]amily.' (PhS, p. 274; PhG, p. 325) The differential economy according to which Hegel apportions self-consciousness of the ethical to the man, to the human law, but not to the woman or the divine law, extends to the relationship that men and women have to desire and to freedom. In the larger context of his understanding of how self-consciousness is achieved through the recognition of another, and of how it involves a confrontation, Hegel's articulation of the recognition that passes between the sister and the brother, might be said to constitute an aberration.[14] Yet

[13] Another way of putting this is to focus on the status of self-consciousness as the 'infinite middle term,' as 'the implicit unity of itself and substance' which 'becomes that unity explicitly and unites the universal essence and its individualized reality' (PhS, p. 266; PhG, p. 315). Although at the end of the section on ethical Spirit Hegel asserts that 'the life of the Spirit and this Substance which is self-conscious in everyone is lost' (PhS, p. 289; PhG, p. 342), this is the point at which he has introduced the naturalness of war, to which the ethics of the nation is reduced. Thus it can be read as referring just as much to the warriors of war, who confront death as a result of the government, who 'shakes' independent associations 'to their core by war' (PhS, p. 272; PhG, p. 324) in order to prevent the community breaking up into isolated units, as it can to the forms of consciousness that are split into divine and human law.

[14] For two reconstructions of Derrida's understanding of the way in which the brother-sister relation in Hegel does not conform to the struggle for recognition in the master/slave relation, see Critchley (1999, pp. 11–12) and Thompson (1998, pp. 249–51). As Critchley says, 'Derrida suggests that the sister's presentiment of the essence of *Sittlichkeit* cannot be contained within the limits of the system. Because Antigone and Polynices constitute themselves as free individualities that have not 'given to or received from one another this independent being-for-self [*Fursichseyn*]', and because they do not engage in a 'struggle for recognition,' their relation somehow exceeds the system of which it is a part' since it is not based upon dialectical structures of recognition (1999, p. 12). Critchley quotes from PhS, p. 274; PhG, p. 325, and is referring to Derrida's claim that Antigone and Polynices are 'the two sole consciousnesses that, in the Hegelian universe, relate to each other without entering war' (1986, p. 149). As Thompson says, Derrida reminds us that 'Hegel's own investigation of the structure of recognition had shown that truly mutual recognition is only possible given the confrontation of two self-consciousnesses such that each 'comes out of itself' (Thompson refers here to PhS, p. 111; PhG, p. 141). In this moment, each consciousness becomes other to itself in and through its confronting another consciousness. However, insofar as either consciousness attempts simply to eliminate or destroy this self-othering before the other, its own 'being-other (*Andersein*),' (PhS, p. 111; PhG, p. 141) it falls back to the level of mere consumptive desire, engaging in a merely natural and self-defeating conflict. Here, no genuine recognition is possible. Yet if, in this very moment of confrontation, each consciousness sublates its being-other, returning thereby into itself, such that in so doing each 'lets the other be free [*entlässt also das andere wieder frei*],' (PhS, p. 111; PhG, p. 142) then the level of natural desire is transcended and genuinely free mutual self-recognition occurs. True recognition thus

in the larger context of the asymmetry of sexual difference, which precludes women from citizenship, the fact that the 'trial by death' (PhS, p. 278; PhG, p. 330) is reserved for male citizens, who confront one another in war, and does not pertain between brother and sister, merely echoes that which is also characteristic of the master/slave dialectic, which is also reserved for men, while the recognition that takes place between the blood relations of brother and sister is characterized in terms of a restful equilibrium (PhS, p. 274; PhG, p. 325). This recognition is one that is achieved on the basis of the diversity that natural sexual difference provides within the context of the community of the family, a community that Hegel considers to be equally natural. As Kevin Thompson says, '[t]he immediate givenness of this diverse relation, along with its extrinsic determinations, is the key to understanding how reciprocal recognition is able to arise within this sphere without confrontation or struggle. . . . brother and sister . . . transcend the level of mere desire and freely recognize one another as distinct consciousnesses.' (1998, pp. 255–56)

presupposes a moment of simple confrontation—a stage of immediate self-assertion that inherently gives rise to some form of conflict, taking the form perhaps even of a life and death struggle. But the mutual recognition of brother and sister arises precisely without this moment of initial encounter and pursuant conflict. Brother and sister do not depend upon one another for their being-for-self nor do they desire one another. They are, it would seem, Derrida says, 'two single consciousnesses that, in the Hegelian universe, relate to each other without entering war' (1986, p. 149). This crucial and decisive bond is thus the inadmissible (Derrida 1986, p. 151), 'a relation excluded from the speculative genesis of *Geist*.' (1998, p. 250) While both Critchley's and Thompson's discussions are illuminating, my effort in this paper is, in part, to advance the discussion, by taking up the difference between the master/slave dialectic and the brother/sister relationship that Derrida considers in the context of the family and in relation to Antigone, by focusing upon the question of self-consciousness, and by thinking this in relation to the importance of war in Hegel's discussion of the human and divine laws in relation to *Sittlichkeit*. At the same time, my suggestion is that the wars with other communities that the loyal citizen-soldiers of the *poleis* (city-states) undertake, wars that include a 'trial by death,' (PhS, p. 278; PhG, p. 330) such as the mortal combat Polynices and Eteocles engage in, but which might have resulted in the slavery of a captive had it not been mutually mortal, forms an important, implicit, but neglected backdrop to Hegel's and Derrida's discussions. The 'free individualities' that the brother and sister constitute are not equal individualities, in the sense that the sister remains in the family, while the brother goes out into the community, and risks his life in war. So the struggle does not involve the sister, only brothers. Due to the inherently unequal status of sister and brother, while the brother's free individuality will be developed by Hegelian dialectic when it is sublated into a legal subject, the sister's 'free' individuality will remain in the family/household—or, in the case of the 'representation [*Vorstellung*]' (PhS, p. 287; PhG, p. 339) with which Hegel is engaging throughout his discussion of human and divine law, Antigone will go to her death. So, while the brother-sister recognition as such, as Thompson says, quoting Derrida is 'outside "the horizon of war,"' (Thompson 1998, p. 255, and Derrida 1986, p. 50) the sister who 'never becomes citizen, or wife, or mother' is '[d]ead' and 'transfigures herself in this character of eternal sister.' (Derrida 1986, p. 150) Yet this sister, Antigone, goes to her death for the sake of burying her brother, and in this burial of him as free, as opposed to a slave, she recognizes him as human, and by the same token conforms to the non-recognition of slaves as human (or the recognition that slaves are not truly human), since had her brother not been free she would not have buried him. Or, perhaps more pertinently, in burying him, she makes him not a slave.

While it is true that brother and sister freely recognize one another in the sense that they constitute 'free individualities' (PhS, p. 274; PhG, p. 325) for one another (although they do not derive their being-for-self from one another), it is also true that the decisive difference between man and woman's ethicality lies in their divergent relationships to desire and freedom; as such it is their differential relationship to self-consciousness that comes into its own. As we have seen, the capacity for self-consciousness is bound up with the fact that man is destined to be a citizen, and for combat in war, and, in the general Hegelian scheme of things, true freedom can only be expressed in the state. A man [a husband], in his capacity as a 'citizen' possesses 'the self-conscious power of universality' and 'thereby acquires the right of desire and, at the same time, preserves his freedom with regard to it.' (PhS, p. 275; PhG, p. 326)[15] In contrast to the way that man has the right to desire, but also the freedom not to be tied to desire, Hegel understands the woman's interest to be focused on the universal. From an ethical point of view, for a woman, 'it is not a question of *this* particular husband, *this* particular child, but simply of husband and children generally.' (PhS, p. 274; PhG, p. 326)[16] Why does Hegel say this?[17] Presumably Hegel focuses on the generality and universality of woman's relationship to husband and children because he understands it to be a woman's duty to take over the household. While such duties must also be ethical in some sense, Hegel reserves burial as the specific content of familial ethics. It is only the specifically ethical duty of burial that attends to the particularity of the family individual. In realizing this latter duty, the woman overcomes—an overcoming, which, however, involves her remaining precisely where she is—her natural, abstract determination, and accedes to an ethical determination.

Given that it is a woman's duty to be guardian of the household, whatever the particularity of the husband or children, whatever her feeling for them, whoever they are, the woman must guard them, take care of them.[18] Yet as we will see, the substitutability of husbands and sons also harbors another undertone, one not confined to *Geschlecht* as narrowly defined according to sexual difference. The replaceability of soldiers in war is mitigated by their burial as particular individuals belonging to the family—a specificity denied soldiers in war, and one that gains its content from a generality that contrasts soldiers belonging to a nation/polis/state with those who do not belong to the state—with foreigners. Elided with the opposition between those-who-do-not-belong-to-(the Greek/European)-state, and

[15] The full complexity of how Hegel construes the familial roles on husband and wife in relation to man and woman would have to engage with his views on the union between man and woman, and how he construes marriage. On this see Derrida (1986) and Thompson (1998).

[16] The implication here is that woman's duty in general is to take care of the family, while the particularity of individual family members only comes to the fore in the duties of burial.

[17] Derrida suggests that Hegel's idea of the irreplaceability comes from the 'mouth' of Antigone (1986 165).

[18] While Hegel says that the law of the Family remains an 'inner feeling' he also insists, that insofar as the relationships are not based 'on feeling but on the universal.' (PhS, p. 274; PhG, p. 326)

those who do, is another less legible opposition (one that Hegel does not address directly in the context of his discussion of human and divine law). Alongside the opposition between Greek and non-Greek, European and non-European, is the opposition between free men and slaves.

According to the account of Hegel provided above, self-consciousness is apportioned to man as a citizen in a way that it is not accorded to woman, who remains in the household. At the same time, true freedom is only realized in the state. Hence, despite the mutual recognition that is said to pertain between the brother and the sister, it is hard to see in what sense woman can be construed as truly free. Indeed, in the case of Antigone, it is hard to see what sort of recognition could be elicited from a brother whose corpse it is her ethical deed to bury. If, as Derrida says, 'one only belongs to the family in busying oneself around the dead,' (1986, p. 143) if the proper work of the family turns out to be that of mourning, what does recognition mean in this context? A more profound complication arises from Derrida's suggestion, which Gearhart explicates, that Hegel's *Aufhebung* is to be thought of as akin to repression, and that *Aufhebung* is not merely a matter of negation, but also of the production of an ideal. To the extent that rational subjectivity is produced through a sublation of the natural order, its production not only enshrines masculinity in its unquestioned entitlement to the freedom that man enjoys as a citizen of the nation; it also inscribes woman as the locus of implicit rationality—as pre-rational. Just as the unconscious, divine law of the family is the origin and model for the human law of the state, even if it must be surpassed, cancelled out, and repudiated through a process that raises the natural diversity of sexual difference to the level of a community that takes shape as the state, so it is also the case that, despite everything we have said above, there is also a sense in which woman partakes in the process by which self-consciousness is realized. Even if women as such are left behind, excluded by this process, they nonetheless facilitate it and become incorporated by it. Even if the family must be gone beyond, it is also the enabling condition of that which lies beyond it. Precisely the alleged natural status of the female sex, the law of sexual difference, is what guarantees and underwrites the state as its enabling condition—and as remaining in excess to it.

By constituting the family as a natural community, even if this natural aspect is overcome, by concentrating the ethicality of the family in the deed of burial, and by construing the divine law that dictates burial of family members as the pinnacle of this ethics, Hegel ignores the fact that burial rituals are just as custom bound and culturally constituted as are the ethical customs that become enshrined in state law.[19] In doing so, as we shall see further, he also ignores the fact that even the determination of who is a blood-relative and who is not—which he treats as purely natural—is itself determined by a political framework, in the sense that who is

[19] Insofar as the ethical action of the family finds its proper expression in burial, Hegel also points beyond mere feeling, since the ethical is intrinsically universal, and as such is bound up with the family as community, and thus, more generally, with the community as state. So mere feeling as such is transcended in the interests on the state.

allowed to *count* as a blood relative, is itself circumscribed by whether one is a slave or whether one is free. Ironically, the very nature that Hegel attributes to blood relations, and to sexual difference, is itself permeated by an understanding of kinship relations, and of the proper treatment of corpses, that is peculiar to particular cultures, a peculiarity that admits of the influence of symbolic structures as always already having infiltrated what one understands to be a blood relation, and what one understands to be the rites pertaining to death. To count as a blood relation is not merely to be united through the maternal line (a lineage that Hegel already understands through the kinship of man and woman, through their union in marriage); it is also to be construed as human in such a way as to be exempt from what Orlando Patterson calls social death (1982).

Both the rituals of mourning on which Antigone insists, and the need for loyalty to which Creon appeals, are inscribed in cultural traditions that are transmitted through a collectivity. Yet while Hegel will come to identify the collectivity with the state, within which true individual freedom can be expressed, the rituals of mourning, which also constitute a collective form of life, the transmission of which specifies a cultural heritage, are not granted the same recognition by Hegel, just as women, to whom the rituals of mourning are entrusted, are not recognized as citizens, either by Sophocles or by Hegel (see Taxidou 2004). The family is also an historical institution, one that develops over time. In treating the community of the family as natural, Hegel fails to take account of the importance of its cultural formation. At the same time, he fails to take account of the fact that culturally specific symbolic kinship structures orchestrate familial roles, a failure to which Judith Butler draws attention.[20] Drawn from a specific historical and religious context, the rituals that Antigone observes in burying Polynices are compromised because she has to bury her brother in secret, and on her own. This context is one that implicates, and is implicated by, not just the relationship between family and state as defined by the overcoming and incorporation of the former by the latter, but also the differentiation of the specific, historical configurations of both family and state that pertain to Thebes/Athens/the German state from the non-Greek, non--European, colonial worlds within which ancient Greece and modern Germany situate themselves politically and culturally. While Hegel is at pains to emphasize the reciprocity of human and divine law, the way in which the nation proceeds from the family, and the way in which the self-conscious, ethical realm of citizenship emerges out of, and remains tied to and dependent on the unconscious nether world,

[20] To say that Hegel fails to take account of the organizing role of culturally sanctioned kinship structures is perhaps naïve. To the extent that *Aufhebung* is understood as akin to repression (Gearhart 1998, and Derrida 1986), it might be more accurate to say that Hegel exhibits a symptomatic repression of the fact that the very play that informs his discussion of human and divine law is named for a product of incest. Antigone's very existence violates the incest taboo. As such her very existence becomes an occasion for Hegel to reinforce the taboo Oedipus transgressed. When Hegel asserts that there is no desire between the brother and the sister, his assertion can be read as much as a negation in the sense that Freud develops that term in his essay, 'Negation,' as much as it can be taken at face value.

it nonetheless remains the case that a differential economy of consciousness organizes this apparent reciprocity, which is orchestrated in advance by a decision that has already been made in favor of the authority of the state over whatever claims might be made on behalf of the right of the family to mourn the dead. In Athens/Thebes this authority is negotiated not only in relation to sexual difference but also in relation to the differentiation of Greeks from non-Greeks, Europeans from non-Europeans, free citizen adult males from slave, barbarian non-citizens. In Hegel it is negotiated in relationship to the colonial wars of ancient Greece and modern Germany. Citizenship, therefore, is defined not only as the province of adult males, but as the product of adult, free, Greek males, and it is conferred through lines of kinship that require citizenship to be passed along through the bodies of women who are not themselves recognized as citizens, but whose Greek heritage enables their sons, on becoming adults, to attain citizenship.

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Recent interpretations of Sophocles' *Antigone* have focused their attention on kinship and sexual difference. Even as such interpretations engage polemically with Hegel, they also tend to reinscribe the opposition between state and family in terms of which he reads the tragedy. While the question of kinship is clearly central to *Antigone*, it needs to be understood not only as a site in which tensions regarding familial obligations and those associated with sexual difference are negotiated in relation to the state, but also as a site of tension in terms of which the identity of slaves, foreigners, and enemies of the state are negotiated. Antigone's insistence on burying her brother Polynices is articulated not merely on the basis of establishing him as a *philos*, a loved one, but also by distinguishing him from a *doulos*, a slave. While much scholarly attention has been devoted to Antigone's argument that her brother is irreplaceable, and therefore deserving of burial notwithstanding Creon's prohibition of his burial, in a way a husband or a son is not, Antigone's differentiation of Polynices from a slave has suffered relative neglect. Drawing on the historical context in which Sophocles constructed the Theban cycle, including the 451/0 Periclean law concerning citizenship, and on textual details that establish the importance of slavery throughout the cycle, I suggest that kinship (*genos*) be understood within this context. A rich history of appropriations of *Antigone*, including Fémi Òsófisan's *Tègònni: an African Antigone* (1999), and Athol Fugard, John Kani and Winston Ntshona's *The Island* (1974), has taken up the legacy of *Antigone* in ways that connect with, and illuminate this wider interpretation of kinship.

Across the ages, and throughout the continents, the logic of Antigone's multiple dramatic rebirths allows a confrontation with the way in which readings of *Antigone* that draw on the logic of the excluded other, to the exclusion of thinking citizenship against the context of slavery, repeat the occlusion of slavery that Hegel's discussion of *Antigone* effects. To the extent that this logic remains confined by a Greek/European philosophical/political point of view that privileges both a subject of rationality and the pre-rational inscribed or encrypted within it, it proceeds in such a way as to defensively screen or shield an even greater threat of disequilibrium than that posed by woman as the 'everlasting irony of the community.' (PhS,

p. 288; PhG, p. 340) The extraordinarily rich theatrical rebirth of Antigone in different political circumstances, across continents, helps illuminate the dearth of western philosophical reflection on the significance of the threat of the colonial other, which the institutions of slavery and colonialism set out to tame. The international, post-colonial, literary, theatrical, dramatic tradition that infuses new life into the figure of Antigone every time she enters the stage, each time she is put to death and reborn, as she rises again with every new production, at the same sheds light on slavery as the repressed other of the tale that western philosophy tells itself about the tragedy of *Antigone*. The significance of this tragic marginalization of slavery is reflected in the fact that again and again playwrights have turned to *Antigone* in racially combustible situations, not the least of which is Fémi Òsófisan's profound meditation on the figure of Antigone, who, having traveled the roads of history, confronts so many dangers that she has to be accompanied by bodyguards. After all, her dramatic performance always closes with her death offstage, shrouded in mystery.

What are we to make of the fact that so much scholarship has been devoted to the authenticity and meaning of the issue of irreplaceability—Antigone's claim that she would not have violated the law to bury a husband or a son, only for her brother Polynices, who cannot be replaced—but so little attention has been paid to another differentiation Antigone makes, when she distinguishes Polynices from a slave? The context in which Hegel, Derrida, Lacan, and others have treated the question of Polynices' irreplaceability is that of familial blood relation and sexual difference, and the definition of ethics that distinguishes the familial, and specifically feminine, duty of burial, from the ethics that characterizes the masculine community, citizenship, and the nation. The context in which this paper addresses the issue of irreplaceability is in terms of the claim that slavery and sexual difference are intrinsically connected with one another. If familial sexual difference constitutes the remains, the residue, of Hegel's dialectical thought, that which cannot be fully digested by metaphysics, slavery constitutes the still more resistant, even more radically excluded, element of the thought that thinks these remains.

The word *doulos* is not even translated as slave in many translations of *Antigone*, as if there had been a deliberate writing out of the issue of slavery, by the tradition. This is in keeping with Hegel's argument in the *Aesthetics* to the effect that slavery was not a suitable topic for tragedy, an argument that both detracts from the extent to which slavery was in fact broached by the tragic poets, and functions to dissuade future exploration of slavery, both as an extant theme in ancient tragedy, and as a dramatic theme for dramatists appropriating tragedy in new contexts (see Hegel *Aesthetics* 1:208–11; *Aesthetik* 2:272–5). Perhaps, contrary to received wisdom, tragedy is not dead after all; perhaps those dramatists who appropriate the tragedy of *Antigone* in ways that expose the abuses of colonialism and slavery can help shed light on Sophocles' *Antigone*, by bringing to light aspects of tragedy present in its original incarnation, but covered over by an interpretative tradition.

British colonization and the specter of slavery provide the backdrop against which *Tègònni: An African Antigone*, by the Nigerian playwright Òsófisan, unfolds. Antigone arrives on the scene late, having survived the hazardous roads of history.

Òsófisan is thinking through both the way in which Antigone has become an inspirational figure for so many, having made so many appearances in diverse political contexts throughout history, a figure who fights for freedom, justice and truth in the face of corrupt regimes, whether Nazism or apartheid, the Dirty War of Argentina, or the collusion of corrupt officials with European multinational oil corporations in postcolonial Nigeria. Not only is Òsófisan thinking through Antigone's legacy as inspirational for freedom fighters; he is also thinking through Antigone's implication in a European, colonial history—a European colonial history and consciousness that, it turns out, has inflected the philosophical and psychoanalytic reception of *Antigone*, not least as it has been handed down to us from Hegel.[21] This implication includes thinkers such as Derrida, Lacan and Butler, whose responses to the play, although in crucial respects taking their distance from Hegel, are still oriented to the very categories that Hegel's reading of the play privileges, when he aligns Creon with the state and Antigone with family/kinship. Even as, in her important work, *Antigone's Claim* (2000), Butler complicates how these categories should be understood, arguing that they are inextricably implicated in one another, she still retains them as central categories, and in this sense re-inscribes them.

While kinship, configured in relation to the familial, is certainly central to *Antigone*, it also bears upon the question of who is a slave, and who is free. Once the importance of such questions is established, it also becomes clear that the parameters within which issues of kinship are usually treated with regard to the play need to be expanded. Like the term *Geschlecht* (as Derrida has pointed out), among the connotations of the word *genos* is not only kinship but also race (Derrida 1987, p. 162). The generational confusion into which Oedipus has thrown his offspring, by committing incest with his mother, Jocasta, ramifies beyond his immediate kin. Referring to the 450/1 BCE law that Pericles established, requiring that in order to qualify as Athenian, both one's father and mother must be Athenian, Jean-Pierre Vernant observes that Pericles' law 'officially prohibited marriage between Athenians and foreigners' and thereby formalized 'a marked tendency

[21] In his *Aesthetics*, Hegel engages in a somewhat tortuous explanation as to why slavery is an inappropriate topic for tragedy. His argument is intriguing on several different levels, as an attempt to negotiate between a Platonic and Aristotelian response to tragic poetry, as an interpretation of Greek tragic heroes, as a reflection on the role of tragedy as a commentary on the transition from *Sittlichkeit* and *Moralität* in a society that is transforming from a pre-legal to a law based one, and as a defensive reaction to thinking through the significance of new world slavery and colonialism. Tragic heroes are interpretations of the statues of gods. Their ethical rigidity and inflexibility are reflections of Greek statuary. Hegel's account, which aligns Antigone with the old order of divinities, and Creon with the new, also manages to infuse Antigone with racialized traits that construe her as on the brink of civilization. Hegel's attitude towards the ethos of the Greeks is ambivalent. Laudable in bearing unwavering responsibility even for events over which they had no control (e.g. Oedipus's accepting responsibility for his unwitting marriage of his mother and murder of his father), yet unsophisticated in their failure to distinguish voluntary from involuntary acts, Greek tragic heroes stand, for Hegel, as both political and moral precursors to nineteenth century Europe, and as that which modern Europe, allegedly, surpasses in moral sophistication.

toward family endogamy' and away from exogamy, that had been extant for some time in Athens (1990, p. 67).[22] Following Sheila Murnaghan, Wm. Blake Tyrrell and Larry Bennett link the Periclean law, which echoes the Thucydidean funeral oration, to Antigone's argument about the replaceability of a husband or son. 'From the viewpoint of marriage as an institution, one husband is as good as another. This is the rationale behind Pericles' law on citizenship of 451 B.C.: the *dêmos* cares nothing for the emotional bonds in marriage but only that the man and the woman be Athenians.' (Tyrrell and Bennett 1998, p. 114) Murnaghan points out that in characterizing a husband in terms of the 'abstract role that could be played by several different men' Antigone is actually echoing the terms that Creon had earlier employed (1986, p. 198–206), when he invokes the image that there are other fields to plow. The same logic of substitution informs the hoplite formation, in which if one warrior fell, another would step up to the line of defense created by the soldiers' shields to take his place (Tyrrell and Bennett 1998, p. 115); Hegel's reference to the need for loyal soldiers to defend the polis fits in seamlessly with such a logic. It is also within this context that Hegel's understanding of the irreplaceability of the brother for the sister (see PhS, p. 275; PhG, p. 327) would have to be revisited. Murnaghan contrasts the affection with which Antigone reveres her brother with the interchangeability of husbands that Pericles' law implies.[23]

It emerges, then, that Sophocles writes the Oedipal cycle in a context where marriage practices in Athens have become increasingly endogamous, where Pericles's law formulates marriage—or rather (since some critics dispute that the law concerned marriage as such) the requirements for citizenship—in such a way as to abstract from any emotional bond, and to emphasize the substitutability of husbands, as long as they are Athenian. This interchangeability is echoed by the way in which men were viewed as warriors who were expected to defend the polis, an interchangeability that extended to burial practices (Tyrrell and Bennett 1998, p. 115). Antigone's reference to the irreplaceability of her brother is neither symptomatic of her callous extremity, nor of her failure to consistently uphold the very values of *philia* with which she aligns herself (as the play is sometimes interpreted), but is rather a refusal to apply to her brother Polynices the very logic that Creon displays in his crude (but not uncommon) image that his son can find another furrow (wife) to plow, an image that conjures up myths of autochthony (see Loraux 2000) at the same time as it reduces women to mere reproductive vessels, good for little else than conferring legitimate citizenship on sons, conduits of citizenship, the privileges of which are exclusive of women themselves. As critics such as Nancy Sorkin Rabinowitz have pointed out, 'although Athenian women had no political rights they were essential for passing on citizenship to their sons.' (1993, p. 3)

[22] Others have pointed out that the law did not so much concern marriage as such, since it stipulate only that one's parents on both sides should be Athenian in order for the claim of an Athenian to be considered legitimate.

[23] See Boegehold (1994, pp. 57–8), who dismisses the effort to link the law to racial purity.

Yet none of the critics from which this picture emerges—neither Vernant, nor Murnaghan, neither Bennett and Tyrell, nor Rabinowitz, have picked up on the salience of the Periclean law, which impinged not only on Pericles, but also on Sophocles' family—and the implicit reference Sophocles makes to it in *Antigone*—for slavery. It is not just the interchangeability of bodies to which Antigone objects, nor the violation of the right typically granted to kin to honor their dead that Heaney taps into (although it is this too); Antigone also answers to an imperative to reserve the rights of burial for her brother, whom she distinguishes from a slave; in doing so she is asserting at the same time that she herself is no slave (Cartledge 2002; Just 1989). The stakes for Antigone in such a distinction are high; she is concerned not merely to honor her brother, but also to distinguish herself from the slavishness Creon imputes both to Polynices and to Antigone herself, and even to Haemon, in as much as Haemon remains loyal to her.

There was considerable slippage in the Greek imaginary between the status of slaves and that of women, such that the alleged slavishness of barbarians was established in part by their imputed effeminacy; women's ostensible inferiority was thus used as a ground upon which to establish the ostensible inferiority of slaves to free men. Thus, the very fact that Antigone insists on enunciating a principle—indeed the very fact that Sophocles' Antigone has her voice heard at all, even if her character would have been played by a male actor—offers a challenge to the popular relegation of women to a locus that has no purchase on politics, and no relevance for the public arena. Yet in establishing her own right to enunciate as a principle the divine, familial dictate that requires the proper burial of her brother, Antigone denies that any such principle should be extended to slaves, thereby making her claim only at the expense of affirming the inferiority of slaves, and inscribing Polynices within the community of human law, understood as a human community that excludes slaves from its humanity.

When Plutarch reports on Pericles' law, he does so in the context of relating how, having established the law, Pericles, on the death of his 'only remaining legitimate son,' pleaded for its suspension in his own case—a plea to which the Athenians acceded. Plutarch explains that Pericles' asked this so that the name and lineage of his house should not die out for want of an heir.' (*Rise and Fall*, p. 203) Plutarch also relates that when the law was introduced there followed 'a long succession of lawsuits ... brought against those whose birth was illegitimate according to Pericles' law,' lawsuits occasioned by a gift of grain from the king of Egypt 'to be distributed among the citizens.' A direct result of the law was, Plutarch continues, that 'nearly five thousand people were convicted and sold into slavery.' (*Rise and Fall*, pp. 203–4) Pericles' law, which, according to Aristotle, was instituted because there were 'too many Athenians'—a rather 'elliptica[l]' explanation, as Alan Boegehold (1994, p. 57) notes—thus turns out to have had severe repercussions for many Athenians, whose claim to be Athenian had gone previously uncontested; so severe, that they became slaves.

Glossing Creon's argument to Haemon in *Antigone* that '[t]he fields of others are fit for the plow,' (l. 569) Tyrrell and Bennett say 'the parties in marriage are replaceable, and its ties, unlike those of blood kinship, *can be made and unmade'*

(1998, p. 114, my emphasis). Taking up the sense in which even kinship ties can be made and unmade, Mary Beth Mader's (2005) article, 'Antigone's Line' thinks through the familial confusion into which Oedipus's incest had thrown his generational line. She does so by addressing Goethe's hope that 1 day the famous irreplaceability passage would be proven spurious (quoted in Tyrell and Bennett 1998, pp. 112–3). Contra Goethe, Mader argues that Antigone's insistence on burying Polynices was an attempt to make him a brother *and only a brother*, thereby disambiguating him from the other familial roles which his father's incest had coalesced. Asking after the implications of Mader's argument—which has the not inconsiderable merit of taking Antigone at her word, rather than wishing the argument could be proved spurious—not only for the legitimacy of symbolic, familial roles, but also for the lines of descent that qualify a king as king, that qualify, in this instance, Creon as king on the death of Polynices and Eteocles—I expand the orbit of Mader's interrogation to include heredity as it affects the political realm. As Butler (2000) points out, Antigone insists not only on burying Polynices, but in publicizing her act of defiance, and in doing so she defies the expectation that women play no part in politics. At the same time (and this is not an aspect that Butler emphasizes) she challenges Creon's sovereignty. In effect, she proves herself more adept at understanding the relation of interdependency of *polis* and *oikos* than Creon (and in doing so, shows herself to be more of a Hegelian than Hegel can bring himself to admit!) In this sense, she proves herself to be a more worthy inheritor of the throne than Creon, except, of course, her character is created in a culture that would not have countenanced a woman's political leadership, in a culture where women were not deemed worthy of citizenship, let alone government. Yet Antigone's justification of her burial of Polynices, her appeal to the sanctity of the bonds of *philia*, bonds that also prove to be decisive for determining the sovereign authority of Thebes, takes shape and is heard only at the price of corroborating the inferior status of slaves. A slave would not deserve the honor of burial, nor would a slave elicit Antigone's violation of Creon's law, but Antigone's brother, Polynices, does.

Antigone disambiguates Polynices not only from a potential son or husband, but also from a slave, a disambiguation which echoes a thematic concern that, once one begins to look for it, shows up throughout the Oedipus cycle. Sophocles' concern with *genos* is not restricted to a narrow understanding of kinship, but extends to the differentiation of citizens from non-citizens, freemen from slaves, and Greeks from barbarians. The very clarity that Antigone seeks in ensuring that her brother is recognized as her brother, precisely her anxiety in preserving or reinstating the difference between brother and uncle, is also a way of distinguishing between her family lineage and the deracination of slaves, what Orlando Patterson (1982) describes as 'social death,' a fate that Oedipus himself narrowly avoided.

In exposing Oedipus, in order to avert an oracle, Laius and Jocasta transgress Theban law. Had Oedipus been given to magistrates, to be sold into slavery—which would have followed a pattern that was not uncommon—there would have been no such transgression. When Oedipus avoids the fate of abandonment as an infant on Mount Cithaeron, saved from exposure by a shepherd, his feet are bound together.

The bodily integrity usually reserved for freemen, for citizens, and which the Greeks held dear—although beating and torture of slaves was commonplace—is thereby violated, a violation that Oedipus mimics when he casts out his own eyes. The boundary separating freemen and slaves is also invoked when Oedipus expresses his fear that the mystery surrounding his origins might conceal his lowly birth. Even the Sphinx's riddle concerning the number of feet man has can be seen to corroborate the central theme of slavery in relation to Oedipus's identity (and thus its pertinence for the identity of his children). When we contextualize the term *andropodon*, a term that 'unambiguously' designated slaves, which was formed 'by analogy with' *tetrapoda* (four-footed things), a term used commonly for cattle, and as such, according to Cartledge, clearly imputing sub-humanity to slaves (Cartledge 2002, p. 151), the riddle of the Sphinx, which goes unanswered, is put in a new light.[24]

Antigone's insistence upon burying her brother takes shape as the effort to preserve his humanity, a humanity that is won, however, at the price of re-inscribing the distinctly questionable humanity accorded by freemen to slaves. Her insistence is informed by the cultural representation of barbarians—Cartledge (2002) and Hall (1989), among others, have commented on the elision between barbarians and slaves in Greek thought—as exposing their dead on funeral pyres, where the corpses were to be stripped by carrion birds. While the evidence points to this representation serving the mythical imaginary perpetuated by Greeks in order to other barbarians—to subject them to a process of othering—rather than reflecting a consistent practice, the fact remains that nonetheless, in the popular Greek imaginary, the Zorastrian exposure of corpses is played out, and informs Antigone's anxiety that Polynices receive a proper—read Greek, non-barbarian (non-Persian), free—burial.

Consider the picture that can be built up from this accumulation of details: the ease with which Oedipus might have been a slave, his concern that the specter of slavery does indeed haunt the circumstances of his birth, his bodily impairment, Antigone's anxiety that Polynices not be treated like a slave in death, her consequent insistence on distinguishing him from a slave in order to honor him, the pervasive, if mythically hyperbolic representation of barbarian practices of exposing corpses against which the tragedy of Antigone unfolds, and the reminder of how precarious freedom was when so many Athenians found themselves sold into slavery as a result of Pericles' law—a law that he successfully argued should be suspended in his own case, a law that is also said to have affected Sophocles' own family. Consider also the exchanges in the play, including the insult that Creon directs at Haemon, whom he calls a woman's slave, and the significance of the Sphinx's riddle in relation to the differentiation of animals from humans with regard to slavery. Given this accumulation, the suggestion that the parameters

[24] See Ahl (2008). Consider this in the context of arguments circulating concerning slaves as ensouled property, property barely distinguished from four-footed animals, a status that renders the humanity of slaves distinctly questionable. See also Cartledge (2002, pp. 136 and 151).

within which the Oedipus cycle has been interpreted need revisiting, begins to look more than plausible. It begins to look as if those shadowy others, marginalized by the reception of *Antigone*, the slaves to whom Sophocles, is, after all, indebted for the leisure time to create the play, inhabit it in ways that have not been fully recognized. To acknowledge their shadowy presence is to begin to articulate not only the ways in which the presence of slavery haunts the tragic drama of ancient Greece, but also the ways in which new world slavery and colonialism continue to haunt modern and contemporary western interpretations of *Antigone*, interpretations to which the system of chattel slavery that helped to make the Athens we celebrate what it was, remains insignificant, and for which the slaves that facilitated the leisure of free men to create tragic dramas remain invisible.

In closing, let me recall, briefly, a dimension of Greek tragedy, and *Antigone* in particular, which, while it has not gone completely unremarked, has certainly been allowed to fade into the background of critical responses to *Antigone*. Critics might mention in passing that, of course, in fifth century BCE Athens, only men would have performed in dramatic tragedies; yet often the performative dynamics that this would have produced—particularly in a play like *Antigone*, where precisely the weight, authority, and legitimacy of a female character's words are in question—are neglected. How exactly would an ancient Athenian audience have read a male actor playing a role such as Antigone, a character who challenges her exclusion from the polity by asserting her right to defy the king? Even the fact that there is still uncertainty as to whether or not women attended festivals of Dionysos is telling of women's marginality.

Among the strengths of *The Island*, by Athol Fugard, John Kani and Winston Ntshona, one of the plays that helps to rethink the contours according to which the western philosophical reception of *Antigone* has been formulated, is its inventive revisiting of the performative constraints under which *Antigone* would have been performed originally. Set in Robben Island, where Nelson Mandela was imprisoned—and inspired by an abbreviated dramatization of the exchange between Creon and Antigone that occurred there—*The Island* stages a scene in which Winston, who is to play Antigone in the annual prison concert, is ridiculed by his cellmate, John, who is to play Creon. Wearing 'false titties,' in the words of the play, and a mop as a wig, Winston becomes the butt of John's sexualized humor for dressing as a woman. Ultimately *The Island* recuperates the humiliation suffered by Winston, and in doing so it serves up an educational lesson as to the lasting and profound relevance of Antigone, as a character who stands up for justice, even if, as we have seen, her understanding of justice turns out to be severely compromised by her failure to expand the implications of her own claim to be heard to slaves. The way in which *The Island* takes up the fact that Winston must dress as a woman is not unproblematic from the point of view of homophobia, yet at least *The Island* confronts the complexities of what it means for a black South African male actor to play the role of Antigone—whether the constraint of a male actor playing Antigone is necessitated by the mores of ancient Athens, or by those of an all male prison in apartheid South Africa. In doing so, *The Island* opens up the question

of how the performative conditions under which Greek tragedy would have originally been played, rather than closing it down.

The Island opens with a scene in which the physical and spiritual endurance of Winston and John is tested to its limits, as they are forced to undertake the backbreaking, Sisyphean labor of shifting piles of sand of one place to another. As soon as one prisoner empties his wheelbarrow of sand, the other must dig the sand back up and deliver it to his cellmate, and so on, *ad infinitum*. The futility of this task is undercut only by the strain it imposes upon the bond between the prisoners, whose own labor orchestrates the rhythm and necessity of their cellmate's, under the hot South African sun. Forced to return to their prison cell in a three-legged run (as they are tied together), John and Winston sustain bodily injuries as they fail to run fast enough to avoid suffering the physical blows of Hodoshe (in Xhosa, carrion fly) the prison guard. Winston's eye injury and John's ankle injury do not fail to conjure up Oedipus's infirmities, and as they are reduced to crawling on all fours, in pain from their injuries, having run three-legged, they struggle to re-assert their manhood, standing again on their own two feet, refusing to acquiesce to the attempt to reduce them to animals. The play thus calls to mind the Sphinx's riddle, at the same time as it evokes the hard labor, physical pain, and bodily abuse suffered by men imprisoned for their objection to apartheid, a system that echoes slavery in its systematic mistreatment of some humans as less than human, and in its exclusionary, racist, politics.

Reflecting upon the texts that have achieved the status of classics, Italo Calvino writes:

> The classics are the books that come down to us bearing the traces of readings previous to ours, and bringing in their wake the traces they themselves have left, on the culture or cultures they have passed through (or, more simply, on language and customs). (Calvino 1989, p. 128; quoted by Heaney 2009, p. 126)

My effort here has been to read the traces that have been left by *Antigone* on the cultures of South Africa, Nigeria and Northern Ireland, in an effort to allow those traces to put into question, and re-inscribe, the traces that *Antigone* has left on a western canon that ritually cites ancient Athenian culture as its origin, embracing Antigone as a tragic hero, without attending to the system of chattel slavery that facilitated her heroic status. In Sophocles, mythical Thebes stands as an Other to Athens, a culture rife not only with incest, but also, I am suggesting—though these traces have been less well read—one in which the precarious boundary separating those who are free from those who are slaves is allowed to appear in all its fragility. This Thebes, counterpart of Athens, thus functions as a literary repository onto which can be projected the deep and abiding anxiety of Athenian, adult males, concerning the legitimacy of their own right to freedom, citizenship, and inheritance, their right to stand, unambiguously, on their own two feet, while requiring others to crawl on all fours, under the blows of torture, thereby returning them to a state of infancy—a fate from which Hegel, along with the continental philosophical tradition, has desperately tried to help the heroes of Greek tragedy to definitively

escape.[25] This evasion leaves in its wake an excess, washed up by the tides of *Aufhebung*/repression, on the shores of philosophy/psychoanalysis, an excess that goes beyond that of sexual difference, an excess that still remains to be thought beyond the Oedipus of Hegel and that of Freud, beyond Derrida's explorations in *Glas*, and beyond Antigone's feminist reclamations: the traces of slavery that the dominant interpretive annals of Antigone's tragedy have attempted to entomb, along with Antigone.[26] Just as the 'hostility' of 'other communities' rises up, according to Hegel, when their altars are 'defiled' by the birds and dogs, when the body is not returned to the earth, in accordance with the 'sacred right' of burial, so the traces of slavery return to haunt us, sometimes erupting violently, when representation banishes them to a 'mute unconscious' (PhS, p. 287; PhG, p. 339) undercurrent to which an outlet of expression is denied.

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[25] I draw here on Froma Zeitlin's (1990) discussion of tragic drama's projection of Thebes as containing the tensions Athenians had trouble confronting in their own *polis*.

[26] Gearhart (1998) argues that Hegel's *Aufhebung* should be understood as akin to repression.

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Chapter 11
Politics of Religion/Religions of Politics

or Paul and Occupy

An Interview with Simon Critchley by Alistair Welchman

Welchman It's hard to know where to begin, but maybe with Paul. Why Paul? And there are two layers to this question. One is: why did you engage with Paul? And the second question—which might answer the first question—is: why has he become such a contemporary intellectual figure, at least in certain circles? It really is a strange thing that Taubes, Agamben, Badiou and now you should all write about Paul.

Critchley It's a strange thing. It depends on how you see history. It's a strange thing within a certain sort of secular orthodoxy about what is permissible or decent to speak about, particularly when it comes to politics. But in the larger historical picture, as I say in the piece that you so brilliantly edited, the return to Paul is always in the spirit of reformation. So within the history of Christianity, Paul is the element of foundation. And since just after his death (I talk about Marcion in the paper) there's been a competition over the meaning of Paul's epistles. So Christianity is a constant return to Paul: somehow in Paul we can find the impetus for this strange thing called Christianity. Obviously that's the case with Luther and the Reformation, and arguably with different movements up to Kierkegaard and Heidegger. So, seen in a broad perspective, in a culture that is still residually Christian, the return to Paul shouldn't be that surprising, should be less surprising. In a sense, the return to the ancient Greeks, who were less important, should be more surprising. The Christians and the Romans were more important.

And for me, the actual reason why I wrote on Paul was because they were going to have a day session in St Paul's Cathedral [in London], a big event on what Paul means now. I'd read Badiou's book on Paul and Agamben's book on Paul and been taken by both and thought I'd write something on Paul in [give the paper in]

An Interview with Simon Critchley by Alistair Welchman (✉)
New School, New York, NY, USA

University of Texas at San Antonio, San Antonio, TX, USA
e-mail: critchls@newschool.edu

© Springer Science+Business Media Dordrecht 2015

A. Welchman (ed.), *Politics of Religion/Religions of Politics*,
Sophia Studies in Cross-cultural Philosophy of Traditions and Cultures 8,
DOI 10.1007/978-94-017-9448-0_11

St Paul's Cathedral and get my mum to come down and it'll be a big day out and she'll be proud of me. It was meant to be this intellectual thing with just a couple of people. And the context was going to be a whole series of works in the Cathedral by Damian Hurst, new things, paintings. But it never happened. They weren't provided the funding and then the thing disappeared and the occasion never arose. But, funnily enough, when I was back in London last week I did something with Giles Frazer, who was the canon of St. Paul's and resigned over [the expulsion of] Occupy St. Paul's. Which is a way of getting to the second question, about why Paul now? If you think about the Occupy movement, the surprising occurrence of occupations in different parts of the world, mainly in North America, which in New York was about Occupy Wall Street, OWS. But in London, St Paul's cathedral became the place of occupation. Now that's because maybe they're soft and allowed to it happen and there's a Cathedral precinct that you can hang out in. But it does also raise this question about the relationship between Christianity and poverty, and Christianity and forms of political resistance, and the turn to Paul, most obviously, is a way of addressing those questions. So most obviously for Badiou, Paul is the historical figure who invents the idea of the universal as that in relationship to which a certain political process might be initiated. For Badiou, Paul is the exemplary militant. And this answers the question: in the context of a generalized liberal democracy and the triumph of liberal democracy in the 90s, where actually the range of political possibilities was dramatically limited. The end of history ideas and the rest . . .

Welchman It's ended before, right, history?

Critchley Yes, it keeps ending. So Paul offered the idea of how you could basically make something out of nothing, and construct a movement that would make something out of nothing and would speak on behalf of a constituency that were nothing, politically, the constituency that Paul describes as the scum of the earth [I Corinthians 4:13]. So the really interesting question that's raised in 'why Paul now?' is that the Paul we have now is a Paul who is able to be a vehicle for giving voice to a political constituency that are invisible or 'nothing' in terms of ordinary politics. So Paul has become the new figure for a militant anti-orthodox, anti-imperialist politics. And that's where we've got to. The other option would have been something like Hardt and Negri. But that's a very different ontology. In Negri there's a Spinozist-Deleuzian kind of substance and we just change the way in which that substance appears, as it were. But this is much more of a creation out of nothing approach.

Welchman Although you're critical in the paper of that notion of creation out of nothing, particularly in relation to the Badiou text.

Critchley Yes. The idea of a radically new beginning. I think there's a real problem there. Just theologically—if that's the right word—there's a problem there. Just as a reading of Paul, there's a real issue about the relationship between creation and redemption, old and new testament, Jewishness and what it means to be 'in Christ,' rather than Christian (the term 'Christian' of course hadn't yet been

invented). And Paul manages somehow to straddle both areas. He is the Hebrew of Hebrews, he's a Jew, who undergoes this transformative experience in relationship to the resurrected Christ. So he's someone who was under the law, and now the law has become the experience of faith. Then the question is: does the experience of faith, which is that radical new beginning, mean that we get rid of that dimension of law or not? And I think there's risk in certain uses of Paul, particularly in Badiou, but it's also there in Heidegger, that we can entirely remake ourselves and throw off that facticity that defines us. So by law I mean something like the factical nature of human life. And projects of transformation are always limited by that. So, in Paul, I see faith and law in this sort of interesting but difficult tension. So the idea of a radical beginning can end up in forms of dangerous abstraction and violent abstraction.

Welchman There's some irony to that reading of Badiou because—although I'm not sure Badiou is terribly clear about this—but there's a critique of what he calls 'speculative leftism' in the first volume of *Being and Event*, which takes a very similar form. In that text he is saying, look, those guys ['speculative leftists'] think you can just intervene—it's a kind revolutionary vangardism—you can just intervene and remake everything. But that's not true because the event is dependent on a certain structure—the eventual site—within ontology. And that looks analogous to your use of the term 'facticity'.

Critchley Yes, up to a point. I mean the event for Badiou has two components: the evental site and the event. So events are always local. And the location of the local becomes the place where the universal appears. By 'law' I mean something like the fact of the past, the fact of our past, that we carry with us, that can't simply be jettisoned or disavowed. What Badiou says is understandable in terms of the history of the left. I mean Badiou, who came from that Marxist-Leninist background, broke with that, broke with the idea of the Party, and the idea of a kind of vangardism. And that led to the formation of the Political Organization and the rest. But there's sort of a temptation to go back to a form of Leninism, which is there in Žižek and Badiou, which I think it a danger. But I think we can have Paul without that speculative leftism.

Welchman And it's very interesting. I guess I didn't see this when I was reading your paper, but you're connecting that issue very much with the kind of diagnosis of Gnosticism. So the speculative theological analogue of leftism, of complete temporal renewal, is disavowal of the body, of nature, of 'Satan's Church.'

Critchley Now in the St Paul paper, in the book, there is a discussion of Marcion. Marcion is fascinating because he cuts the cord that binds creation to redemption, old to New Testament, Judaism to Christianity, and Marcion is the 'presbyteros,' the spokesman of a radical novelty. He also is the beginning of a dualistic ontology in the sense in which for Marcion, . . . the fact of the wickedness of the world does not flow from original sin as it does for a conventional Christian, it flows from where? another god, another divine source, so then we get the idea . . .

Welchman Plato's demiurge. . .

Critchley Plato's demiurge, a demiurge who created the visible world and whose emissaries and representatives are the *archons* or contemporary corporate leaders, and we have to rage against them. Although it's very clear that the radical novelty of Marcion is always a question of faith, and not a question of gnosis, there's no knowledge in Marcion. There's a continuation of that Marcionite dualistic ontology into forms of more radical Gnosticism, in Valentinus in the following centuries. And I think there is something deeply tempting and deeply interesting and disturbing about Gnosticism and what's tempting and interesting is the idea that to quote one of the placards I used to see a Zucchoti park 'shit's fucked and bullshit'—the world is fucked up, the world is rotten to the core and it can't be redeemed in and of itself, which is where these sort of movements would break with forms of Marxist narrative. For Marxism, that which is can be ameliorated so that it leads to a free association of human beings and communism or whatever. Whereas the world is simply fucked but we can step back from that and either destroy it or leave it. So . . .

Welchman And this is the structure that you open *Infinitely Demanding* . . .

Critchley Yeah, it's close to ideas of active nihilism. Yeah. I hadn't made that connection. But it is very close to that. I think that Gnostic temptation is completely understandable. You know it's time to leave planet earth. This project is doomed and we can begin again somewhere else. That structure gives us a way of understanding certain forms of insurrectionary politics. And I've tried to interpret the Invisible Committee and groups like that in these terms. They're adopting a politics of secession, of withdrawal. And that has its risks and dangers, it leads to a kind of abstraction again. But I understand that. But more powerfully it's an ideological position which is incredibly current: that people just think the world is fucked and it's not their fault. It's not sin, it's not my sin that's fucked up the world—the world is fucked up.

Welchman And they're right, for the most part, unless you happen to be a CEO.

Critchley Yeah. And it's run by these *archons*, these corporate leaders who have no accountability and have made things terrible. So let's remake it. And that's basically the plotline of James Cameron's *Avatar*. And it's the plotline of the *Matrix*. And I've just been writing a short thing on Philip K Dick along similar lines . . .

Welchman That sounds great. I had no idea that he had read Hans Jonas's book on *Gnosticism*!

Critchley Yeah, it's great. For him the world is a paranoid reality governed by these *archons* who are out to get you: a world of spies and espionage. They come in and steal things from your safe and move your possessions around at night. But the truth is out there. And we just need to cleanse the doors of perception in order to see it aright. And that's what . . .

Welchman So he's a true Gnostic, in the sense that it's done through gnosis and it's cognitive.

Critchley Yeah. There's a gnosis of the divine. And as always, the gnosis of the divine is linked to the possible divinization of the human. This is something I want to think about more. The latest way I've been thinking about it—in the last two days—is by dusting off one of my favorite books, which is *The Art of Memory* by Frances Yates, where she goes into the history of mnemotechnics and all the rest, but the main figure is Giordano Bruno. And Bruno's heresy was this: Bruno thought that the human being could comprehend the whole and in comprehending the whole becomes divine. And through the right organization of the mind, and in particular memory, and all sorts of arcane wisdom that Bruno was involved with, hermetic wisdom, we can become gods. So in many ways there's a strange standoff between a kind of position which is out there ideologically, which is that human beings can become gods, which is also there in this Kurzweil guy . . .

Welchman . . . technical overcoming . . .

Critchley At least Philip K Dick has an idea of gnosis as an access to metaphysical reality whereas the more common idea is that we can become godlike here on earth through the technological perfection of new prostheses. So you either go that way or [the way of] a conventional Christianity, which says well it is your fault

Welchman A Pauline Christianity?

Critchley Yeah, a Pauline Christianity. Which means that the reason that shit is fucked up and bullshit is also your fault: this is something you can't disavow.

Welchman So there's a lot of different directions you can take this. Just let me contextualize this right. So Gnosticism is really interesting. But fundamentally you think it's an inappropriate response, right?

Critchley Yeah.

Welchman It kind of gets the facts right, in a certain way, but in terms of active participation. Gnosticism is going to lead you in the direction either of a passive acceptance or into a personal drama of redemption.

Critchley It'll lead into either a passive or active nihilism. Because you begin from the idea of the world as nothing really real. And we can do away with it. So I think that's a temptation that needs to be understood because it keeps recurring in different guises. And it's been around for—depends on which unit—at least three millennia: it goes back to Zoroastrian ideas.

Welchman So to coin a phrase, can you talk about the difference between faith and knowledge?

Critchley Oh right yeah.

Welchman Because faith is the term that you want to take out from Paul, that Badiou wants to take out from Paul. And that's the easy way of characterizing this

difference because Gnosticism is a cognitive enterprise. Just as a footnote, I was interested that you talked about Hamlet in just such cognitive terms, as hypercognitive, so as having this cognitive insight into the terrible, putrefying nature of reality.

Critchley Hamlet in a sense has no faith, all he has is knowledge.

Welchman Right

Critchley And he sees the world for what it is: it's rotten; it's a prison. So Hamlet is at the Agambenian moment of global civil war and everything is . . . this office we're sitting in . . . is Auschwitz, whatever it might be. So Hamlet has that.

Welchman The decoration is a little minimal.

Critchley It is. A little austere . . .

Welchman And it is an enclosed space . . .

Critchley It is. Where no law applies, generalized state of exception. It's the idea that we inhabit a generalized state of exception. And we know that. And all that there is then is the productivity of illusion, which we know to be illusion. And that's what theater is. So in many ways . . . This is a separate project, but it's the one that really interests me at the moment. Philosophy begins with a disavowal of theater. It's explicit in Plato, it's what he calls 'theatrocracy [*theatrokratia*],' society of the spectacle. And so for Plato we need to see through the illusion of a theatrical world, which is a world of opinion, reflected back through theater, media; we need to set that against an order of knowledge which we can participate in if we orientate our soul to the good. We can't comprehend the good. But we can have access to the forms. So for Plato, it's knowledge against illusion. For Hamlet and the tragedians, it's the world is a prison, an illusion governed by war and violence and theater gives us a way of at least pointing that out. So theater becomes our only mode of action. So in this distracted globe, as Hamlet says, we can construct another globe, namely the theater, which can at least show us . . .

Welchman is there a political moment to your understanding of Hamlet?

Critchley Yes. It's complicated. I've not got it fully in my head. Napoleon is alleged to have said to Goethe—in one of those apocryphal moments—that what fate was for the ancients, politics is for us. So the order of fate, the gods who govern the city, has become the order of politics. One way of reading Hamlet—no, the overwhelmingly powerful way I want to read Hamlet—is as a political drama in that sense. It's not about some bourgeois individual who's like us, who can't make up his mind. It's about someone who's a sovereign in the Schmittian sense, who expects to be a king, whose father the king is killed, and there's a usurper king on the throne, and his mother's involved in it in some way he can't figure out, and he's told the truth by a ghost. He knows. He just can't act in the appropriate way. But in that framework, the only thing that Hamlet has faith in is theater. And the most fascinating thing about Hamlet is that, in the context of the Elizabethan police state

which dominated England: England had turned itself from a kind of backwater, second division European state, into a contender through a kind of Syrian regime of terror and spies and espionage.

Welchman and poor laws . . .

Critchley Yeah. So everybody is being watched all the time in Hamlet. No one's alone. Everyone's being watched. There are surveillance cameras everywhere. And we become aware of that in a theatrical performance where one is being watched. So theater becomes as it were the crucible through which we can diagnose the political regime that we inhabit . . .

Welchman Is there a *positive* political outcome? Clearly the play is political. Clearly there are political ramifications. But if we were to fit those political ramifications in some way into the structure you've set up, it looks like a gnostic structure.

Critchley Almost, yeah.

Welchman Hamlet lacks faith. He has a very minimal form of faith. He has faith in the aesthetic. That's a kind of limited form of redemption. Certainly it's not one that hopes to change the nature of the state or eliminate the state or do anything like that. So is there a possible political praxis that could come out of this analysis? And what's the role of art?

Critchley When I think about ancient tragedy (although I don't like the term 'ancient') or when I think about early modern tragedy (not liking the words 'early modern') or I think about Ibsen or Brecht, or whatever, I want to say something like the following: interesting theater or great theater or powerful theater tends to arise at points of radical historical transition between a society which is more or less ordered undergoing some sort of dissolution—though success, through military success or financial success. Athens is a case in point. All of the tragedies I think are about a society that has a memory—a memory—of myth as a way of legislating, a way of running a political order, a sort of mythic political order, has a memory of that, but no belief in that. And that memory is somehow bound up with the memory of the Trojan War and the Mycenaean period and all the rest, and a political order that's governed by law. So it's this old world of myth and new world of law coming into some sort of fateful collision. So theater seems to take place in the space between the old and the new, past and present, there's a sort of essential temporal disjunction at the heart of theater, which is really interesting. In Schmitt it's obvious, and it's obvious historically in the battles between Catholicism and emergent Protestantism in England at that period, dissolution of the monasteries, and the emergence of a kind of Tudor tyranny, which is what it was. But there's still the memory of a kind of mythic order, which was be legitimate, or what a true king would be, namely Hamlet's father. And then we're in a world where that's dissolved. And you could say 'that's it'. One option would be to say there's nothing positive here. It's simply a diagnosis of the *impasse* we find ourselves in: the world is screwed and we might as well be aware of that. Or you could say something more

interesting and follow Raymond Williams. Raymond Williams's book on *Modern Tragedy* has a few really interesting pages on dialectics, tragedy and revolution. And what Williams wants to say is theater is dialectical. It's about oppositions in some sort of conflictual relation. OK. We have that. And they smash against each other and things collapse. That's a dialectic. But that dialectic could also be a dialectic of revolution. What Williams wants to say is that there's a tragic character to revolution: in revolution, a society, a social order, is dissolved in the name of progress, and into that new space a new form of dictatorship emerges, Jacobinism or Cromwell in the English revolution. But that doesn't mean that it's a failure, it means there's another dialectical spin. So theater can give us a head for the political complexities of history, the dialectic of history. That's probably as far as I'd go. Maybe with Brecht you could push it further

Welchman But your book is about Hamlet.

Critchley Book's about Hamlet. But the weird thing about that is the characters we pick up: I mean Schmitt and Benjamin as two characters! I mean Schmitt, Mr. Decision, Mr. State of Exception, Mr. Sovereignty, writes a book about the sovereign who isn't sovereign, the sovereign that can't decide and there's a kind of internal collapse of the Schmittian project that's being articulated in his mediation on Hamlet. It's very strange.

Welchman So it's not a critical essay, the Schmitt? Is there not an implicit criticism: this is a failed sovereignty?

Critchley I think he's presenting us with the failure of the modern political order, which is the order, which Hamlet finds himself in, as opposed to the Catholic order of true kings, which preceded it. So it's a kind of lament in Schmitt, I think. But whether there's more than that in theater, I don't know. Maybe there is.

Welchman Having covered two way too big topics, I'd like to delicately move us back to the topic of religion and pose you this question. There's clearly a kind of religiosity about Agamben's text. I mean it's hard to tell what's going on in a lot of Agamben, but it is suffused with a kind of religiosity. Badiou is clearly not. Your work is kind of cautiously neutral. You say somewhere, 'I don't want to tie my flag to the mast of secularism' but that's as far as you want to go. Just about Badiou's text. Is it a religious text? The Paul book? Does it have to be, in the end? He doesn't want it to be.

Critchley He doesn't want it to be. And in his terms, religion is not one the four conditions for the event and all the rest.

Welchman And that weakens the text a lot because at the end he's like: you can't take any of this really seriously because this was all a mistake and Paul wasn't right and he had faith in the wrong thing. . .

Critchley So you can answer that question about Badiou and religion very simply in Badiou's own terms: no, it's not religious at all, and religion is of no consequence. Paul just gives us the logic of the political event. Great. But you read the

book, and more is going on than that. Similarly with Agamben. The interest in Paul for Agamben is really an interest in language, an interest in the nature of performatives, of proclamations, or faith as the different, non-propositional use of language. This could be at best a kind of Heideggerian move: there's a sort of dysfunction in our use of language, and we need to attend to it, and Paul is a way of attending to that. But there's no doubt if you read Agamben's book that there's more to it than that. I think similarly with me. I think I've got a huge interest in religion, which I can disavow, saying it's just giving me a series of diagnostic structures. So if we want to be critics of ideology in 2012, then we need to read Jonas on Gnosticism and we need to read Paul because these structures are still in play. But there's more than that. For me, it's the improbability of belief and the extraordinary desire for there to be something like belief; and I still suffer from a kind of religion envy. Because you imagine that faith is something that *they* have, that *they* have access to, and you don't have access to, and it must be sweet and wonderful. It's back to faith and knowledge. So philosophy gives one knowledge of a certain sort. But it seems to deprive us of any transcendent idea of faith.

Welchman So when you characterize you relation as in part the experience of a belief envy, you're putting the emphasis on the 'envy' but I'm going to put the emphasis on the word 'belief'. And this was Philip Quadrio's question about the nature of faith: it makes faith look like a kind of cognitive enterprise again. So it's not normal cognition, it's another form of cognition. Maybe it's a deficient one, some might say. Maybe it's hypercognitive, in some ways a better form of cognition. But that's not the complete story with faith, right.

Critchley No. That's right. So, to correct myself: to talk about belief envy is to imagine that belief is something that one can have as a form of knowledge. There's a part of your head which is a knowledge part, and there's a part of your head which is a faith part, and somehow there's a wall between them. Now the form of faith that I think is not knowledge, and which I want to defend, is this idea of faith as a subjective commitment to an ethical demand. So the idea is that faith is not knowledge of some metaphysical entity, like god; faith is the orientation of a self actively pointing towards the world in relationship to something that it experiences as a demand, and that demand is not an item of knowledge, it's a sort of ethical orientation. In that sense, I have faith.

Welchman So that's very interesting. So doesn't that make faith, on the analysis of *Infinitely Demanding*, identical with ethics.

Critchley Yeah. Yes it does. At the end of the day, this would be a kind of residual Levinasianism, Identification of ethics and religion, which means that ethics is not a set of principles or codes or whatever, ethics is an experience of relation to a demand, and so's faith. So I think that there is an identification of faith and ethics in my work.

Welchman Does that make secular ethics impossible?

Critchley it means that at the core, motivating structures, or the core motivating thing which we get an ethical view of the world going, is a kind of faith. Onto which one could add all sorts of secondary stuff. You could then add systems of norms and laws that would flow from that and all the rest. In Kantian terms it's the question of how the moral law can find a place in the heart of the human being in a motivating way. Without that ethics seems to be a series of abstractions, which I can have a perfectly disinterested relationship to. And I want it to be something more than that.

Welchman Yes, clearly it has to be. But it's a very strong claim, though, right? There are lots of people who claim to have some ethical experience. I don't mean experienced ethicists, although some people claim that too. But people who have presumably engaged themselves in the phenomenology, which is a kind of active phenomenology, of ethical experience, but who wouldn't maintain that that had any religions dimension to it. Or has the religious dimension been pared down, demetaphysicalized . . .

Critchley Yeah, the religious dimension been pared down to such an extent. So for me, to put it classically, was Jesus Christ, the Son of God, who was born, crucified and resurrected, or was he a troublesome rabbi in occupied Palestine? For me, as Joyce would say, these are schoolboy speculations on the historicity of Jesus. The authority of someone like Jesus Christ doesn't come from any metaphysical guarantee of divinity, but comes from the demand that they articulate, that one might or might not accept—there can be no coercion here. So to have ethical experience on my view is to have faith. But not faith in some beyond, faith in the ethical experience . . . so it's kind of circular in that regard.

Welchman So I was thinking about this in relation to Badiou and trying to save his view. There is right now, maybe there could be in the future, but right now no other space within which we can articulate ethical experience except one that has been overlain with a religious dimension. So it's not that Badiou is secularizing, exactly, so that he can just take this structure off and put it back in. That's the weakest interpretation. I feel much more religiosity about Agamben than obviously you do; I put you and Agamben much closer together.

Critchley Interesting, yes.

Welchman But it's not just that Badiou is taking this structure and secularizing it. But nor is it the alternative. The alternative hypothesis is just as bad: that we're unable to have done with Christianity, and we should try to get over it. But that there is, for the time being anyway, historically ineliminable reference to religion because there's no other space in which to articulate these demands.

Critchley And that space has come back with an extraordinary power in the last 40, 50 years as a consequence of forms of secular imperialism. The paradox is that the return to religion can be dated in different ways. But one way of dating it is the Iranian revolution, which, in terms of the revolution, was resistance to an imperial

secular order. So we're in a situation where there are the gods of this world, the governments and corporations, and then to try and oppose them in various ways, means that one is ineluctably drawn into forms of religious thinking. Religion comes from *religare*, which means to join together, to assemble. The key feature of religion is association. So for me any—for *me* firstly, and this is where I follow Rousseau—legitimate politics is about association not about representation. It means inhabiting forms of direct democracy, more or less; or at least people coming together in whichever way they can and making a decision. It doesn't mean deferring that decision to elected representatives. But that association is 'church', that's 'church'. I've always been very attracted to ideas in historically black Christianity, where church is not a place; church is something you have or you don't have. You can have church in church, you can have church in a concert hall, you can have church on the street and you can have good church and bad church, or you have no church in a church because the pastor isn't any good. Church is something that you have and something that you do. So even for someone like Badiou, who seems like such an anti-religious figure, what attracts him to Paul is the idea of the event, the idea of the event being located in a community that is addressed by a letter that is sent from Paul. That community is a church, it's an *ekklesia*, that's what 'ekklesia' means, it's that binding together. So to that extent politics and religion can get very close. But this implies nothing *metaphysical*. But it *can* do. That's the other thing. You could be in a political situation and you have faith in the situation and you're engaged in it. And the person next to you could believe this is all because of the resurrected Christ or because of the Buddhist principles he lives his life by. But in a sense that's neither here nor there.

Welchman So you don't buy the Derrida, Heidegger and Agamben thesis. Somewhere Agamben says evil is basically a failure to respect ontological difference, treating being as a being. But on your view, metaphysicalized versions of religion may be perfectly OK. So there's a non-metaphysical version, but we're not all committed to that.

Critchley What matters for me is the demand. Whether the demand is seen to flow from a divine command, with a metaphysical legitimacy, is neither here nor there. So I guess metaphysics in a Heideggerian mode is that metaphysics is always the attempt to determine the meaning of being in various ways. And one way of doing that is to say the meaning of being is god. So to that extent this would be a kind of non-metaphysical faith, or an experience of faith. But that question isn't perhaps the most important question to ask.

Welchman I just read your article in the *Guardian* and I noticed one thing, which you're addressing right now. In *Infinitely Demanding* your phenomenology of ethical experience is based on this dialectic, or something like that, between demand and approval. But in the article, you talk about demand and then immediately about location. Is that a change, or a change of emphasis? Because you've mentioned a lot of times the localized. Association is a locality, so's the formation of a community. And of course the Occupy guys, they needed a place to assemble.

Critchley The short answer is that after the police and the city authorities took apart Zuccotti Park, there was the question: what next? where next? It seemed to me that location was essential. There's no political without location. So that was what was on my mind. This is very close to Badiou in a way. For Badiou you've got an event, which is an evental site plus and event. I guess what I'm saying is that politics is a demand and a location. That demand has to be approved, it has to be that in relationship to which one shapes one's ethical selfhood. I don't remember how this happened. I stumbled into the language of demand through reading Dieter Henrich on the structure of moral insight in Kant in, I think, 1995, when he talks about 'demand'. And then through people like Bernard Waldenfelz who was doing a phenomenological ethics of the *Anspruch*.

Welchman So you're thinking of 'demand' as translating 'Anspruch'?

Critchley At one moment, yes. So to me it seems like an arcane piece of conceptual vocabulary.

Welchman Surely it's got a Levinasian reference at the back of it. It seems too Levinasian.

Critchley No. He says in *Otherwise than Being* that the ethical relation is not a demand. He says that. And he's thinking of demand in a more Sartrean way. But the point I wanted to make is that we're now in a situation of the politics of the demand, the politics of the demandless demand, demanding everything and demanding nothing. There was this wonderful moment last fall, when the question that was raised was 'Who are your leaders and what do you want?' And the refusal to answer both those questions in the name of a demandless demand, a demand that is in a sense abstract, vague, and refuses to target itself.

Welchman Yes, that's just what happened with the Occupy Wall Street protests: no one could figure out how to handle them because they had no leaders and no demands! Can you talk about your experience with OWS?

Critchley It was adbusters that called the protest in August and I got wind of it shortly after that. There was some crazy New York end of summer party full of celebrities. It was weird, and on the terrace I was talking to a South African friend of mine who was explaining how this was going to work. [And I thought] OK there's something going on here. Then I went down on September 17 with my son who was in town from England and we walked up and down Broadway and [laughs] went home and that was that. So what was interesting was the location? They didn't occupy Wall Street. They occupied Zuccotti Park. And that happened because there was a breakoff from the main group (issued by David Graeber) and they were going to have a General Assembly. Whereas I think the original group, the adbusters group, was much more 'let's march up and down and get some microphones and loudhailers and do a conventional call'. I think what was interesting—well, so many things were interesting—was the fact that it wasn't where it was supposed to be. It wasn't far from where it was planned to be, but it was somewhere else. And the limitations of the context gave rise to these forms of innovation like the human

mike. And for me, what was absolutely fascinating was: I've been hanging around with students and activists in the last few years in New York, and watching them develop these techniques in what looked like the maddest, most arcane panoply of stuff. And then suddenly it becomes a central—the central—political issue and everyone knows what a general assembly is and how to engage in consensual discussion. The question that everyone's asking, which is the wrong question, is: what next? I think the question is: it happened. Well, not the question, the statement is: it happened, it occurred. And we should focus on the fact that it occurred and then it might occur again.

Welchman or something else will occur.

Critchley Yes, or something else will occur, if we look backwards rather than forwards. That's the key thing. So I think the May 1st demonstrations that are called for, even what's going on now, on the occupying pavements around Zuccotti, I think this is not going to work. These sorts of movements, they happen rarely. They're not destined for longevity. The effects of them are going to be long-term. But '68 lasted, what, 30 something days, and was failure and then DeGaulle was re-elected! Really you could say that it was 1980 with the election of the Mitterand government that 68 [had its effects]. . . And then that was a partial victory. I think there's a tendency on the Left to get frustrated that things aren't happening and all the rest. But no: it happened, and there was a re-invention of political possibility at that point and that was fantastic.

Welchman When you say that things like that are short-lived, it raises standard problems with anarchist structures, which is that they are incredibly vulnerable to statist pressure and there's been a slew of local ordinances across the United States [making long-term park protests illegal]. And it's not hard to take a park away from people. All you need to do is say, once a week we need to . . .

Critchley . . . need to clean it . . .

Welchman Yeah, clean it.

Critchley . . . hygiene . . .

Welchman Yes, hygiene, really trivial . . .

Critchley . . . the language of hygiene . . .

Welchman . . . social hygiene. It's really easy to do that. And those structures of direct democracy and horizontal communication are incredibly vulnerable. So where's longevity going to come from?

Critchley Elsewhere. They're incredibly vulnerable. The sites were cleared. And a lot of people who were involved, and a lot of people who weren't involved saw what was happening. And I think the brutality of the police response, particularly in New York, has really shaken things up. It's a classic scenario: what do you do when you're being beaten up by guys with sticks who can arrest you? Does non-violent resistance work . . . ? What do you do? So I think one question that's raised is: does

this tip over from non-violent resistance to violent resistance? Could we go through a kind of Weather Underground moment, let's bring the war home?

Welchman I can't think of anything more catastrophic.

Critchley Yes, it would be a disaster. The other way to go is: if OWS was association and general assembly and all the rest, then: what's the relationship between that and representation? Is what happened something which is separate from normal politics? And what *should* people involved in the movement, and not involved in the movement make of this? And on that I'm torn, simply torn. You've got someone like Badiou in his little book on politics that just came out a month ago, saying we should cultivate an absolute indifference towards voting. Something like that. And I can see why he says it, but it's a little stupid. If I were indifferent to voting in Texas or in the Southern states of the US, I think that's the wrong strategy. Part of the strategy has to be the expansion of voting rights, getting people the vote and, all of that because, as we know, in the United States, this is all . . .

Welchman . . . going to be a big problem in the next election . . .

Critchley . . . and it's all racially coded, as we know, and as we saw in Florida in 2000, all the rest, all that. So there has to be an articulation between the forms of association in Occupy Wall Street and the forms of representative politics at least, at the grass roots level. But how far should that go? This is the question that opposition movements always face. The Green party in Germany in the 70s: do you remain separate, or do you become a political party and enter the process? You get power, but at what cost?

Welchman Chomsky addresses a similar issue, and he has a very clear answer and from a perspective that's at some level sympathetic. If you go for anarchism right now, it'll just be domination by corporations. Right now, only the state is even marginally responsive to popular demands. So right now you have to support the state.

Critchley I guess my view, for what it's worth, is that you need to pursue both lines. You need to pursue every possible political avenue. So, you know, Occupy threw up amazing things, but one needs to be pragmatically involved in the representative political process at this point, and it would serve no purpose if Obama were not re-elected. It would be the Left shooting itself in the foot, as it has done in the past. I think there's another question, which is maybe more of a European question, well, maybe not; maybe it's a North African and Arabic question, which is about the state and where we are with the state. And it seems to me that in the European Union we're in a situation of absolute confusion and paradox: the Treaty of Rome . . . we need to get over the idea nation state, it led to war; federalism of the EU, all the rest: the conditions would seem to be ideal for the dissolution of the nation state. But that hasn't happened.

Welchman And we got something worse!

Critchley . . . and we got something worse: a form of affectless bureaucracy where certain nation states still have extraordinary power (like Germany), and where opposition to that power is often going to be articulated in terms of the nation state. So what's going on in Greece is a kind of defense of the Greek state against its humiliation by its one-time European friends who are not its enemies. So, what am I saying? There's a sense in which . . .

Welchman . . . a kind of tactical nationalism . . .

Critchley Yeah. Tactical nationalism. I think that it wouldn't take that much of a push in the areas of Europe that I know to bring about a full-scale collapse of the political system. I think Britain is in a horrendous situation. The Murdoch scandal is revealing the rottenness of that system: the cronyism, the friendships, the little networks of power that have governed Britain since the late 70s. And it's nauseating . . .

Welchman The great and the good.

Critchley Yeah. And people see that. So what I would like to see is these husks, these dinosaurs, these relics of European history dissolve, and then we embrace a federal political order in Europe and reorganize autonomy around towns, cities and agricultural areas, whatever it might be, regions. And that's entirely imaginable. It wouldn't take that much of a change. In certain countries like Italy and Switzerland it would be relatively easy. In more centralized states, it would be harder. But why not? And we're just not even anywhere close to that conversation, but that's not far away. Then you think about the Arab world, why, given that the Arab world was designed by French and British colonialists—and those lines in the sand are where they are because they decided that's where they should be—why are those states fixed in stone? Why wasn't there a more thoroughgoing thinking through of what's going on in Tunisia and Egypt and Libya?—well Libya is a different case—but in Tunisia and Egypt, which would lead to a questioning of the state form.

Welchman But that's not going on at all in the Arab Spring . . .

Critchley No, no. As far as I can tell, it's not happening at all. No. What we have is classical, almost nationalist socialist—not National Socialist! Mubarak's family were selling off the family jewels—the natural resources and the power companies—to rich foreigners and feathering their nests and the Egyptian people need to reclaim the ownership of means of production, and all the rest. So there's a sense in which the agenda was still powerfully nationalist. And I think that's a problem because, as we're seeing now, those national frameworks are inhabited by more traditional parties, so what's happening in Egypt is increasingly retrograde. It's sort of worrying. So the state is in a state but it is still remarkably robust because there's still a residual belief in it. But people don't really believe in it. They know it's a façade. So why not push a bit further and try and imagine . . . One of the aspects of anarchism that I think is most interesting is its federalist credentials. Redescribe

anarchism as federalism and people will love it. It's just local forms of autonomy. Which you know would have complicated effects. It could lead to much more right-wing local government in some places and left-wing in other places. God knows, if Texas seceded . . .

Welchman But what do you do about this issue? In a way the European Union was sold on the grounds, just as you say, that after the Second World War, nation states had caused the war, and we should get rid of them or minimize their power, and it was also sold under the guise of subsidiarity—who remembers that word?—increasing power at the periphery . . .

Critchley Yes, giving away sovereignty . . .

Welchman . . . and it hasn't been all false. I mean, certainly in terms of languages, there was an awful history of the eradication of minor languages in Europe and they've put a stop to that. And there's clearly been more autonomy: Scottish autonomy, Welsh autonomy, Basque autonomy.

Critchley And money has flowed to the regions . . .

Welchman So it hasn't been a complete dead loss. But, nevertheless, overwhelmingly, the structures of the European Union, the only real concrete example we have of a strong post-national entity, they're just captured by capital, they're totally vectors for 'fiscal responsibility' and 'free trade' and all those things that are watchwords for the real people who are in charge, the CEOs and the bankers.

Critchley The *archons* of the Gnostic conspiracy, the confederacy of corporations. Yes, it's a nauseating spectacle. You've got sort of double sovereignty: bureaucracy at the European level and then forms of national bureaucracy. It's the worst of both worlds. I'm not really a super, huge fan of the EU necessarily, it's not something that animates my thought much . . .

Welchman I don't think it really animates anyone's.

Critchley But that's the problem. The only forms of identification people have in Western Europe are with the nation state, premised on the idea that the nation state was the location of the unity of power and politics. Politics was the means to get things done, power is the ability to get things done. We vote the right people into power and they get those things done. That has *manifestly* entirely dissolved. But the only forms of identification people have are still with those husks of nations. And what should take the place of that is a new European identity, a new European civil religion, whatever it might be, along the lines . . .

Welchman à la Rousseau?

Critchley . . . à la Rousseau, but along the lines of what was crafted by Madison here, and the debates around the Constitution and the Federalist papers. The strange thing about the US is the scale of the place, the abstraction and distances involved and all the rest. But still it invites a certain patriotism, which is powerfully affective and re-describable in different terms, liberal or conservative or whatever. Europe

has none of that, it seems to me, and the chance to make that happen was the debate around the Constitution, which is fifteen years ago now, and no one's got the slightest interest in that anymore. So we're really fucked.

Welchman . . . and that's your last word on the matter?

Critchley That's my last word on the matter, that's my last word.

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A. Welchman (ed.), *Politics of Religion/Religions of Politics,*
Sophia Studies in Cross-cultural Philosophy of Traditions and Cultures 8,
DOI 10.1007/978-94-017-9448-0