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The Possibility of an Ethical Politics: From Peace to Liturgy

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Abstract   This essay examines the possibility of developing an *ethical politics* out of the work of Emmanuel Levinas. Levinas' own work does not accomplish this kind of politics. He opts instead for a *politics of peace*, which, as this essay argues, falls short of the demands of the ethical. Thus, this essay both provides an account of Levinas' own politics and develops resources from within Levinas' own work for thinking beyond that politics. An alternative, *liturgical politics* is sketched out. In a liturgical politics, law must be thought on a redistributive model. Redistribution, it is argued, responds more adequately to the extravagant generosity of ethics than the neutral '*droits de l'homme*' developed in Levinas' political philosophy.

Key words   ethics · law · Levinas · liturgy · peace · politics · redistribution

> I cannot live in society on the basis of this one-to-one responsibility alone. (Levinas)

It has become all but commonplace among Continental philosophers to demand that Levinasians produce a politics. This demand typically performs a twofold function: to point out both the limits of both Levinas' pure Hebraism[1] and the movement from the singular Other to *le tiers*.[2] Though I am somewhat suspicious of these demands – as they often mask a call for a certain *kind* of politics – it is nevertheless true that Levinasians must be sensitive to how the very matters of obligation indicate the horizon of the political. If Levinas wants to contend that Europe is constituted by the simultaneous intertwining of and rupture between 'the Bible and the Greeks'[3] – tantamount to the singularity of Hebraic

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wisdom and the universality of Athenian law in politics – then an account of the relation between ethics and the state is imperative. Furthermore, because the demand for a politics emerges from concrete exigencies, those perplexed by Levinas' now famous comment, that his 'definition of the other is completely different' from one inclusive of Israel's most proximal other, the Palestinian (EP, 294), must feel an even more urgent demand. The question, then, is quite straightforward: is a Levinasian ethics destined for such a closed conception of the neighbor, or could politics, setting out from ethics, be thought otherwise?

The present reflections set out from Levinas and seek an *ethical politics*. This politics must be distinguished from Levinas' own articulation of a *politics of peace*. Is there a possibility, beginning within Levinas' thought, for a legitimate ethical politics? Precisely what this politics might look like from a Levinasian perspective remains an altogether open question. Although part of our task here will be to explore what an ethical politics might look like, we will ask if such a politics is necessarily absent from Levinas' own account of a politics of peace. Thus, we will engage the political in a manner both consonant with and foreign to Levinas' own reflections on the matter. This engagement entails four basic tasks. The first task is to illuminate the 'problem' of politics within the ethical; the second, to examine Levinas' attempts to negotiate the *movement* from the ethical to the political. The sections on these two tasks highlight three structures: the *gap* between ethics and politics, the *necessity* of their relation, and the *passage* that makes reconciling gap and necessity possible. The third task, in light of the relation between ethics and politics, is to examine Levinas' passage from ethics to politics with a critical eye. In the fourth and final task, we will outline a Levinasian phenomenology of political space responsive to our question of an ethical politics. In the two concluding sections, on the third and fourth tasks we will have occasion both to voice hesitation with regard to Levinas' deployment of politics and to extend our considerations beyond the conservative limitations of that deployment.

I

The motivation for a critique of Levinas' 'pure Hebraism' lies in the putatively contradictory logic of ethics and politics, a contradiction that renders a morally legitimated politics structurally impossible. Gillian Rose puts it directly when she writes of Levinas' 'Buddhist Judaism' that 'offers an extreme version of Athens *versus* Jerusalem'.[4] The Buddhist character of Levinas' Hebraism – his resolute insistence on the first position of the singular face – is betrayed by the vigilant work of ethics in the shadow of the state. Ethics, working within the particularity of moral

consciousness, is always a transcendence of politics. 'Responsibility', Rose writes, 'is defined in this new ethics as "passivity beyond passivity," which is inconceivable and not representable, *because it takes place beyond any city* – even though Levinas insists that it is social and not sacred.'[5] Such a characterization of Levinas' work is encouraged by the 'Preface' to *Totality and Infinity*. There, Levinas describes the task of *Totality and Infinity* by setting the ethics of exteriority in opposition to war and politics: 'War does not manifest exteriority and the other as other. . . . Morality will oppose politics in history' (TeI, ix–x/21–2).

The opposition of morality to war and politics arises out of a logical necessity. Politics is necessarily problematic for Levinas because it demands terms opposed to those of the face-to-face relation. As Levinas writes in his 'Preface' to the German translation of *Totality and Infinity*, ethical transcendence is wholly the relation of unicity to unicity, the love from stranger to stranger, which places ethics outside the generic idea of community (PEA, 251). Politics as generic community, founded in a general identity, disturbs the intimacy of the face-to-face pair by interjecting the universal between a relation of singulars. This interjection, in the name of third parties, threatens to neutralize the troubled ground of ethics and so trouble the matter of obligation itself. As one of Levinas' first remarks on the problem makes clear, the relation of singularity to singularity forms 'a society of me and you. We are just among ourselves. Third parties are excluded. A third man essentially disturbs this intimacy' (MT, 31/30). In *Totality and Infinity*, Levinas will again underscore this troubling and disturbing presence of another, third party. The character of disturbance marks the priority and purity of the ethical situation; the other party seems to arrive subsequent to the face-to-face. Ethics is independent of the rules and laws of politics and the question of social justice. This independence is established by the immediate responsibility of the one for the Other. Levinas writes that '[r]esponsibility for the other is an immediacy antecedent to the questions [of politics], it is proximity. It is troubled and becomes a problem when a third party enters' (AE, 200/157). Despite its signification within the face-to-face, the third party is problematic because it 'is other than the neighbor, but also another neighbor, and also a neighbor of the other, and not simply his fellow' (AE, 200/157). The logic of ethics and politics manifests a remarkable gap. The gap is opened up by the otherness of the third, who is other than me and other than the face that faces the moral I.

The face-to-face relation is always the relation of unicity to unicity. Political matters, however, demand, of necessity, a language other than that of the singular and the unique. This other language is necessary for the simple reason that political questioning calls for media of neutral problems: equality, comparison and reciprocity. The moral dimension of

politics lies in the question of justice. As such, politics calls for a calculation of equal relations, and this calculation always works within the neutral economy of representation. In 'Peace and Proximity', Levinas writes that

> . . . [t]he first question in the interhuman is the question of justice. . . . Comparison is superimposed onto my relation with the *unique* and the incomparable, and, in view of equity and equality, a weighing, a thinking, a calculation, the comparison of incomparables. . . . [Subjectivity] enters with the dignity of a citizen into the perfect reciprocity of political laws which are essentially egalitarian or held to become so. (PeP, 148–9/168)

The egalitarian structures of the liberal state cannot account for the language of singularity. The structures that make equality possible are superimposed onto the relation of unicity to unicity. I am a citizen only under a general law, a law based in the comparison of incomparable singulars. It belongs to the very idea of law that it neutralizes the enigma of the singular. Such is the fate of institutions.

The uniqueness of the face-to-face relation is not simply opposed to the state as one logic to another. The ethical explicitly resists the state and therein refuses suppression of its singularity. Levinas notes in 'Ideology and Idealism' that

> . . . the relation to the Other, as a relation of responsibility, cannot be totally suppressed, even when it takes the form of politics or warfare. Here it is impossible to free myself by saying 'it's not my concern.' There is no choice, for it is always inescapably my concern. (IaI, 247)

The logic and concrete work of ethics resists the scope of political logic. My relation to the Other 'cannot be totally suppressed'. Singularity resists universality. The work of obligation called for in the face-to-face can neither be concealed nor expiated in the legalistic work of the state. In this resistance, Levinas' work both replays some essential features of the conceptual conflict of Hebraism (City of Jerusalem) and Hellenism (City of Athens) and restages something of the ancient confrontation between Antigone and Kreon. The unsuppressable, potentially revolutionary and potentially destructive fact of a singular obligation stakes its claim outside the boundary walls of the state. But, still, one may ask: if Levinas claims ethics is sociality, does that not imply that politics is more than something outside the ethical? Is not sociality always political, even in its ethical signification?

II

What critics like Rose find objectionable in Levinas' separation of ethics from politics is the supposed failure to think the relation of the ethical

to the political. On this account, Levinas' privileging of ethics over politics fails to see how the logics of heteronomy and Hebraism presuppose the very structures they put into question. So, this is a failure born of naivety. The state, so the criticism goes, is both a factical and an essential necessity. To exclude an account of the state from ethics is to forget a – perhaps *the* – condition of the ethical relation and to evade the anxious risks of political community in a gesture of naivety.[6]

But this clearly sells the Levinasian prerogative short. Levinas will admit, with his own qualifications, that the human is *animal politique*, 'a political animal' (MT, 35/33). While he surely does not, and cannot, make politics equiprimordial with ethics,[7] it is altogether wrong to say that Levinas does not think the relation between the two. In his first take on the relation of ethics to politics, the juxtaposition of the singular face and the universality of the law opens up a gap. The face signifies without context. Politics is the face contextualized and compared – the face as citizen. Yet, the Other is always an Other with others. The call to the necessity of politics is already within the face-to-face, something that signals justice, a question of the public realm, as necessary. Levinas writes:

> But in the real world there are many others. When others enter, each of them is external to myself, problems arise. Who is closest to me? Who is the Other? Perhaps something has already occurred between them. We must investigate carefully. Legal justice is required. There is need for a State. (IaI, 247)

The politics of the state is at once what opposes ethics and what is necessary. If one cannot live in society on the basis of one-to-one responsibility alone, then some kind of politics is necessary. Between politics and ethics, there is a gap and the necessity of relation. The gap is manifest in the opposed logics. The necessity is manifest in something like the facticity of my sociality. There are many others and they command me to be a political animal.

What is the sense of this necessity, and how might it be related to ethics? For, if ethics is unsuppressable by politics and politics cannot assume, correct, or substitute itself for the work of ethics, then what would be the status of politics inside or outside the scope of obligation? This is posed by Levinas as the question of the relation of ethics to politics, a question imposed by the necessity of legal justice. It is quite simple: is the legal justice of the state necessary for protection of one from another, or is it necessary as an extension of my responsibility for the neighbor? Is legal justice born of violence, or of goodness? Levinas puts it plainly:

> [I]t is very important to know whether the state, society, law, and power are required because man is a beast to his neighbor (*homo homini lupus*)

or because I am responsible for my fellow. It is very important to know whether the political order defines man's responsibility or merely restricts his bestiality. It is very important, even if the conclusion is that all of us exist for the sake of the state, the society, the law.[8]

These remarks confirm the tension inherent in the relation. In 'Peace and Proximity', Levinas attempts to alleviate that tension by insisting on the relation as one of genetic order. When Levinas writes in *Totality and Infinity* that 'behind the straight line of the law, the land of goodness extends infinite and unexplored' (TeI, 223/245), the implication is that the goodness of ethics cannot be subsumed under the labor of politics. The function of ethics, of goodness, is to remind politics of its origin and the place of its justification. The political practice of the state is measured by what is generated by face-to-face obligations. This measuring command of the facing relation is guaranteed by the question of origin. Ethics puts politics in question as both other than politics and the foundation of its justice. This genetic relation is important to recall, for the danger of politics lies in its capacity to claim itself as its own center. Levinas reminds us that politics left to itself 'bears a tyranny within itself' (TeI, 276/300). Or, as he writes in an immensely important passage from 'Peace and Proximity', we can recall politics to its origin in peace. Precisely because the state risks claiming an originary character, Levinas writes that

> . . . it seemed to us important to recall peace and justice as their origin, justification, and measure; to recall that this justice, which can legitimate them ethically . . . is not a natural and anonymous legality governing the human masses. . . . Nothing would be able to withdraw itself from the control of the responsibility of the 'one for the other,' which delineates the limit of the State and does not cease to appeal to the vigilance of persons who would not be satisfied with the simple subsumption of cases under a general rule. (PeP, 149–50/168–9).

The state is dangerous when it claims an anonymous foundation to law, namely, a foundation grounded in a generic communal identity. But law does not arise from an originally indifferent situation. Law, in some manner of appealing to ground, looks to the peace of the relation of unicity to unicity for its foundation. 'Justice', Levinas will say, 'demands *and* lays the foundation of the state [*exige et fonde l'État*]' (DU, 216).

This appeal to the ethical relation as the ground of law calls for what Levinas terms a 'phenomenology of the rights of man'. The rights of the human, the universality of equality and comparison, 'are based on an original sense of the right, or the sense of an original right' (DH, 175/116).[9] This original right is concretely produced in the relation to the Other: the unique and the singular. This ethical relation is what the ethical state, practicing the politics of peace, takes as its model. Levinas

writes: 'Metaphysics therefore leads us to the accomplishment of the I as unicity by relation to which the work of the State must be situated, and which it must take as a model [*doit se situer et se modeler*]' (TeI, 277/300). The universality of the state is not self-sufficient. Rather, the source of its egalitarian principles is manifest first as the duty commanded by the singular face. Levinas writes in 'The Rights of Man and the Rights of the Other' that

> . . . the rights of man manifest themselves *concretely* to consciousness as the rights of the other, for which I am answerable. Their original manifestation as rights of the other person and as duty for an *I,* as my fraternal duty – that is the phenomenology of the rights of man. (DH, 187/125)

Ethics has a twofold relation to politics: ethics is both the phenomenological ground of politics and, as the ground on which politics is built, is always capable of calling it into question. Ethics holds an interruptive power in relation to politics, even as it grounds. This interruptive effect derives from its position in the order of priority.

Politics left to itself is tyrannical. Still, if we situate ethics at the basis of the just state, then a relation is forged between ethics and politics that opens up the possibility of an ethical politics. But, the face-to-face itself brings up a paradox: there is a gap between ethics and politics and a necessity to both. This paradox is resolved, in part, by the introduction of the figure of *le tiers* – the third party. In *Totality and Infinity*, Levinas writes that

> . . . [t]he third party looks at me in the eyes of the Other. . . . It is not that there would first be the face, and then the being it manifests or expresses would concern himself with justice; the epiphany of the face qua face opens humanity. . . . The presence of the face – the infinity of the Other – is destitution, the presence of the third party (that is, of the whole of humanity that looks at us). (TeI, 188/213)

This intertwining of the face and the third provides something like a resolution to the paradoxical relation of ethics to politics. If this paradox is the simultaneity of gap and necessity, then it can be resolved only by a figure of passage. This passage is necessary, for, without a passage, without a relation of ethics and politics, politics is left to itself. Safe from the weight of the ethical, such a politics leads to tyranny and the primacy of war. The third party, which hearkens back to Aristotle's third man argument in the *Metaphysics*, functions as this passage. In an important claim, Levinas will say that the third looks at me in the face of the Other originally and not as a supplement. The third party already points to the possibility of an ethical politics, as the third relates the ethical to the universality of the state immanently. Levinas puts it this way:

> In the measure that the face of the Other relates us with the third party, the metaphysical relation of the I with the Other moves into the form of the

> We, aspires to a State, institutions, laws, which are the source of universal-
> ity. (TeI, 276/300)

At this point, Levinas remarks that a politics left to itself is tyranny. Without the relations of height described in the ethical, the state is subject to the suspension of morality in war. The presence of the third in the face-to-face, however, marks politics with the demands of moral consciousness. The rights of the human, we might say, are always already marked by the rights of the Other. Their reduction of the singularity of the Other to the 'particularity of an individual of the genre human, to the condition of a citizen' is indispensable for politics. But, this reduction does not make a clean break with its original situation. This reduction, rather, is a movement of 'derivation' whose 'imperative motivation' is to 'inscribe' the incomparable and unique right of the Other human in the law (DU, 216).

The presence of the third signifies the point of passage from ethics to politics, and thereby marks politics with ethics. The co-presence of the face and the third signals the political in the (original) ethical situation. The third is the signification that makes the passage possible – the indicative sign, as it were, of what transcends the given (politics is beyond the face), while simultaneously being immanent to the given (the third signals in the eyes of the Other). Levinas' use of the third as the signification of politics is phenomenologically important, as his analysis has always adhered, methodologically, to the concrete. Levinas' appeal to the concrete means, in this context, that politics cannot simply be constructed out of ethics. Politics must signify concretely within the ethical; the third must indicate itself in the face of the Other. The third intertwined with the face performs precisely this signification. Levinas' turn to the signification of the third is, as Critchley puts it, 'the attempt to traverse the passage from ethics to politics without reducing the dimension of transcendence'.[10] The signification effects a doubling of discourse, manifest in what Levinas calls the 'prophetic word' of 'monotheism'. The invocation of the prophetic word fills out what is left unexplained when Levinas says: 'language is justice.' Levinas tells us in 'De l'Unicité' that the prophetic voice reminds the judgement of the state that the human face is concealed in the idea of the citizen. Justice, derived from ethics, demands the protection and first position of singularity, and so opposes the neutered disposition of the law of citizenship. The prophetic voice recalls the unicity that 'precedes every genre or is liberated from every genre' (DU, 216).

The prophetic word of monotheism constitutes what Critchley calls the 'double community of *fraternitas*'.[11] The prophetic word doubles community by simultaneously affirming law as generality and liberating unicity from generality. The prophetic word expresses the

movement from law to singularity and from singularity to law. Levinas writes that

> . . . the prophetic word responds to the epiphany of the face, doubles every discourse, not as discourse about moral themes, but as an irreducible movement of a discourse which is essentially aroused by the epiphany of the face inasmuch as it attests to the presence of the third party, of humanity as a whole, in the eyes that look at me. (TeI, 188/213)

The prophet of monotheism, speaking the word of God – said, for Levinas, in the face – puts humanity under an ethical law. This law is ethical because it refuses to undermine the priority of the face of the Other who commands. The ethical law says community in the face of the Other, which is, in Levinas' account, the concretion of the Divine. Freedom in fraternity affirms the responsibility of the one-for-the-Other. Indeed, in his 'Preface' to the German translation of *Totality and Infinity*, Levinas puts fraternity and the sociality of peace immediately alongside the relations of unicity to unicity, the love 'from stranger to stranger' (PEA, 251). 'The Rights of Man and the Rights of the Other' confirms this link:

> Should not the fraternity that is in the motto of the republic be discerned in the prior non-indifference of the one for the other, in that original goodness in which freedom is embedded, and in which the justice of the rights of man takes on an immutable significance and stability, better than those guaranteed by the state? A freedom in fraternity, in which the responsibility of one-for-the-other is affirmed, and through which the rights of man manifest themselves *concretely* to consciousness as the rights of the Other, for which I am answerable. (DH, 187/125)

If, as Levinas will say in *Otherwise than Being*, justice is the birth of consciousness, then this consciousness of the rights of the human (universality) made concrete *as* the rights of the other (singularity) is our first, primordial political subjectivity.[12] Primordial political subjectivity – the relation of fraternity – is a relation to the universal in the concrete. This subjectivity 'lives from' the identical significative locus of the Other and the third.

III

Political subjectivity outlines what is necessary for a legitimate politics. The political subjectivity of *fraternitas* is a community of difference that stands under the protection of the universality of law. Law and its universality, however, are not established in the name of order. That is, the universality of law is neither an identification of a shared identity nor

required by humanity's beastly nature. It is, rather, a law established in the name of singularity. Against the tradition that grounds the universality of law in an extension of *my* interests, Levinas' law establishes a protection of the rights of the singular Other. A politics whose universality is answerable to and derived from the singularity of the Other is a legitimate politics. The legitimacy of this politics of peace lies in the justificatory relation of the rights of the human to the rights of the Other. Justification flows in one direction: from the Other to the law. 'I seek this peace,' Levinas says, 'not for me but for the Other' (IEI, 196). Peace for the Other is a politics justified by its protection of the singularity of the Other. A politics of peace secures the Other's place in the sun. Peace, one could say, gives the world back to the Other.

But is a politics of peace sufficiently an ethical politics? That is, does the excess of giving, what Levinas will call the 'extravagant generosity' of the for-the-Other (cf. DU, 216), inhere in this politics of peace? My contention here is that it does not. The incompatibility of the politics of peace with an ethical politics is due to what I will call Levinas' 'conservatism'. By conservatism, I mean to indicate Levinas' failure to question the roots of the idea of politics, as well as his failure to practice a radical phenomenology. I can see this failure and conservatism in its twofold appearance: Levinas' practice of politics and his articulation of its structure.

To begin, let us first recall Levinas' comments on Palestinian–Israeli relations, which speak to his own political practice. This political issue is a factual instance, a case of putting the politics of peace into action, and betrays much about Levinas' account of politics. In this context, Levinas first explains what he understands to be the accomplished political state. He claims that the necessity of

> . . . a State in the fullest sense of the term, a State with an army and arms, an army which can have a deterrent and if necessary a defensive significance . . . is ethical – indeed, it's an old ethical idea which commands us precisely to defend our neighbors. My people and my kin are still my neighbors. When you defend the Jewish people, you defend your neighbor; and every Jew in particular defends his neighbor when he defends. (EP, 292)

Such a delineation of the notion of neighbor must strike any reader of Levinas as, at best, peculiar, if not outright problematic. Has not Levinas long since insisted on the singularity of the neighbor beyond any context or identity? Does this not violate the wisdom of the biblical command to welcome the Stranger? How have we come from Widow, Orphan, Stranger – figures that dominate *Totality and Infinity* – to 'people' and 'kin'? Perhaps troubled by this, the interviewer Shlomo Malka turns to the obvious question: does not the Palestinian–Israeli relation mimic the logic of the Other in the Same, the stateless in the state, the Stranger to

s/he who governs, and so 'for the Israeli, isn't the "other" above all the Palestinian'? To this question, Levinas responds that

> . . . [m]y definition of the Other is completely different. The Other is the neighbor, who is not necessarily kin, but who can be. And in this sense, if you are for the Other, you are for the neighbor. But if your neighbor attacks another neighbor or treats him unjustly, what can you do? Then alterity takes on another character, in alterity we can find an enemy, or at least then we are faced with the problem of knowing who is right and who is wrong, who is just and who is unjust. There are people who are wrong. (EP, 294)

One cannot but see in this comment a failure of the extravagant generosity so elegantly and systematically articulated in Levinas' ethics. The possibility of being in kinship, the failure of which constitutes the Other as enemy, establishes a boundary that bars the Palestinian from the work of ethics. For Levinas, here, the political Other, the stateless in the state, does not demand a generosity from the Same.

Now, it would be tempting, and perhaps even somewhat warranted, to see this as a personal failure on Levinas' part, reading this as born of complex political and psychological urgencies. Surely, one must consider that Levinas has witnessed intimately two of the West's most horrifying moral failures: Stalinist Russia and Hitler's Germany. Further, one might see this as a poor application of Levinas' sense of law, a mistake corrected in a proper reapplication of the law of peace to the Palestinian 'problem'. But these are two temptations to which we do not want to succumb. Succumbing to them conceals what is most revealing about Levinas' comments. If taken seriously, these comments reveal a tendency built into both Levinas' construal of the politics of peace and, perhaps most significantly, the passage from ethics to politics. It is therefore of note that in a politically neutral, strictly philosophical context, Levinas will still link peace with defense of the Other and Third. Consider what he says in 'The Rights of Man and the Rights of the Other':

> This is a goodness in peace, which is also the exercise of a freedom, and in which the *I* frees itself from its 'return to self,' from its auto-affirmation, from its egotism of a being perservering in its being, *to answer for the other*, precisely to defend the rights of the other man. (DH, 186/124–5)

At first glance, one might read this note as simply reiterating how the universality of law protects the singular Other. However, when it is read in light of his comments on the Palestinian as enemy, another picture emerges. It becomes clear that Levinas identifies an intimacy between the idea of peace and the idea of a defense of the Other. This defense of the Other is undertaken in the name of the law and is thus motivated by the comparison of incomparables. But comparison is not dis-interested. (Recall that dis-interestedness is something of a pre-condition of ethics for Levinas.) It would appear, rather, that this comparison is done in the

name of a kind of kinship. The question 'Who belongs to the law?', perhaps the very question Levinas' work in *ethics* has long contested, suddenly reappears in politics under another series of concepts: comparison, defense, kinship. Comparison, when thought in terms of defense and kinship, is wholly interested.

This latter sense of comparison is also indispensable for Levinas' politics. It makes determination of both which neighbor is 'right' and who calls for defense possible. Levinas is clear what clue we have for such comparisons: the 'first language' of the 'wish for peace'. He writes that

> . . . [n]on-indifference and goodness of responsibility: these are not neutral, midway between love and hostility. They must be conceived on the basis of the meeting, in which the *wish for peace* – or goodness – is the first language. (DH, 186/125)

Meeting, language, peace: this opens the question of who meets, who speaks this language, and s/he for whom peace is sought. The question of who meets is necessarily a question of who is my neighbor. Who speaks the language of the wish for peace is necessarily a question of who 'counts' in my giving. For whom is this peace sought? Here Levinas makes it clear that it is only sought for those who 'fit', so to speak, under the universality of the law. Peace, we could say, obtains only for those who fit the rhythms of political life.

If Levinas understands politics in this manner, a politics consistent in both practice and structural account of that practice, then we must ask further: what sort of signification makes this politics possible? For whom is peace sought in a politics of peace? And, how does the passage from ethics to politics evidence this 'whom'? How does the signification of politics in the face render such a structural and practical understanding possible? Levinas' own analyses make it clear that the 'who' of the third – simultaneously the who of the Other – is precisely not a question. Levinas' descriptions of the absoluteness of alterity make it clear that he brackets the question of the who of the third. The alterity of the Other is the Other stripped of its contextual marks. Levinas will famously describe this as the *nudity* of the face. In an interview with Philippe Nemo, Levinas will say that

> . . . [t]he best way of encountering the Other is not even to notice the color of his eyes. When one observes the color of the eyes, one is not in a social relationship with the Other. The relation with the face can surely be dominated by perception, but what is specifically the face is what cannot be reduced to that. . . . The skin of the face is that which stays most naked, most destitute. (EI, 79–80/85–6)

This clearly outlines Levinas' conception of sociality: social relations are without context and without factical features of particularity. Singularity

is not perceivable and so does not and cannot manifest particular features of the body. To preserve this sense of sociality, the nudity and destituteness of the skin set aside all signifiers that point alterity to contextual, factical determinations. Levinas writes elsewhere that the Other is

> . . . [a] uniqueness beyond the individuality of multiple individuals within their kind. A uniqueness not because of any distinctive sign that would serve as a specific or individuating difference. A unity prior to any distinctive sign. . . . A uniqueness that is not forgotten, beneath all the constraints of Being, History, and the logical forms that hold it in their grip. (DH, 176/117)

Now, this non-perceptual face is the point of passage to politics. So, if the alterity of the Other is nude, then the third must also signify with nudity. Nudity of the third, in turn, leads quite logically to a politics stripped of context. Hence the bareness of the universality of the law. Given Levinas' insistence on the identical significative locus of Other and third, it is surely not too much to say that the descriptive properties of the face determine the content of what is established on the other side of the passage: politics. Because the face signifies as absolute uniqueness, the third cannot carry contextual characteristics over to the content of a politics of peace. The symmetry of Levinas' law is directly derived from the nudity of the face. The law could not signify otherwise.

It is true that this passage puts the totalitarian practice of politics in question. But it must also be said that it fails to put the traditional idea of political space into question. Levinas' political thinking certainly forgoes war in the name of peace. Nonetheless, peace is maintained in and by way of the hegemonic work of the universal. The universality grounded in the rights of the Other establishes an account of universality answerable to the ethical. The call to defend the rights of the Other alters the character of that answering, and, further, this alteration imposes law upon voices not wishing for peace. In this sense, I think law has failed to be dis-interested. Dominance, even when it is domination with peace, is thoroughly interested. Levinas' insistence on the wish for peace conceals how obligation is often demanded in the contestation of the peace of the moment. Violence can be the only voice of the political other, but Levinas' politics of peace cannot hear this voice. Traditional political space is therefore left safe because the primacy of a fixed universal remains untouched. Peace is maintained in the fixity of law. To stray from law is to wish not for peace and so not to speak the language of neighborly love. To stray from law, Levinas would seem to say, does not put law into question. This is guaranteed, structurally, by the significative structure of the third as nudity. Such a signification does not and cannot carry contextual markers through the passage to politics. So, it

is no surprise that Levinas articulates political space as the symmetrical and neutral space of universal laws. This symmetry of political space marks Levinas' account with conservativism in the sense that the idea of symmetrical political space is not put into question. His description of the passage from the third to politics also points to a conservative phenomenological moment. Levinas' insistence on the nudity of the face, and so the nudity of the third, fails to feel fully the force of the alterity of the Other. If, however, we ask who the Other and the third are, then do we not more radically interrogate the alterity of the Other and others? That is, have we not asked about what is most other about the Other, most alter about alterity? If we ask who is the Other and the third, do we not see another politics? Might this other politics restore the extravagant generosity of ethics to political space?

IV

Let us begin opening the horizon of this other politics. Our basic critical contention thus far has been that Levinas construes political space – and therefore the passage from ethics to politics – conservatively. This conservatism derives from the logical connection between the nudity of the face and the symmetry of the state. Having hesitated before this passage to and characterization of political space, we are poised to put forth another question: in what manner is it possible to think political space otherwise? And, what resources remain in Levinas' thought for this thinking otherwise?

To begin this thinking otherwise, let us consider two of Levinas' remarks on the state. First, although Levinas endorses a conservative notion of law, he also questions our common assumptions about universality. This questioning may unsettle the conservatism of Levinas' state. In 'the state of Israel and the Religion of Israel', Levinas remarks that

> [w]e need to reflect on the nature of the modern State. . . . The sovereignty of the State incorporates the universe. In the sovereign State, the citizen may finally exercise a will. It acts absolutely. Leisure, security, democracy: these mark the return of a condition, the beginning of a free being. (SIRI, 259–60)

And, second, in 'Ideology and Idealism', Levinas will make the following claim, important for thinking about an ethical politics: 'In the social community, the community of clothed beings, *the privileges of rank obstruct justice*' (IaI, 243–4; my emphasis). Leisure, security, absolute act, free being – these are aspects of subjective life that Levinas puts in question, for they are, in the case of the ethical, preconditions of violence. The question of his success in such putting in question in ethics is

tantamount to a judgement of his lifelong philosophical work. But what limits his ability to question radically these aspects of the symmetrical state is his reliance on the hegemony of the universal. Political space unfolds from this universal. What clue is there for another phenomenology of political space?

Levinas' methodological insistence on the concrete is the most obvious place to look for such a clue. This insistence returns us to the immediate and the factual, with all Levinasian qualifications due to those terms. What seems most apparent about concrete political spatiality is its *asymmetrical distribution*. Power, wealth, representation – the elements of political space – all indicate, in concrete human faces, a fundamental lack of symmetry in consolidations of political capital. Levinas' own reflections would, at times, seem to lead us to such a description. For, if language is already justice, then what would be the implications of the following remarks from *Totality and Infinity*?

> Speech is not instituted in a homogeneous or abstract medium, but in a world where it is necessary to aid and give. It presupposes an I, an existence separated in its enjoyment, which does not welcome empty handed the face and its voice coming from another shore. Multiplicity in being, which refuses totalization but takes form as fraternity and discourse, is situated in essentially asymmetrical 'space'. (TeI, 191/216)

Multiplicity or political difference in political relations refuses totalization, and so is an indicator of asymmetrical space. Testimony to asymmetry comes from the voice of the Other. Such witness comes from the site designated or constructed *as* Other through various elements of political space. Ellison's *Invisible Man* gives us just such a testimony. Consider Ellison's reflections on why the invisible man loves the music of Louis Armstrong – an artist who has 'made poetry out of being invisible'. Ellison writes that

> . . . my own grasp of invisibility aids me to understand his music. . . . Invisibility, let me explain, gives one a slightly different sense of time, you're never quite on the beat. Sometimes you're ahead and sometimes behind. Instead of the swift and imperceptible flowing of time, you are aware of its nodes, those points where time stands still or from which it leaps ahead. *And you slip into the breaks and look around*. That's what you hear vaguely in Louis' music.[13]

Ellison's evocation of what falls between rhythm and melody, what interrupts melody at its points of transition, might remind us of Levinas' claim in 'La ruine de la représentation' that alterity interrupts the *rhythms* of reflection and representation (RR, 135). Representation, which plays within the boundaries of the Same, is put in question by what interrupts. The epistemological and ontological figure of representation is concretized in political space in manifold ways. Democratic

power and wealth – as ways in which political space is quantified – are primary sites of political representation. The intimacy of representation and the question of politics is evident when Levinas says that 'idealism completely carried out reduces all ethics to politics' (TeI, 192/216). If Ellison's testimony speaks to anything, it is to the interruption of the visible Same of political space by the invisible Other of political space.

Now, if we have grounds for thinking political space in its asymmetrical distribution, another question arises: what kind of signification makes passage from ethics to asymmetrical politics possible? To navigate this passage, we must revisit the question 'Who is the third?' without the prejudices Levinas brings to it. To reopen the question without prejudice is to trouble the purity of Levinas' account of the Other and the third. As we saw above, this is a question Levinas explicitly sets aside. Thus, his analysis needs what we could call a 'hermeneutic supplement'. This supplement, however, is not attached to the matters themselves from the outside, but is already situated on the margins of Levinas' descriptions. This supplement, which aims generally at radicalizing the alterity of the Other and the third, restores the way in which the third intervenes not as singular, but as an other marked by its social context. Asking 'Who is the third?' reinscribes context into the manifestation of the face by questioning, not only the fact that the Other/third accuses, but, further, in what manner the Other/third sets out accusation.

Reinscription of context into the signification of the face returns us to what Irigaray, with regard to the question of sexed bodies, has called the 'irreducible non-substitutability' of difference.[14] For Irigaray, difference is what makes ethics possible. But inattentiveness to how difference is inscribed on the very flesh of the face risks forgetting what is most other about the Other, most different about difference. If we – unlike Levinas, but inspired by him – take the socio-political context of signification seriously, then we cannot simply generate a transferable notion of alterity. As Irigaray's work on law and sexual difference has shown, non-substitutability already puts the neutrality and universality of law into question. Non-substitutability, which arises out of recontextualizing the face and third, is born not of a political agenda, but of the very idea of the concrete other. The materiality of the face – recall here that Levinas says materiality describes responsibility – manifests the marks of culture: gender, race, class and that embarrassing etc. The socio-political context of signification, which renders alterity non-transferable, is concretely expressed in the materiality of the face. The hermeneutic supplement, then, comes concretely from the expressive horizons of alterity. The accusing Other and third accuse me simultaneously as singularities and as raced/classed/gendered bodies. The effect of this signification is a ruining of the neutrality and universality inherent in the *conservative* construal of law. This opens the door for thinking

politically about what, in the context of ethics, Levinas calls a respons-
ible humanism rooted in the anarchical (HA, 90–1/138). Such a modal-
ity of signification and accusation also retrieves a sense of contextuality
– one that does not signal a philosophy of the neuter, but one that alters
alterity. This retrieval widens the very otherness of the Other.

Further, this material signification recontextualizes the body of the
subject put under obligation. The accusing face always accuses a *moi*
that is in some manner substantial. It is helpful in this context to recall
Levinas' trope that the subject is accused 'in its skin'. 'In responsibility,'
Levinas writes, 'as one assigned or elected from the outside, assigned as
irreplaceable, the subject is accused in its skin' (AE, 134/106). The
embodied *moi,* the responsible subject, is exposed to the Other, not as
conscience alone, but always as a body. The aim of this formulation is
to conceive the responsible body without the possibility of evasion (AE,
139/109). Exposure of the body in its skin exposes the body of the *moi*
in its singularity. But, at the same time, do we not have to say that it
exposes the body, as we said above about the face, with its social, con-
textual markers? Does it really make sense to say I am accused by the
Other without accounting for the gendered, raced and classed character
of that accusation? Indeed, in moral 'experience', it is indisputable that
these characters of the body accused determine the terms of obligation
and the work of the call. Do these very characteristics not compose the
concrete content of my being for-the-Other and therefore for-the-Third?
Could we not derive this from Levinas' (qualified) affirmation of
Merleau-Ponty's notion that the body has a history? Is this history not
brought into relief in obligation itself, where I can evade neither obli-
gation nor the history of my exposed body? To be accused in a raced,
gendered, classed, etc., body is to be called to answer in some (infinite)
manner to that history.

If we can legitimately claim that contextuality widens the sense of
obligation in ethics, then there are consequences for how we think about
the passage to politics. What is most significant about this contextual-
ization of alterity is that such marks alter, quite profoundly, the logic of
transition from the face and third to politics. One can no longer safely
think political space in terms of the anchored universality of law. Rather,
with the passage to asymmetrical political space, negotiated through the
contextual Other and third, a new set of political demands is presented.
These demands exceed not only the singularity of the Other via the third,
but also the singularity of the I. I am called to answer in this political
space to historical exigencies of *our,* not simply *my,* sociality. Response
to this responsibility cannot take place under the universality of law. The
historical exigencies of race, class, gender, etc., call for a response within
the non-universal and unique character of the demands issuing from *our*
history. 'Our' history does not refer to the history of a unified, collective

I. This history refers to the agonistic interplay of socialities through which various modes of representation have determined political space as violence. This violent representation is the medium in which an ethically responsive politics must take place. This is asymmetrical political space.

Asymmetrical political space makes it possible to articulate an *ethical politics,* which in turn allows us to exceed the neutrality of political space deemed conservative in Levinas' politics of peace. The central problem of an ethical politics, then, is how to make sense of an extravagant generosity within the asymmetry of political spatiality. This generosity is legitimated when the passage from ethics to politics is altered by the contextual marks of the I, Other and third party. The politics indicated by this passage takes place in asymmetrical space, a space of representation and violence, and so bears within it the possibility of the generosity of the ethical. This political generosity can be culled from the term Levinas gives to the work of ethics: liturgy. Liturgy is the moment in which work accedes to the ethical. Ethics and its duties are taken up in liturgy.[15] If ethics is accomplished in the infinite work of liturgy, then an ethical politics must also be liturgical. In the context of politics, the insertion of the word 'liturgy' is particularly productive. The word must be thought in two intertwined ways. First, liturgy must be understood in the sense Levinas gives it in 'Trace of the Other', translating the Greek with the provocative phrase 'expenditure of funds at a loss'. Second, liturgy must also be thought, in the political context, in terms of its traditional translation: 'public works'. The latter, which Levinas' translation overlooks, reminds us of the political context of liturgical work. Giving is not simply ethical. In asymmetrical political space, giving is public. Its generous work is made possible by the institutions and laws of the ethical state. Liturgy, conceived in asymmetrical political space, reclaims the political. Liturgical giving in political space calls for a generosity that takes place, not between singularities, but in and through public works. This generosity is enacted in the responsive transformation of political institutions in, quite literally, the face of others: the movement from peace to liturgy. This movement makes the transition from ethics to politics without reducing the dimension of transcendence. This is precisely what Levinas' political thought has always sought to accomplish.

The demands of liturgy – the responsibilities of politics – are certainly necessary for an ethical politics, but are not wholly sufficient. For, to speak of the work of liturgy is to speak of a world in which giving is possible, as well as of the concrete content of that giving. Regarding the latter, the sense of this giving is context-dependent, an-archical, and so subject to the exigencies of an historically concrete moment. We can, however, briefly consider two general aspects of this giving: democratic

political power and wealth. Democracy and wealth are perhaps the most important sites of asymmetry in political life. They are, to be blunt, sites of representation and disturbing violence, and so provide important sites of demand, expenditure and public work. Also, these two aspects of giving are particularly relevant because they both represent a distribution of power in political space based on a quantification of the world. It is therefore important to recall Levinas' comments in 'Ego and Totality' that justice is only possible on the basis of a quantification of the world. 'The quantification of man', Levinas writes, 'points to a new justice' (MT, 51/45). The quantification of political space is thus not a question of a violence set between faces, but the condition for the possibility of a liturgical response, of responsible sociality, and so of an ethical politics. Let us sketch something of the impact of this politics on democracy.

According to Critchley, the ethical sense of Levinas' transition to politics allows us to see democracy as ethics in practice. That is, in the case of democracy, we see ethics put into political practice in the sense that democracy, like the Same by the Other, is always power put in question. As Critchley puts it,

> I understand democracy to be an ethically grounded form of political life which is continually being called into question by asking of its legitimacy and the legitimacy of its practices and institutions: what is justice? In this sense, legitimate communities are those which have themselves in question. . . . Democracy is the form of society committed to the political equality of all its citizens and the ethical inequality of myself faced with the Other.[16]

Democratic life is put in question by contestations of power through, for example, elections, activism and debate. To be sure, this is sufficient for the ethical dimension of a politics of peace. However, a liturgical politics may demand something more radical. Relegation of the ethical sense of politics to abstract mechanisms of power is not sufficiently concrete, for it appeals to a structure that does not give when put in question. But democracy does represent. Democracy quantifies the world of political power through representations of selves and others. This quantification is fecund when we consider how quantification of power makes giving possible – that is, how the consolidation of relations derived from democratic work puts in question those who emerge victorious. Liturgy here calls for a giving of political power without reciprocity. To take the practice of democracy in the USA, this giving calls for a rethinking of how democratic power is distributed. In opposition to a majority rule democracy, the centerpiece of the US system of democracy, a liturgical politics literally calls for a giving of political power responsive to the inequality of myself/ourselves faced with the Other. Liturgical politics as

democracy would therefore call for a distribution of political power that does not solidify the majority. Rather, this democracy calls for a non-reciprocal, redistributive giving to the other of democratic space: the minority. And surely this redistribution is subject to the movement of history, to social change, and so lacks the sort of *arche* typically demanded of a foundation. The an-archic dimension of this redistribution is not a limitation of liturgy, but its very fund and the very condition of generosity.

The same sort of consequences hold for wealth. The asymmetry of wealth distribution under capitalist systems is put in question by the others of political space. If an ethical politics modeled on liturgy requires that we think of democracy as expenditure of political representation at a loss, then we must see distributions of wealth according to the same demands. The quantification of the world in money is treated by Levinas with some care in 'Ego and Totality', but we need to begin to think through the same issue liturgically. If the quantification of the world in money leads us to a new justice – here, a redistributive justice – we arrive at a new conception of taxation and possession. The public work of taxation is this quantification. The exigent responsibility of expenditure of these funds at a loss is therefore the justice of a liturgical politics. The collection and distribution of wealth is thereby infused with moral weight. Wealth is the site of my/our violence to the other(s), the possibility of my/our giving, and so of meeting the other(s) without empty hands. The asymmetry of wealth distribution, inherent in the facticity of capitalist political life, transforms that dimension of political space. The moral weight of unequal distributions of wealth shifts political space from a kind of neutrality to outright violence. The liturgical response to this political responsibility, which is signified concretely by the contextual other and third, gives without expectation of return. Rather, I am called to sacrifice my full hands for the others. Wealth quantifies the world and exposes my hands as full. It also exposes how my full hands usurp the place of the Other and others. One could, I think call this giving, this liturgical justice, a kind of political *sainteté*.[17]

Based on this sketch of some consequences of a liturgical politics, we can return to Levinas' remark that privileges of rank obstruct justice. This remark indicates that there are resources and impulses already in Levinas for a redistributive politics. Redistribution, conceived in the context of liturgy, is responsive to the demands made in asymmetrical political space. This is most decidedly not a politics of reciprocity. The redistributive gift manifests a giving without return. The difficulty of this duty of redistribution ultimately lies in the undecidable, contextual character of political responsibility, as well as the difficulty of accounting, in the Levinasian context, for the identities constitutive of political relations. But we must always decide within this undecidability – within the

an-archy of political responsibility – for an extravagant generosity, and not merely for the neutrality of law. An-archy is the fund from which obligation arises in ethics. So too is it the fund from which a responsible political response must arise. If the neutrality of law fails to recognize the weight of this an-archy, then should not peace give way to liturgy?

A liturgical politics makes it possible to think concretely about an ethical politics beyond the politics of peace. The expenditure of funds at a loss in public works – both senses of liturgy thought at once – ruins the petrified idols of violence that have come to dominate political life in the USA: the idols of a certain kind of democratic representation and capitalist conceptions of wealth accumulation. This ruining work opens the possibility of a further *rapprochement* between Levinas and Marx, a reconciliation already begun in the work of Robert Gibbs and Simon Critchley[18] and indicated in various remarks Levinas makes regarding the *idea* of a communism (distinct from Marxist science and the brutal practices of Stalinism).[19] An ethical politics also opens up a new conception of political temporality. Irigaray captures the sense of this new temporality in *J'aime à toi*:

> Respect for the negative, the play of the dialectic between us, would enable us to remain ourselves (*demeurer soi*) and to create an *œuvre* with the other. And thus to develop, building a temporality instead of believing in eternal promises. We can construct a History on the basis of an interiority without power.[20]

Respect for the negative is best manifest in a liturgical politics. Respect, ethics, must be concrete – without the utopia of eternal promises. The extravagant generosity of liturgy must interrupt the rhythms of political life, which introduces a politics answerable to what Catherine Chalier has called the 'utopia of the *human*'.[21] The demand for respect in liturgy is made by the contextually characterized third, the ethico-political subjectivity it initiates, and so the third and subjectivity marked by their place/non-place in political space. This demand accuses me in a skin that is at once nude and clothed. The *moi* is singular and social. To be so accused by the third is to feel the force of an alterity both unique and political. Is this not what it would mean not only to feel the force of an alterity *in me*, but also to respond to the idea of the infinite *in us*?

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PSC

Abbreviations of works by Levinas

AE   *Autrement qu'être, ou au-delà de l'essence*. The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1974; *Otherwise than Being, or Beyond Essence*, trans. Alphonso Lingis. Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic, 1988.

AHN   *A l'Heure des Nations*. Paris: Editions de Minuit, 1988; *In the Time of the Nations*, trans. Michael Smith. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994.

DH   'Les droits de l'homme et les droits d'autrui', in *Hors sujet*. Montpellier: Fata Morgana, 1987; 'The Rights of Man and the Rights of the Other', in *Outside the Subject*, trans. Michael Smith. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1995.

DU   'De l'Unicité', in *Entre Nous*: *Essais sur le penser-à-l'autre*. Paris: Grasset, 1991.

EI   *Ethique et infini*. Paris: Fayard, 1982; *Ethics and Infinity*, trans. Richard Cohen. Pittsburgh, PA: Duquesne University Press.

EP   'Ethics and Politics', in *The Levinas Reader*, ed. and trans. Seàn Hand. Oxford: Blackwell, 1989.

HA   'Humanisme et an-archie', in *Humanisme de l'autre homme*. Montpellier: Fata Morgana (Editions Livre de poche), 1972; 'Humanism and Anarchy', in *Collected Philosophical Papers*, ed. and trans. Alphonso Lingis. The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1987.

IaI   'Ideology and Idealism', in *The Levinas Reader*. Oxford: Blackwell, 1989.

IEI   'Interview: Ethics of the Infinite', in *States of Mind*, ed. Richard Kearney. New York: NYU Press, 1995.

MT   'Le Moi et la Totalité', in *Entre Nous*: *Essais sur le penser-à-l'autre*. Paris: Grasset, 1991; 'Ego and the Totality', trans. Alphonso Lingis, in *Collected Philosophical Papers*. Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic, 1987.

PEA   '*Totalité et infini*: Préface à l'édition allemande', in *Entre Nous*: *Essais sur le penser-à-l'autre*. Paris: Grasset, 1991.

PeP   'Paix et proximité', in *Alterité et transcendance*. Montpellier: Fata Morgana, 1995; 'Peace and Proximity', trans. Peter Atterton and Simon Critchley, in *Emmanuel Levinas*: *Basic Philosophical Writings*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996.

RR   'La ruine de la représentation', in *En découvrant l'existence avec Husserl et Heidegger*. Paris: Vrin, 1988.

SIRI   'The state of Israel and the Religion of Israel', trans. Seàn Hand, in *The Levinas Reader*, ed. Seàn Hand. Oxford: Blackwell, 1990.

TeI   *Totalité et infini*. The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1961; *Totality and Infinity*, trans. Alphonso Lingis. Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic, 1992.

Notes

1 See the work of Gillian Rose for a vivid example of this criticism, most recently in her *Mourning Becomes the Law* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996). Rose's criticisms overlook the fact that Levinas will

consistently insist on the necessity of the 'Greek' when it comes to the case of politics. While this does not directly address the sense of Rose's appeal to a 'third' city beneath the ruins of Athens and Jerusalem, it does, I think, bring Levinas and Rose into a proximity she perhaps does not anticipate.

2 Again, the work of Gillian Rose is exemplary in this regard. See her sustained criticism of the ethics/politics disjunct and her remarks on the problem of the third party in *The Broken Middle*: *Out of our Ancient Society* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992), pp. 270–96. See also Charles Scott's *On the Advantages and Disadvantages of Ethics and Politics* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996), Chapter 11. Rose and Scott are by no means cohorts in critique. Despite the fact that both are suspicious of Levinas' account of politics, Rose argues for a politics 'below' ethics, while Scott remains suspicious of both ethics and politics. A recent article has gone so far as to conclude that 'the privilege accorded to absolute alterity in Levinas leads to an inability to support political action', which of course fails to take into account Levinas' own efforts, often very nuanced, in that direction. See Ed Wingenbach, 'Liberating Responsibility: The Levinasian Ethic of *Being and Time*', *International Philosophical Quarterly* XXXVI(1) (March 1996): 29–46.

3 In *A l'Heure des Nations*, Levinas will remark: 'What is Europe? It is the Bible and the Greeks' (AHN, 128/133). See also an interview with Florian Rötzer, conducted in German, where Levinas remarks, 'Europe, that's the Bible and the Greeks', and links this simultaneity with the question of justice ('Emmanuel Levinas', in *Französische Philosophen im Gespräch*, ed. Florian Rötzer [Munich: Boer Verlag, 1986], pp. 93 ff.; 'Emmanuel Levinas', in *Conversations with French Philosophers*, trans. Gary Ayelsworth [Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press, 1995], p. 60). What is most interesting about the latter interview is that Levinas insists that the necessity of the state does not, and indeed cannot, dispense with the relation of goodness with the Other. So, universality and law (in a word, justice) are always bound to singularity and goodness. Explicating this binding is the task of the present essay.

4 Rose, *Mourning Becomes the Law*, p. 37.

5 ibid.; my emphasis.

6 Cf., for example, ibid., p. 36.

7 Here my description of Levinas' account of the relation between ethics and politics will run counter to that of Simon Critchley, who contends that 'the third party ensures that the ethical relation always takes place within a political context, within the political realm' (*The Ethics of Deconstruction*: *Derrida and Levinas* [Oxford: Blackwell, 1992], p. 225). This remark puts the case too strongly. While Critchley is correct that Levinas situates ethics and politics in a common significative locus (the face of the Other), we will not claim that ethics takes place within the public realm. Rather, it is quite the contrary. Politics (the politics of peace) is set out from the ethical, and the intertwining of the face and the third is commanded as much by Levinas' methodological allegiance to the principle of concretion as it is by the matters of politics. We cannot, however, go to the opposite extreme of Critchley and claim, as Brian Schroeder does, that for Levinas 'the ethical

is prior to and "better" than the political' (*Altared Ground* [New York: Routledge, 1996], pp. 102–3, also p. 72). Schroeder underestimates how seriously Levinas takes the articulation of a politics of peace and how in that context law may be configured as the protection of the Other.

8   IaI, 247–8 and also see the parallel remarks concluding 'Peace and Proximity'. With the phrase *homo homini lupus,* Levinas is recalling Hobbes' famed question posed to William, Earl of Devonshire, in the 1855 dedication of *De Cive*. The phrase is of course originally from Plautus' *Asinaria*. We might suspect that Levinas has in mind Freud, who employs the phrase in *Civilization and its Discontents*, but in an interview from 1988 Levinas uses the same phrase – translated into French on this occasion – and invokes Hobbes' authorship. See 'Responsabilité et substitution', in Augusto Ponzio, *Sujet et altérité sur Emmanuel Levinas* (Paris: Editions L'Harmattan, 1996), p. 141.

9   In our own formulations, we will use the phrase 'rights of the human' to avoid the gender exclusive 'man'. But it is important to note that this alteration, though in accord with current literary convention, is not without dangers. It covers over the important link, for Levinas, between politics and *illeity.* This connection is linked of course to the masculine *il,* which is a problematic unto itself and cannot be adequately treated here. On this issue, see Simonne Plourde, *Emmanuel Levinas*: *Altérité et responsabilité* (Paris: Editions du Cerf, 1996), pp. 127–48; she outlines both the linguistic and the temporal aspects of *illeity*, attempting to show how immemoriality 'takes root in the surprising human fraternity' (p. 141). See also John Llewelyn, *Emmanuel Levinas*: *Genealogy of Ethics* (New York: Routledge, 1995), pp. 209 ff., for another sort of structural account. Llewelyn attempts to negotiate a path around the simple identification of illeity with masculine privilege by pointing out that, according to Levinas' logic, 'it must be emphasized that the trace of the other [the He-ism of illeity] passes also through the She-ism and elleity of maternity, so through a non-neutral illelleity' (p. 209). I must thank John Llewelyn for alerting me, in numerous personal conversations, to this problem of substituting 'human' for 'man' and s/he for 'he' in Levinas' work.

10 Critchley, *Ethics of Deconstruction*, p. 233.

11 ibid., p. 227. The obvious gender exclusiveness that comes with the term 'fraternity' is a significant problem, one that comes also with the question of 'illeity' mentioned above in note 9. This problem entails the wider issue of Levinas' problematic use of the feminine and the patriarchal privilege that use betrays. Such issues take us afield from the immediate task at hand, but we should note that they have an enormous impact on both the ethics of Levinas' ethics and the politics of the same. See Tina Chanter's *Ethics of Eros* (New York: Routledge, 1995), Chapter 5 for a rigorous and critical examination of the role of sex/gender in Levinas' ethics (and by extension his politics). Her reading of Levinas, and especially of Irigaray's critique of Levinas, is uniquely sensitive to the complexities of the issue, which in turn yields a sophisticated account of both the feminine in Levinas and the future of an ethics of alterity.

12 At this point, one may note how this impacts on Levinas' quiet, yet lifelong,

polemic against Hegel. In the *Grundlinien*, Hegel will describe political subjectivity in terms of the 'patriot'. Hegel writes: 'This is the secret of the patriotism of the citizens [*das Geheimnis des Patriotismus der Bürger*] in the sense that they know state as their substance, for it is the state which supports their particular spheres and the legal recognition, authority, and welfare of these' (*Grundlinien der Philosophie des Rechts* [Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1982], p. 458; *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, ed. Allen Wood, trans. H. B. Nisbet [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991], pp. 329–30). Levinas' articulation of the genetic priority and resistance of ethics to politics effectively reverses the Hegelian logic of the state, without eschewing the idea of law.

13 Ralph Ellison, *Invisible Man* (New York: Vintage Books, 1947), p. 8; my emphasis.

14 Cf. Luce Irigaray, 'Questions to Emmanuel Levinas', in *The Irigaray Reader*, ed. Margaret Whitford (Oxford: Blackwell, 1993) p. 185 (question six).

15 Cf. Emmanuel Levinas, 'Dialogue: Œuvre et Altérité', in Ponzio, *Sujet et altérité sur Emmanuel Levinas*, p. 150.

16 Critchley, *Ethics of Deconstruction*, p. 239.

17 In numerous places Levinas will define *sainteté* as being called to 'sacrifice' for the other. See, for example, his 'Avant-propos' to *Entre Nous* (Paris: Editions Grasset, 1991), p. 11 and the interview 'Responsabilité et substitution', in Ponzio, *Sujet et altérité*, p. 143.

18 See, for example, Robert Gibbs, *Correlations in Rosenzweig and Levinas* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1992), Chapter 10 and Simon Critchley, 'On Derrida's *Specters of Marx*', *Philosophy and Social Criticism* 21(3) (1995): 12–19.

19 See Levinas' remarks in 'Ideology and Idealism' on Marxism as a 'prophetic cry' (in *De Dieu qui vient à l'idée* [Paris: Vrin, 1992], p. 19; IaI, 238) and on Stalinism and the meaning of Marxism at IEI, 197 f.

20 Luce Irigaray, *J'aime à toi*: *Esquisse d'une félicité dans l'histoire* (Paris: Editions Grasset, 1992), p. 231; *I Love to You*: *Sketch of a Possible Felicity in History*, trans. Alison Martin (New York: Routledge, 1996), p. 148.

21 Catherine Chalier, *Levinas*: *L'utopie de l'humain* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1993). Chalier is playing on Levinas' scattered remarks regarding the idea of a utopia without eternity. Levinas will write, for example, that ethics transformed as justice conceives a subjectivity that says '*here I am for the others*', thereby '[losing] his place radically, or his shelter in being, to enter into ubiquity which is also a utopia' (AE, 233/185). Or elsewhere, Levinas will remark that '[t]his concern for the other remains utopian in the sense that it is always "out of place" (*u-topos*) in this world, always other than the "ways of the world"; but there are many examples of it in the world' (IEI, 197).