Otherwise Than Politics: A Levinassian Defense of Political Indifference

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Abstract: Emmanuel Levinas critiques the political sovereignty of what is Said (*le Dit*), the surface differences and visible identities politics imposes, through a recourse to the nudity of the invisible face, which, audible rather than visible, is a pre-predicative Saying (*le Dire*). Although Levinas does not deny systemic and political injustices, he is not convinced that the solution to these problems is itself systemic and political, as the political is a problem rather than a solution. Only the ethical and/or religious can offer a response to the problem of the political. Given this Levinassian edifice, then, this article argues that all thinking that fails to skeptically *unsay* (*le Dédire*) the social and institutionalized differences of the political machine makes no difference. The article will first articulate why, following Levinas, politics is the problem rather than a solution and then explain why ethical (and religious) relation is prior to politics (and ontology) by demarcating different senses of thirdness (*le tier*). A criticism of natural rights will follow before some concluding remarks are offered that explain how one might enact a skeptical comportment toward all politics that may nevertheless let political situations lie exactly as they were.

Keywords: Emmanuel Levinas; politics; ethics; religion; skepticism; time

1. Introduction

In a sphere otherwise than possible systematization and totalization, otherwise than according to the economic distribution of rights, Emmanuel Levinas secures a space—or, as will be argued, a *time*—*prior* to the emergence of the political and the differences it institutes.[1] Far from the political offering the only response to systemic injustice, for Levinas the political is the problem rather than a solution. In other words, Levinas does not deny systemic and political injustices, but he is not convinced that the solution to these problems is itself something systemic and political. Seeing the need for something otherwise than the political, he elucidates that which is antecedent to the political with all its instituted differences in order that these differences might be rendered *indifferent* by being *unsaid* (*dédit*). In Levinassian terminology, only the ethical and/or religious, as the antecedent condition of the political, can offer a response to the problem that the political poses. To understand this, the following will (1) articulate why politics is itself the problem rather than a solution, (2) explain why the face or ethical (as well as religious) relation is prior to politics (and ontology) and (3) indicate possible Levinassian criticisms of natural or private rights. On the basis of this foregoing edifice, which Levinas provides, remarks that attempt to draw some possible conclusions that exceed Levinas' own philosophy will then be offered. These principally concern how one might enact a properly

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skeptical comportment toward any and all politics, which amounts to a privileging of the temporal over the spatial, a time of radical difference that, although revolutionary, may yet let the political landscape, its topography, lie exactly as is.

2. Politics as a Problem

The basic premise of this essay—and surely of Levinas' own work, particularly in *Totality and Infinity*—is that politics is a problem rather than a solution, which means it is neither an end in itself, i.e., of inherent value, nor a means to any end, often enough because it is fetishized as though it were an end in itself. Further, as a problem, it does not contain its own solution, which means that the solution to this problem (if there is a solution at all) must come from a domain outside of politics proper.

Levinas defines politics, at the very beginning of *Totality and Infinity*, as follows: "The art of foreseeing war and winning it by every means" (Levinas 1969, p. 21). Now, if war is competition over social goods and rights, politics would then be a strategy of distributing social goods and rights in an equitable manner, i.e., economically. Politics is thus, in the best-case scenario, good economics or, in the worst-case scenario, war. In either event, it is concerned with the distribution and re-distribution of social goods and rights, whereby the politician can be praised for "foreseeing" or "winning" a war in virtue of having leveraged advantages for some party or demographic. If this account of politics is adequate, then Levinas is correct to see that there is no *necessary* link, though there could perhaps be a factual link, between politics and ethics, the domain in which we are called to responsibility rather than to the avoidance of or victory in conflict concerning the distribution of rights and goods.

Levinas contends, as is well known, that ethics is first philosophy, by which he does not mean a moral code, i.e., a system of prescriptions and prohibitions. To contend that ethics is first philosophy is rather to contend that the ethical relation, the face-to-face relation, is primary. The nature of this relation will be explicated more fully in the following section, but the fundamental difference between the political and the ethical for Levinas is the role the third plays in each. In the political, the third is always the third person, the third party, a possible mediator and arbitrator, but always a neutral party who exists apart from the relation between the two, whose rights and claims are equal to everyone else's (save one's own) and so rival those of everyone else's (save one's own). Levinas remarks, "The fact that the other, my neighbor, is also a third party with respect to another, who is also a neighbor, is the birth of thought, consciousness, justice and philosophy" (Levinas 1998, p. 128). It is only by means of this third that reflection concerning the distribution of interests between all interested parties other than myself, i.e., the space of comparison and thus of evaluation and judgment, namely, political space and its principal category, justice, emerges.

Levinas writes, "Justice requires contemporaneousness of representation. It is thus that the neighbor becomes visible, and, looked at, presents himself . . . The saying is fixed in a said, is written, becomes a book, law and science" (Levinas 1998, p. 159). This passage indicates that justice—opposed to responsibility, that primary characteristic of the ethical, which rather stems from an-archical or immemorial accusation or summons—privileges the present (presentation and representation) and hence visibility. If in the face-to-face of the ethical relation, the Other calls from on High, beyond possible presentation and representation, and, most importantly, from a Past immemorial, i.e., prior to one's ability to respond, then, by contrast, the call of justice demands contemporaneity or the co-presence and horizon of representable comparables, i.e., of equals. If in the ethical relation the face of the Other is audible, a Saying (*le Dire*), then justice demands visibility, something that can be Said (*le Dit*) or thematized, as this is what permits comparison. If, in the ethical relation, the Other is a Saying, an offering of signs, but not a sign herself, then in justice the Other must become a theme, something Said. Constituted through visible co-presence and co-representation, the political privileges the spatial, i.e., cartography and topography, while the ethical always privileges the temporal, not as a series of contiguous presents but rather as the very disruption of continuity and contemporaneity. Politics is spatial contiguity and association, permitting comparison and equality. The ethical and religious are temporal disruption and interruption, stemming from a call to responsibility antecedent

to my very being. One is, as it were, interrupted before having begun to speak. Self-justification and self-knowledge, interrupted before they have begun, are thus rather the response and the interruption, the demand to give response. One is interrupted; therefore; one is obliged to speak.

Why, though, does political space constitute not only a problem, but a problem unsolvable by the political itself? Why, in other words, must the political grant priority to the ethical? For Levinas, the political, like ontology, names, at least when annexed by the State, a totality without exit, totality without the breach of the Infinite. "Political society appears as a plurality that expresses the multiplicity of the articulations of a system" (Levinas 1969, p. 216). The book *Totality and Infinity* is a revolt of the ethical and religious, the Infinite, against ontology, i.e., against a theory of totality, where "totality" names the deployment, distribution and mobilization of a single organized structure: a system. Politics, then, is ultimately ontological rather than ethical or religious insofar as it is the articulation of a system that involves the representation, mapping, and annexation, i.e., topographization, of each and every other. Everybody has their place. There is, however, no place (or, rather, no *time*) for forgiveness, no space (or, again, no *time*) for absolute uniqueness and genuine *caritas*. As Levinas confirms, "Justice is distinct from charity, since with it there intervenes a form of equality and measure, a set of social rules to be established according to the judgment of the State, and therefore according to politics" (Levinas 2002, p. 183). Justice, at least as a political category, names perfect self-commensurability and reciprocity, but this domain itself is utterly incommensurable with the ethical and religious. These latter cannot be annexed by the former.

It is safe to say that Levinas' estimation of the State is ambivalent. As Adriaan Theodoor Peperzak comments, "The state is necessary to establish and maintain the conditions of concrete morality, but the demands of ethics have set the standard by which all politics must be judged . . . " (Peperzak 1997, p. 24). The State, even if just, and so not de facto bad or to be demolished, is nevertheless not on a par with, not equal with or a comparable domain to, ethics, which "sets the standard" of judgment. Moreover, that for which the State is helpful, the maintenance of "the conditions of concrete morality", is not the highest. Even a thinker like Chantal Mouffe, who is not a reader of Levinas and does not share many similarities with him, affirms, " . . . [A]n absolute human equality would be a practically meaningless, indifferent equality" (Mouffe 2005, p. 40). Her prescription, offered in an earlier book: " . . . what is needed is a new kind of articulation between the universal and the particular" (Mouffe 1993, p. 13). If, in Levinas, the State is a kind of universal, an anonymous system of laws, aimed initially at the avoidance of and, in a worst-case scenario, victory in conflict, then ethics, which "sets the standard" by which all politics is to be judged, pertains to particular relations or, better, to concrete and individual relations. Consequently, if there is a link between justice, a political category, and the ethical, what is needed is a concrete universal. The State, the universal, can remain, but it cannot be abandoned to anonymity; it must somehow maintain that particular relation by which it can be judged or critiqued. In Levinas' own words, "This means concretely or empirically that justice is not a legality regulating human masses, from which a technique of social equilibrium is drawn, harmonizing antagonistic forces. That would be a justification of the State delivered over to its own necessities" (Levinas 1998, p. 159). The State, then, if just, can remain—even if the Hobbesian State ought not remain—but the State and even the political as such cannot be regarded as an end in itself insofar as politics always remains subject to ethics. The universal is subject to the call, the Saying, the accusation, the summons of the particular. Left to its own devices, however, "justice actually participates in what Levinas calls totalization, subjecting individuality and uniqueness to universal categories" (Alford 2004, p. 156). The political, like the ethical in Søren Kierkegaard, when considered as autonomous and its own highest end, is given over to the universal. Against Kierkegaard, however, neither the ethical nor the religious in Levinas "suspends" politics, at least not simply, but they do condition it. As Oona Eisenstadt and Claire Elise Katz insist, in their defense of Levinas against racist misinterpretations, " . . . ethics precedes ontology, and thus precedes the political . . . " (Eisenstadt and Katz 2016, p. 19), which spells the preponderance of "duties rather than rights, responsibility rather than power" (Eisenstadt and Katz 2016, p. 25). Duty and responsibility do not necessarily have

to suspend all rights and powers, but they are the standard by which the latter can be critiqued and resisted. Right, in other words, should only exist as the implementation of duty, while duty should be both the pre-condition of and check on right. Politics ought make no judgment concerning the ethical, though the ethical might judge the political.

3. The Nude and the Religious

Levinas begins not in the political sphere but in the ethical. His ethics is not an applied ethics, not the discipline of ethics, i.e., neither a moral code, science of the "ought" nor a moral psychology. Rather, ethics first names a relation without relation, relation without a mediating third (that which Kierkegaard would have rather termed the religious). Ethics is the immediacy of the face-to-face. The face is destitute and poor, neither yet clothed by the predicates or objective themes the Other may make of it nor by the determinants or groupings the State may confer upon it. The face is without clothing or nude; it is an immediate exposure to and before the Other. The face—albeit always a concrete face and therefore always particular and embodied rather than disincarnate and universal like a Cartesian ego or the bearer of the Ring of Gyges—is properly invisible.[2] To say that the face is exposed is to point to its vulnerability or "susception" to the Other, to its inability to be protected by or hide behind a veil of natural or legal rights. To say that the face is nude is to point to its invisibility, although it is always the invisibility *of* the visible and incarnate one.

So, if the political brings about visibility in order to enable representation and comparison, then the ethical, although anterior to the political, must be understood in contrast to this, hence why this essay did not explicate the ethical before explicating the political. The ethical is the invisibility *of* the political. To say that the face is invisible is to indicate that, *qua* face, it cannot become a theme, cannot be annexed under political markers and cannot be allocated according to sociological or economic groupings. In short, the face is invisible because it is not subject to the judgments of sight, which reveals always bodies, i.e., spatial properties—e.g., skin color, tattered clothes, fine jewelry, apparent class divisions etc.—but the face can only be heard. The face is invisible because it speaks; it is a Saying. Its epiphany occurs through the offering of discourse. On the contrary, that which would give itself to sight has a façade but not a face. The face is not a mere surface, even if it, *qua* incarnate, cannot exist apart from one. One commentator on Levinas, Jill Robbins, arguably states the matter more directly than Levinas:

> The face occurs as a collision between world and that which exceeds world. To the extent that the face is out of world, it appears *in* the world as naked and destitute. Naked—that is, without clothing, covering, or mask—it signifies without attributes, outside any categories, not across its generality, but by itself . . . (Robbins 1999, p. 58)

The face is both worldly and unworldly, political and apolitical. The face is *in* the world but not *of* the world, which here means that it is the invisibility *of* the visible. The face is "by itself" because it signifies neither through some arbitrary sign or convention nor through its attributes, but through itself, i.e., "tautegorically" rather than "allegorically". It does not signify through the representation of another.[3] The representative is universal, capable of representing everything that is like it or in agreement with it. Representation is based on the similar and common, which in turn are only possible on the basis of the comparable and commensurable. This is why the State, as universal and general, is representative. It represents or associates its parts by means of a third, a common third term, common party, shared consciousness, like agenda, common ideology and/or shared scapegoat, that can unite otherwise disparate members of society. Levinas writes of the State, "Truth, which should reconcile persons, here exists anonymously. Universality presents itself as impersonal; and this is

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[2]　See Tritten (2014a) for more on the notion of incarnation in Levinas and for an argument against the proprietorship of one's "own" body.

[3]　See Tritten (2014b) for more on the distinction between the tautegorical and the allegorical.

another inhumanity" ([Levinas 1969](#), p. 46). The face exists *under* political regimes, yet is *excluded* from them, *not to be appropriated, not to be annexed, not to be incorporated, not to be occupied, not to be mobilized* (all spatial metaphors: geography, cartography, and topography). The face is a kind of exit, a way out, in the world but not of the world, counted under political regimes as a single vote just like any other but somehow beyond the count, in excess of representation. The face is subjected to the inhumanity and neutralization of political determinations, yet, as nude, evades them all. The face can be (illegitimately) represented by its attributes, its façade, but it finds its true dignity in advance of the political sphere, the domain of what is Said. The face does not presuppose the prevailing discourse, prevailing sociological and political signifiers, but it first offers a discourse and a world.

The Said, be it politics, economics, institutional religion, etc., is constituted as a system—a structure, a grammar that governs possible discourse—by which the Said acquires its meaning through the referential play of signifiers. (Here one can begin to see Levinas' divergence from structuralist theory.) Saying, however, is not referential; it signifies nothing other than itself, the pure event that is the very giving of signs. The event of signification precedes the system, the grammar, i.e., the lawful interconnection of all that is Said. This means that ethics, the face-to-face relation, precedes what can be said; it precedes nominations, inscriptions, categorizations, and organizations: politics. Levinas confirms, "What we are here calling oneself . . . precedes this empirical order, which is a part of being, of the universe, of the State, and is already conditioned in a system" ([Levinas 1998](#), p. 116). Saying is the condition of the system without being subsumed into the same just as ethics is the condition of politics without being annexed as a moment—at least not necessarily—within the political apparatus. Politics is not the condition of one's relation to the Other, but it is a consequent codification, mobilization, and organization of a foregoing relation to the Other. Politics only constitutes the *form* of the social bond, but not the bond itself. The ethical bond, however, ties one to the Other in absolute responsibility, prior to the political assignation of my belonging to certain identity groups or even to humanity at large on the basis of common and reciprocal rights or interests.

Levinas nicely illustrates the point that the social bond does not consist in a political or sociological structure, but that the structure follows, without necessarily adhering to, the ethical bond, responsibility for the Other. He writes, "Between the one I am and the other for whom I am responsible there gapes open a difference, without a basis in community. The unity of the human race is in fact posterior to fraternity" ([Levinas 1998](#), p. 166). Community is based on a common-unity, on a common third term, on the commodification of the general, its ability to be exchanged by all who are apparently not only equal but equivalent, at least as far as rights are concerned, a veritable Hobbesian state of nature. Everybody has the same rights, because everybody is fundamentally the same, participants in the same human community and the same human nature, equality conflated with egality. In the ethical relation, however, the difference between I and the Other is neither reciprocal nor symmetrical but a radical alterity that calls me into question, that troubles all signification, all identity markers whereby one can measure, thematize, or understand the relation. For Levinas it is only as participants in a third—the State, community, humanity—that everybody else (but not me) is perfectly symmetrical and reciprocal. Politics, the system, the "reciprocal order", risks leveling off ethical difference in order to institute an equality based on the *likeness* of common terms. This leveling off is a forgetting of the ethical relation, a leveling off of difference for the sake of universality in the inhumane sense. Precisely to see the equality of all on the basis of the fact that everybody is *homo sapiens* is to reduce every Other to all Others, to erode ethical difference in favor of a *bad* indifference. The calculation of politics would then have free reign. Ethics must avoid annexation into the system; it cannot be reduced to politics. Simon Critchley warns, "The danger in grounding ethics in the idea that we are all 'fundamentally the same' is that a door is opened for a Holocaust" ([Critchley 2002](#), p. 35). When politics forgets the face-to-face relation, symmetry and reciprocity fill the system without remainder with the result that all difference becomes nothing but *numerical* difference, economic difference: exchangeability *in lieu* of irreplaceability and representation *in lieu* of sacrifice.

Let it be noted that Levinas does not wish to do away with politics and its claim to justice for all. Rather, as Simon Critchley states, "Levinas wants to criticize the belief that *only* political rationality can answer political problems. He wants to indicate how the order of the state rests upon the irreducible ethical responsibility of the face-to-face relation" (Critchley 2002, p. 24). The argument of this essay is even stronger, namely, that political rationality can *never* ultimately solve the problem that the political poses, but, perhaps, only provisionally and partially at best. Ethical relation, in contrast to political rationality, refuses to found human particularity as an instance of universality; it refuses to draw differences that could, in principle, be shared in common with others, identitarian differences. Political differences must be rendered indifferent, now in the *good* sense of indifference. John Llewelyn beautifully situates the problematic:

> Suppose I give the other all due recognition as a subject; need I do anything more? Specifically, need I take the further step of recognizing her *difference* or is any difference between us now construed effectively as that which must be put aside for our equal status as subjects to come to the fore? (Llewelyn 1995, p. 25)

> The rub of much identity politics is that even as such a politics seeks recognition for a given group in virtue of the oppression and marginalization experienced by its members, it re-marks those same subjects precisely in terms of the categories through which social and/or economic subordination operates (Llewelyn 1995, p. 26)

Rather than reiterating the same differences that divide one group and its interests from another, what is needed is a movement *away from* these differences, but not a movement *toward* the Same. If George Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel demarcates between the bad infinite and the good infinite, then Levinas provides the means to distinguish between bad indifference (the homogenous and immaterial) and good indifference (the interruption of the validity of identitarian differences). We do not need to move towards greater degrees of commonality. We need a movement that cuts across identitarian differences, rendering them indifferent and immaterial. This would not institute a larger genus that would swallow pre-existing differences. It would rather let these differences remain and even be acknowledged, but without determining the identity of those in the group, i.e., without vitiating their uniqueness or "unicity." Social and cultural differences should not be effaced—they can remain exactly as they are—but their valency needs to be alleviated. In short, the task is to recognize the neighbor through the concreteness of their face, but not through the specificity of their identitarian differences. The task is to acknowledge those political differences only as something not to be regarded and, in that sense, as unseen or invisible. In this vein, Diane Perpich wonders,

> Levinas famously says that the best way to 'see' the face of the other is not even to notice the color of the other's eyes. Does this indicate an ethics indifferent to such specific differences as those of sexual difference, race, ethnicity, or nationality?" (Perpich 2010, p. 21)

The proper way to "see" the Other as a face rather than as surface or façade is to acquire a blind spot, to develop an invisibility with respect to their "specifiable" differences, despite the fact that they will always be a concrete, i.e., incarnate, face rather than a disembodied cogito. The Other is concrete, yet invisible. The Other's visible identity is not effaced, but it belongs only to the visible realm, the derivative realm of the political and the Said, and not to the invisible realm, the anterior realm of the ethical and pre-predicative Saying.

The primary problem with the political, given that it abides in the domain of the Said and its demarcated identitarian differences, is that it impersonally swallows the Other by reducing them to an instantiation of a universal rather than granting an "exit" from such totalization. Politics, at least as a form of Statism or parliamentary procedure, is blind to the face; it only recognizes people as votes, as representatives of the interests of a group. The only way to avoid this impersonal neutrality then is, as mentioned above, to move away from these differences and toward another domain, again not toward the Same but toward a domain of incomparability. It is incomparable precisely because here

political differences are rendered indifferent, but not by being subsumed under a more encompassing category. The ethical may be the condition of the political but, in turn, one can move from the political back to the ethical, from identitarian differences to political indifference. Rather than the ethical being lost in the political, "it would seem that the original face-to-face relation is preserved in pockets of 'decency' or ethical supplements to the political" (Caygill 2002, p. 65). The ethical is not simply anterior to the political, but it also "supplements" the political, restoring spirit to its letter, restoring personal concern to impersonal apparatus, but also exposing that it is not self-sufficient and not its own end, also exposing the fact that it does not contain its own solution. This is all possible, however, only because the role of the third in ethical (and religious) relation is radically different than in political relation. What, then, is this nonpolitical conception of thirdness (*le tier*), a third that would not mediate and subsume into a higher unity?

Negatively, Levinas is convinced that "the relation proceeding from me to the other cannot be included within a network of relations visible to a third party", as under the gaze of a third party "the Other would amount to a second copy of the I . . . " (Levinas 1969, p. 121). In view of the third party, both I and Other are to be regarded as numerically distinct, but otherwise essentially indistinguishable and thus exchangeable. Levinas associates this negative operation of the third with the political:

> 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 universality. But politics left to itself bears a tyranny within itself; it deforms the I and the other who have given rise to it, for it judges them according to universal rules . . . (Levinas 1969, p. 300)

Fortunately, there is also a positive role for the third to play, a role it plays in advance of the State, but a third that only exists between "the I and the other who have given rise to it." This third remains tethered to ethical, rather than political, relation. As Levinas states, "The revelation of the third party, ineluctable in the face, is produced only through the face" (Levinas 1969, p. 305). This third is the otherness of the Other, the Other *in* the Other. It is, in short, the dimension of "height" and thus of the religious *within* the ethical. This dimension is concealed in the political.

Levinas' preferred term for designating the element of height, of the Infinite and of the religious *within* the ethical relation, is "illeity." He glosses, "The second person eludes apprehension precisely in function of the third personality designated in him—*ille*. The *ille* is indivisible and unmultipliable as infinity, and each time singular" (Levinas 1998, p. xl). The *il* is personal rather than impersonal and thus a singular third rather than a mediating concept, law, or structure, as in the political. This third is not a third party, not a third entity (not even a deity), but that ineluctable excess of the second person, the Other, that refuses apprehension and thematization. The third party, e.g., the arbiter or mediator, or the third term, e.g., a concept, law, or structure, is the condition of the possibility of political relation. The third that is illeity, however, is the condition of the possibility of the reverence and awe that cannot be removed from the Other, the religious that does not exist anywhere except within ethical relation itself, within the face-to-face. This third does not close up a structure and totality, not even as a theology, i.e., as an ontology of God, but it is, quite the contrary, the very breach of the Infinite, that which precludes annexation or incorporation as a mere instantiation of a genus or political identity. This is the dimension of the religious, although it is not a theology, not a doctrine about an entity called "God." As Llewelyn observes, "If Levinas's neologism *illéité* is built on this upper-case *Il* or lower-case *il*, it is built also on the Latin pronoun *ille* denoting remoteness and disjunction from the speaker, separatedness . . . " (Llewelyn 2002, p. 129). Whether Levinas intends to invoke a capitalized "He" in this locution or not, Llewelyn is certainly right to indicate the allusion to the Latin *ille*, indicating distance and separation, rather than annexation and incorporation. This is the Infinite that Levinas thinks in contrast with totality and so too the breach that always demands the "unsaying" of any political marker, identity, platform, policy or the like. Politics must open onto an outside, but only if the political order itself and as a whole can be unsaid.

To recapitulate, the problem with the political, as Llewelyn attests, may be pithily stated as follows: "The political renders the ethical invisible. The State effaces the face" (Llewelyn 1995, p. 67). This does not, however, imply the demise of the State and the abandoning of the political, as ethics is, it bears worth repeating, the invisibility *of* the visible, the nudity *of* the invested, the breach *of* totality. If Llewelyn and Levinas are correct, then the fact that "the political renders the ethical invisible" is not simply bad, but it is precisely in this way that ethics concretely acquires its invisibility. It is only in this way that it could be the invisibility *of* a visible power or structure. It is as if there is no nudity as such, but only nudity covered by a structure, nudity clothed. The nudity of the face is never "given" for immediate intuition, but only as a rupture with the themes that try to clothe it. What is needed, then, is not necessarily the disappearance or abdication of the State and the political as such, but deliverance is required. Insofar as the ethical offers deliverance, the ethical sphere is also the site of the religious and, as Levinas attests, "Deliverance does not enter into the idea of kingship", i.e., into the idea of political authority, as deliverance offers "the highest hope, forever separated from political structures" (Levinas 2007, p. 186). Deliverance offers a "separation" from political structures without demanding the abolishment of political structures. Levinas makes this point quite poignantly, writing, "The true end of eschatology . . . involves possibilities that cannot be structured according to a political schema" (Levinas 2007, p. 185). The third present in the ethical relation is that of illeity, which saturates the ethical with religious (not theological) significance.

Now, if politics aims at justice and ethics at the Good, then what characterizes the eschatology the religious offers? Peace. To be sure, peace is not justice, as justice can be achieved through conflict and war, but war cannot be a condition of peace, as peace is wholly otherwise than war. As Peperzak has commented,

> If politics is warring under the cover and behind the appearance of peace, a radical rupture with war, which is not just a pause or a means for the essential *polemos* of opposed interests, presupposes some kind of gratuity, an exception to the realm of essence . . . (Peperzak 1997, p. 90)

This "exception", this "outside" of politics, is a peace that cannot be had through political measures, i.e., neither through a strategy of avoiding nor of winning war, because peace is gratuitous. This is the peace that can even be had during the harshest of wars, as this peace stands not only outside struggle and conflict but also outside law and measure, even if it does not necessarily require the demise of the latter pairing. The peace promised by eschatology, i.e., by the religious, exceeds the face of the second person—it is the thirdness or illeity *of* the second—but it is never manifest apart from the ethical relation. As one commentator has put it, "[Levinas'] word is an attack on the idolatry of politics in the name of a prepolitical ethics . . . " (Alford 2004, pp. 155–56). It is not just an ethics, however, but also a nonidolatrous religiosity, which hopefully does not just prevent an idolatrous theology but also the idolatry of politics. Religion and politics should be separate, but not, if one will, in order to save politics from religiosity but in order to save, to deliver, religiosity from politics.

4. Otherwise Than Political Categories

The foregoing has consisted of an exposition of a theoretical framework provided by Levinas. The remainder of this essay will explore possible consequences of this theory, at times pushing Levinas to the limit, surely draw entailments with which he himself would not have been entirely comfortable or concerning which he may have simply preferred to remain silent.

Voting, rights, and equality are arguably the three most operative categories of modern political thought. Of course, universal suffrage is relatively new and rights, at least conceived as a natural property, is a modern invention that surely did not exist before the sixteenth century with John Locke arguably being the first to explicitly associate rights with private property, exposing that the modern notion of rights is arguably an economic concept at bottom, namely, a capitalist and bourgeois conception. Notions of equality surely existed prior to modernity, whether in any of three great monotheistic traditions or in Stoicism for which everyone is equal because all are part of the same

commonwealth: God or Reason or Nature. It is modernity, however, that thinks of equality as possession of the same inalienable rights, a "private" property that is nevertheless held in common by all. Today, then, to think otherwise than politics is to think otherwise than private and natural [property] rights as well as otherwise than the homogenizing conception of equality to which this invention of rights leads.

Bernard Waldenfels, commenting on Levinas, argues that "the tension ... between the respect of the other's otherness and the requirements of equality, marks the point where ethics and politics are insolubly entangled without covering each other" (Waldenfels 2002, p. 78). They are inextricably entangled because ethics is the invisibility *of* the visible, the nudity *of* the invested, but they do not cover each other because an insoluble remainder of nudity always remains exposed (or, at least, exposable). It is precisely where (or, better, *when*) a political system, despite constituting a totality, cannot cover and hide the Infinite, when the ethical and religious evade the political or are "beyond" the political, that the possibility of an authentic "otherwise than the political" emerges. One such area is the excess of duties over rights, the excess of responsibility over the possible exercise of my powers. Levinas contests,

> Thus limited by justice, does not the fundamental principle of the rights of man remain repressed, and does not the peace it inaugurates among men remain uncertain and ever precarious? A bad peace. Better, indeed, than a good war! But yet an abstract peace, seeking stability in the powers of the state, in politics ... Hence recourse of justice to politics, to its strategies and clever dealings ... (Levinas 1993, pp. 122–23)

Levinas is not against the notion of human rights as such, but it should not and cannot be a means to peace, as peace is antithetical to war, i.e., of an entirely different order. If anything, the rights of the Other are to be respected of their own accord, but not as a means to peace, i.e., as a means to only an abstract peace that resides in the abstract and legal equality of all. This, however, is the modern use of human rights: rights are thought to be the foundation of equality and community. For modern thought, rights are a legal condition of human equality insofar as everybody shares these rights in common; everybody has equal rights because everybody has the *same* rights. This is precisely what Levinas hopes to repudiate. "For the philosophical tradition the *conflicts* between the same and the other are resolved by a theory whereby the other is reduced to the same—or, concretely, by the community of the State ... " (Levinas 1969, p. 47). Rights do not serve to elevate the dignity of all, only to level our dignity off into a uniform homogeneity.

Equality thought along these lines is problematic because it compares people externally, matching up, i.e., coordinating, rights until they are reciprocal, balanced, and equal. Justice thus conceived is a scale indeed, if not a tyranny of the masses, then a tyranny of number, of the quantifiable and proportionate. Levinas, however, refuses the externality required for comparability, reciprocity, and symmetry as well as refusing that the one who is making the comparison amongst equals is herself comparable. Granting a more defensible notion of thirdness to justice than when utilized as a political category simply, Levinas asserts,

> In no way is justice ... a diminution, a limitation of anarchic responsibility ... But the contemporaneousness of the multiple is tied about the diachrony of the two; justice remains justice only in a society where there is no distinction between those close and those far off [...] The equality of all is borne by my inequality, the surplus of my duties over my rights (Levinas 1998, p. 100)

There is no distinction between the remote and the proximate, i.e., both are neighbors, because even the third, although calling from on High and thus from afar, is intimate, i.e., "tied about the diachrony of the two." The relation between the two, however, is not one between comparables because not one of contemporaneity, i.e., of the synchronic. Even justice, then, properly understood—understood as tethered to the ethical relation, understood as the thirdness present *in*

the ethical relation rather than as an *external* third party, understood as the rupture of the Infinite rather than as a coordination of a system—although the condition of contemporaneity, is ultimately diachronic and anarchic, only to be thought temporally rather than spatially. This remove, this illeity, is precisely what ensures that my rights are never comparable to that of the Other, of *any* Other, that "all equality is borne by my inequality." If modernity thinks human equality as a result of the comparability and reciprocity of human rights, then Levinas fells this homogenizing egalitarianism at the roots. Equality must not be thought of in terms of egality and exchangeability. As Levinas infers, "This incommensurability with consciousness . . . is not the inoffensive relationship of knowing in which everything is equalized, nor the indifference of *spatial* [emphasis added] contiguity; it is an assignation of me by another, a responsibility with regard to me we do not even know" ([Levinas 1998], p. 100) Even the one not present, an Other whose very existence may remain unknown, is my neighbor (the proximate) who calls from on High (the remote) as incomparable, as one whose rights and dignity outstrips my own.[4] The reason for this is because the relation to the Other, whether the second or the third (the *ille*), is not spatial but temporal, not synchronic but diachronic. Were the relationship spatial, then the relation would be external, but the Other, *any* Other, even the unknown Other, calls forth *in* each and every relation with each and every Other, but not as something given, not as someone *present* as a term of the relation. Even the face of the Other who is "present" is not a term and not given, but only announces their presence through their offering of signs, an offering that has always already preceded my hearing of it. The relation is thus always anarchical and diachronic.

The Other is never given, is never present. I have either come too late or their advent is still being announced, still promised. Consequently, the Other, as not given, is an object of desire rather than an object of satiation, i.e., of happiness. In Levinas' words,

> Finally, the distance that separates happiness from desire separates politics from religion. Politics tends toward reciprocal recognition, that is, toward equality; it ensures happiness. [. . .] Religion is Desire and not struggle for recognition. It is the surplus possible in a society of equals, that of glorious humility, responsibility, and sacrifice, which are the condition of equality itself ([Levinas 1969], p. 64)

Everyone is indeed equal, consequently considered, but this equality is founded on an antecedent surplus. The breach of the Infinite, the surplus of the system, is *antecedent* to the system. It is thus not an escape from the system, i.e., there is no call to abolish the State, but perhaps only because there is a higher calling, because the State or even the political as such is neither an end in itself nor a solution, i.e., a means to an end. Politics is a problem only "solved"—if it is to be solved at all—by returning to the antecedent surplus, the surplus which founded the system of which it is the surplus, thus the surplus that, though apparently only possible as posterior to the system, is its anterior ground, a "posterior anteriority." The true meaning of politics is effusive, i.e., it exceeds its own domain. Religion is antecedent to politics as the Infinite is antecedent to justice, at least if justice is thought of as nothing more than a political category. Political categories—rights, equality, recognition and representation—should serve only to point to their outside or, to avoid the spatial metaphor and employ a more properly temporal one, to their anterior. In order to reveal their real force and truth political categories, the political as such, must be skeptically Unsaid. The antecedent breach of the Infinite must interrupt, from a time immemorial, everything which is presently Said.

5. Political Skepticism and Unsaying

This concluding section will briefly pose the possibility of negating the political as such and not simply this or that law, policy, or platform. If an age can be post-metaphysical, then why could it not

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[4] As Drew Dalton rightfully insists, just because the rights and dignity of the Other exceed my own, this does not entail acquiescence, i.e., blind submission. The relation to the Other often leads to "obsession" or a "captivation", whereby I become "hostage" to the Other. This, despite the Other's height, is to be resisted. See ([Dalton 2018]), especially pp. 48–50.

also be post-political, especially if politics, *per* Levinas, is ontology? If Kierkegaard can suspend the ethical, then would it not be less rather than more scandalous to suspend the political? If it is possible to suspend the political, then skepticism is the Levinassian means to this end. Levinas asks,

> What difference is there between institutions arising from a limitation of violence and those arising from a limitation of responsibility? There is, at least, this one: in the second case, one can revolt against institutions in the very name of that which gave birth to them (Levinas 2000, p. 183)

As Plato suggested in the *Crito*, justice never does harm; it never meets violence with violence. One can, however, meet responsibility with responsibility. This may seem inaccurate, as Colin Davis, for instance, has argued, "The third party acts as a corrective to the asymmetry of ethical relations. [. . .] The third party makes it possible to escape the moral chaos that Levinas's non-universalist ethics might entail" (Davis 1996, p. 84). Insofar as this is true, however, this statement must be inverted or unsaid (*dédit*); it must also be said that the second party, *qua* interruption, acts as a corrective to the universalizing and mediating activity of the third party. For Levinas, given that diachrony trumps synchrony, every proposition, if it is to retain its truth, must be unsaid. This is the apparatus of skepticism.

Skepticism is a corollary of the diachronic that, if employed synchronically, results only in contradictions, i.e., in a *reductio ad absurdum*. On the one hand, to unsay, i.e., to negate any proposition synchronic with another, is to commit a contradiction, to affirm and to negate at the same time in the same respect. On the other hand, to unsay a proposition at a different time, i.e., diachronically, does not commit this logical sin. It is this unsaying, this turning of the tables, *peritrope*,[5] that Levinas thinks of as skeptical unsaying. "[Skepticism] is a refusal to synchronize the implicit affirmation contained in saying and the negation which this affirmation states in the said" (Levinas 1998, p. 167). Insofar as the ground of contemporaneity and comparison, that which makes politics possible, is anarchic or absolutely anterior, i.e., that which was never present but always already has been, any truth affirmed as present must immediately be negated. "Truth is in several times . . . a diachrony without synthesis which the fate of skepticism refuted . . . " (Levinas 1998, p. 183).

It is not that some political policy, platform, or ideology should be unsaid in favor of its negation, e.g., democracy in favor of monarchy, equality in favor of a hierarchy of natural kinds, or capitalism in favor of socialism. It is rather the whole domain of the political, of the Said, that must be negated or Unsaid in order to reveal its institution, the founding act that must remain exceptional to what it founds, the Say*ing* of the Said. The solution to political problems, to systemic injustices, is not simply a counter proposal or the rule of the opposing party, but it must be something entirely counter to the political and systemic as such. Fred Alford is thus correct when he says the following:

> Three propositions about the state define Levinas's project: peace is impossible within the state, peace is possible only beyond the state, going beyond the state to find peace cannot mean leaving the state behind . . . The transcendence of the state must somehow take place within the state . . . (Alford 2004, p. 149)

"Peace is impossible within the state", i.e., the State or rather the political as such is a problem rather than a solution. "Peace is possible only beyond the state," i.e., peace is possible only in ethical and/or religious relation, the breach of the system, the breach of the Infinite, which, although the condition of politics, is not a condition able to be annexed into the same. The condition of the political thus lies inherently beyond that same order. "Going beyond the state to find peace cannot mean leaving the state behind", i.e., the solution is not a call for anarchy, as that too is a political movement, albeit a non-Statist one. Going beyond the State is not a synchronic negation of the State, an attempt to

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5　For more on the notion of *peritrope* in ancient skepticism, see (Tritten 2018).

institute its contradiction, the contradiction of law and order (anarchy), but it is an attempt to Unsay the State in order to say the rupture of the same so as to be opened up to its institution (anarchy), that Saying entirely antecedent to anything the State might be able to pronounce. So too for the political as such. Politics must be Unsaid as such and as a whole in order to find a way out of the same, which turns out to be not so much an "outside" but a "before". With this "before", however, lies the only hope of ever attaining what comes after the political. It is not good enough simply to be post-gender or post-sexual; we should become post-political.

If the terms "post-gender" and "post-sexual" do not mean that gender and sex do not exist, only that these distinctions should not have to bear social valency, then the "post-political" too does not have to name the state of affairs that will follow the demise of the State. Politics institutions can remain and remain exactly as they are, but they must lose their valency. Take, for example, the kingship and queenship of England. These offices have not been vacated, but the power the king and queen yield ceases to be observed, as they are now just playthings to be bandied about by tabloids. Power unobserved is no power at all. To resist a certain regime, to protest a certain administration is still to recognize that the power they wield *is* power. Real resistance, however, would refuse to concede that political power is power. It would not acknowledge the power wielded by a corrupt government by trying to resist it through the same channels, e.g., voting, that inaugurated it except with the contrary platform, but real resistance would withdraw its support from that very system, from the very apparatus that affords that power its force and efficacy. It may be, then, that real resistance does not, for example, consist in an oppositional vote so much as in the refusal of the vote. Real resistance would not erect an opposing party, but it would, with Simone Weil, advocate for the abolition of all political parties. Real resistance, with Thoreau, would not cast its anti-abolitionist vote and its anti-war vote on paper, but it would withdraw from the State, including its financial support (taxes) of the State and the war it wages. Real resistance would not say "Not *my* President," but it would lead a life that lives as if there were no such office at all. None of this seeks the abolition of the State; it can all remain exactly as is. But, it does refuse to work for its maintenance and afford it its constant attention and engagement. It refuses to acknowledge the legitimacy of the power it wields, refusing even to resist it through legally sanctioned and Statist means, e.g., a worker's strike. Let us turn politics into a plaything to be bandied about in the tabloids just as has happened to the king and queen of England. Let politics become inoperative, a spectacle without observance. Let us be skeptical of politics both as a source of authority and as a problem-solving means. Let us become politically indifferent.

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