

## FIVE PROBLEMS IN LEVINAS'S VIEW OF POLITICS AND THE SKETCH OF A SOLUTION TO THEM

SIMON CRITCHLEY  
New School University

*This essay attempts to sharpen significantly the critical debate around Levinas's work by focusing on the question of politics, which is, it is argued, Levinas's Achilles' heel. Five problems in Levinas's treatment of politics are identified and discussed: fraternity, monotheism, androcentrism, the family, and Israel. It is argued that Levinas's ethics is terribly compromised by his conception of politics. In order to save Levinasian ethics from this compromise, two possibilities are explored: first, to follow Derrida's separation of ethical form from political content in his recent reading of Levinas, which allows for a notion of political invention linked to ethical responsibility, and second, to link Levinas's conception of ethics to what is called in the essay the anarchistic disturbance of politics. In conclusion, this anarchistic experience of ethics is linked to a quite different understanding of politics as the dissensual space of democracy.*

**Keywords:** Levinas; ethics; politics; Derrida; anarchism

Recent years have seen an explosion of interest in the thought of Emmanuel Levinas. From the relative obscurity in which his work languished until the mid-1980s, Levinas is now widely seen as a great philosopher whose influence extends far beyond the professional confines of philosophy. His work is read in religious studies and theology, sociology, aesthetics, literary, and cultural theory, and even in political theory. This is all very nice. But the problem with this explosion of interest is that much of the work on Levinas tends to confine itself to exegesis, commentary, comparison with other thinkers, and, at its worst, homage. This is finally dull and produces only disciple-

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*AUTHOR'S NOTE: This essay was written during the first days of the conflict in Iraq, in March 2003, and was to a large extent inspired by the huge and global antiwar protests that preceded the conflict. I would like to thank Stephen White and a stunning anonymous reader for their excellent responses to my essay, which enabled me to focus a number of issues, even though I have not adequately responded to their criticisms.*

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ship and scholasticism. It would be a savage irony indeed if Levinas scholarship suffered the same mind-numbing fate as much Heidegger scholarship. Our relation to a major thinker has to be critical. In my view, politics is the name of a critical point in Levinas's work, perhaps *the* critical point or even the Achilles' heel of his work.

To my mind, the question of Levinas and politics is a way of marking both a necessity and a disquietude, a necessity that entails a disquietude. The necessity is that of the passage from ethics to politics. As Levinas writes, and as many of his major commentators have pointed out, ethics as the infinite responsibility of the face-to-face relation described in *Totality and Infinity*, or 'the other within the same' of ethical subjectivity described in *Otherwise than Being or beyond Essence*, entails, and has to entail, a relation to politics conceived—and conceived perhaps too traditionally, too narrowly, too abstractly—as the realm of legality, justice, the institution of the state, and everything that Levinas subsumes under the heading of *le tiers*, the third party. Emmanuel Levinas was not Martin Buber, and the core of Levinas's critique of Buber's I-Thou relation is that the abstraction of the ethical relation must be incarnated in the life of the political realm. This much is well known, and we do not really require many more miles of sympathetic commentary on the relevant pages of *Otherwise than Being* or other texts.

So much for the necessity, but why the disquietude? There is much to say here, but there are, for me, a series of open questions with regard to the passage from ethics to politics. Let me summarize five problems that seem to me to be essential, problems that have recently been sharpened by the appearance of Howard Caygill's *Levinas and the Political*, a subtle and subtly devastating book that shows the risks and the possibilities of Levinas's work and how that work might be said to bifurcate around the question of the political.<sup>1</sup> So, let me begin with the risks before going on to the possibilities:

1. *Fraternity*: The conceptualization of justice, community, legality, and *le tiers* is continually linked to what Levinas calls 'fraternity'. In terms of the secular trinity of French republicanism, it is the third person of fraternity to which Levinas appeals over the claims to liberty and equality. However, this appeal to fraternity shows, I think, the utterly classical politics of friendship—to coin a phrase—that underpins Levinas's work. To pick one example among many, from *Otherwise than Being or beyond Essence*, 'the other is from the first the brother to all the other men' ('*Autrui est d'emblée le frère à tous les autres hommes*', p. 201/158).<sup>2</sup> That is, at the level of politics, the ethical relation is translated into what I would see as a classical conception of political friendship as fraternity, as a relation between brothers, between free equals who also happen to be male.

2. *Monotheism*: That is, the linking of fraternity to the question of God, and the idea that political community is, or has to be, monotheistic. As Howard Caygill writes, commenting on Levinas's work from the 1930s, but it is a constant feature of Levinas's work, 'Against the principle of freedom and being as gathering or domination, Levinas seeks protection from elemental evil in the thought of a human dignity emerging from a fraternity in which humans are called by God to responsibility for the other man'.<sup>3</sup> In other words, the universality of fraternity is ensured through the passage to God, which incidentally recalls the classical Christian, essentially Augustinian, conception of friendship. That is, the Christian has friends only insofar as that friendship is mediated through the presence of God, which means that all humanity is my friend and no one is my enemy—such is, for Carl Schmitt, the essentially depoliticizing logic of Christianity. This is one way of hearing Levinas's phrase from *Otherwise than Being*, that it is "Thanks to God" I am an other for the others' (AE 201/OB 158). Or again, from *Totality and Infinity*, 'monotheism signifies this human kinship, the idea of a human race that refers back to the other [*autrui*] in the face'.<sup>4</sup> Thus, there is a strict entailment between fraternity and monotheism, and I take it that universalistic republicanism is simply the secular translation of that entailment, '*le paradis laïque*' of the French Republic.

3. *Androcentrism*: That Levinas's conception of ethics, fraternity, and monotheism is profoundly androcentric, as scholars like Stella Sandford have shown, where the feminine is thematized as the essential, but essentially preethical, opening of the ethical.<sup>5</sup> Relations of solidarity between women are thinkable only on analogy with fraternity—hence, sorority is secondary to fraternity, sisterhood is secondary to brotherhood.

4. *Filiality and the family*: That is, the way in which the androcentric concept of fraternity is linked to what Derrida calls 'the family schema'.<sup>6</sup> Filiality is a key concept in Levinas, particularly in the concluding pages of *Totality and Infinity*. But the child is either explicitly the son, *le fils*, or is thought on analogy with the son, and is linked together with the concepts of paternity and fraternity as that which makes 'the strange conjuncture of the family possible' (TeI 256/TI 279). It should not be forgotten that *Totality and Infinity* concludes with an invocation of the 'marvel of the family' (TeI 283/TI 306). As such, one might speculate, *Totality and Infinity* produces a curious reversal of the logic of Hegel's *Philosophy of Right*. Where Hegel begins with the family only to end with the state, Levinas begins with the totalizing violence of the state only to end with the family. It then becomes a question of linking the pluralism of the family to the political order. Let's just say that I am not convinced that the family is such a marvel.

5. *Israel*: Finally, and perhaps most significantly, it would be a question of linking these four themes to what we might call (and I choose my words carefully, thinking of Heidegger) the *political fate* of Levinasian ethics, namely, the vexed question of Israel. In relation to Israel, there is a risk—a risk and not a certainty as Howard Caygill carefully tracks in his book, but a profound risk nonetheless—that the nonplace of the ethical relation to the other becomes the place of Israel's borders. Israel risks functioning as the name *par excellence* for a just polity, a polity based on the prepolitical priority of ethical obligation to the other—*Politique après!* as Levinas exclaimed in response to President Sadat's visit to Jerusalem in 1977.<sup>7</sup> Israel might be said to have a double function in Levinas's discourse, as both ideal and real, as an ideal where ethical responsibility would be incarnated in social justice, and as a really existing state where justice is endlessly compromised by violence. The name 'Israel' is suspended, possibly fatally suspended, between ideality and reality, between holy history and political history. Might this double function, this *glissement de sens*, with regard to Israel, explain why, in 1982, Levinas did not feel able to condemn the murder of Palestinians in the camps of Sabra and Shatila?<sup>8</sup> Is that why Levinas said that in alterity I also find an enemy? Maybe. One can only wonder (or perhaps worry) what Levinas might have said now when the person required by an Israeli commission of inquiry to be removed from his post as defence minister because of his culpability in a war crime—Ariel Sharon—is now prime minister of the State of Israel and where the double function of Zion finds its most powerful support from the evangelical Christian right in the United States. One should remember that the Bible is George W. Bush's favourite bedtime reading, where the neoimperial project of the U.S. government is intrinsically linked to a Zionist vision. One might burst into hysterical laughter if the situation were not so bloody frightening.

So, five problems: fraternity, monotheism, androcentrism, filiality, and the family and Israel. This is the reason why I spoke of politics in Levinas as both a necessity and a disquietude, a necessity *that* disquiets. Namely, that it seems to me that there has to be an incarnation of ethics in politics for Levinas, and that the name of this just polity has to be Israel, even when, as Levinas emphasizes in 'Judaism and Revolution', a fascinating Talmudic commentary, it is not necessary to conceive of Israel in particularistic Jewish terms. Israel is the name for any people, Levinas insists, *any* people that has submitted to the Law, non-Jewish as well as Jewish.<sup>9</sup> But—and it is such a stupidly obvious but still nagging question—what about people or peoples that do not, or do not choose, to submit to law conceived in this manner? What about those whom, in a careless and ill-advised remark on 'the yellow

peril', Levinas subsumes under the category of the Asiatic, the Chinese, and even the Russians insofar as they submit themselves to the 'paganism' of communism?<sup>10</sup> What about those outside of the influence of the Bible and the Greeks? What about those who simply dance, in Levinas's frankly racist aside in a 1991 interview. I quote, 'I often say, although it is a dangerous thing to say publicly, that humanity consists of the Bible and the Greeks. All the rest can be translated: all the rest—all the exotic—is dance'.<sup>11</sup> To which I am inclined to say: *let's dance*, let's dance all night, let's party hearty. And what about those peoples who accept submission to the law—for Islam, of course, means submission—but who stand outside or aside from the Judaeo-Christian inheritance in Levinas's eyes, even when they stand inside Israel, like Israeli-Arabs, or inside the metropolitan European states, like the *maghrebins* in France? The problem of culture and cultural relativism, at the heart of Levinas's disagreement with Merleau-Ponty, his opposition to Levi-Strauss, and his peculiar anthropological commitments to Levy-Bruhl, looms very large. I refer you to Robert Bernasconi's definitive work in this area.<sup>12</sup>

One way of apparently softening the charge of Zionism in Levinas is by replacing Israel with France as the major political signifier of his work. This is particularly plausible as the two themes can be traced back to the Dreyfus affair and specifically to the identification of the ideals of the French Republic with the critique of anti-Semitism, something that left a huge impression on Levinas as a student in Strasbourg, in particular through the example of his teacher, Maurice Pradines. With this in mind, it is indeed curious to observe the canonization of Levinas as a French philosopher after his death and the utterly ugly family (the family again!) wranglings over the executive rights to his estate. In the face of the possibility, raised by Simone Hansel at the prompting of Richard Cohen, of establishing the Levinas archive in North Carolina (an intriguingly weird idea), Michael Levinas wrote in *Le Monde* in 1996 that 'the attachment of my father to France was total' and that any archive must exist in '*un lieu français et républicain*'.<sup>13</sup> Also, we might wonder as to the machinations behind Jean-Luc Marion's claim that the only two great French philosophers of the twentieth century (excluding himself, of course, or perhaps reserving himself for the twenty-first century) were Bergson and Levinas, the implication being that other French philosophers—like Deleuze or Foucault or Derrida—were either somehow irrelevant or simply commentators on German philosophy.<sup>14</sup> This is obviously a very silly thing to say. Logically speaking, the attempted incarnation of Levinasian ethics in the supposedly concrete universal of the French state is no less repellent than the attempt to do the same in the Israeli state. I recall my palms sweating nervously as I listened to the French ambassador to Israel make this connection in an otherwise rather eloquent speech before more than a thousand peo-

ple during the first Levinas conference to be held in Israel, in Jerusalem in May 2002. There is a danger in the canonization of Levinas as an essentially French philosopher, that is, as some sort of apologist for a conservative republicanism whose vapid universalism would somehow be caught in Levinas's slogan 'ethics is first philosophy'. Of course, Levinas is hardly blameless in this identification of his work with '*une certaine idée de la France*', and in a conversation with Francois Poirié he notes that he held the rather curious belief, which he still finds reasonable, that the war with Germany was necessary 'in order to defend the French language'.<sup>15</sup>

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In my view, these are the problems that beset the question of Levinas and politics. My hope would be for a nonfraternalistic, nonmonotheistic, nonandrocentric, nonfilial, nonfamilial, and non-Zionist conception of the relation of ethics to politics. This also sounds very nice, but how do we get there from here? I have claimed that Levinas's work is defined by the disquieting necessity of the passage from ethics to politics. Yet, what if we questioned the nature of this passage? For Levinas, there is a deduction of politics from ethics, from the other to all others, from *autrui* to *le tiers*, but what if this did not take place in the way Levinas suggests? On the contrary, might there not be a *hiatus* between ethics and politics, a hiatus that, far from inducing paralysis or resignation, perhaps opens onto a new experience of the political decision?

In raising these questions in this way, I am alluding to Derrida's *Adieu à Emmanuel Levinas*, which I would briefly like to address in order to pick out its central argument as it permits a powerful response to the problems we have sketched. In my view, *Adieu* lets us see the significant *distance* between Derrida's and Levinas's work.<sup>16</sup> What I mean is that one way of reading *Adieu* is in terms of the increasingly close philosophical proximity of Derrida to Levinas, which builds upon Derrida's 1986 remark where he said, 'Faced with a thinking like that of Levinas, I never have an objection. I am ready to subscribe to everything that he says'.<sup>17</sup> This is an understandable reading, and I have myself advanced arguments for such a proximity. But despite this undoubted homology, and despite the relative absence of criticism in *Adieu*, perhaps the latter paradoxically permits us to see that Derrida is much further away from Levinas than might at first appear.

Derrida focuses on one seemingly contingent word in Levinas's vocabulary—'welcome' (*accueil*)—which he then links to the theme of hospitality. Derrida shows how the hospitality of welcome defines the various meanings given to ethics in Levinas's work. In my view, he rightly argues that Levinas's

*Totality and Infinity* can be read as 'an immense treatise on hospitality', where ethics is defined as a welcome to the other, as an unconditional hospitality. Yet the question that Derrida is seeking to explore in this text concerns the relation between an ethics of hospitality and a politics or law of hospitality in Levinas's work. So the question is whether an ethics of hospitality can, in the classical manner, *found* the spheres of politics and law. That is, does the formal ethical imperative of Levinas's work ('tu ne tueras point') lead to a determinable political or legal content? Can one deduce politics from ethics? Derrida's claim, which in my view could be at the very least complicated—perhaps even contested—is that although Levinas sees the necessity for such a deduction, he leaves us perplexed as to how it might be achieved, and his text is marked by a silence on this crucial point (A 197).

However, and this is the really interesting move in the argument, rather than judging this hiatus negatively, Derrida claims that the absence of a plausible deduction from ethics to politics should not induce paralysis or resignation. The claim is therefore that if there is no deduction from ethics to politics, then this can be both ethically and politically welcome. On the one hand, ethics is left defined as the infinite responsibility of unconditional hospitality. Whilst, on the other hand, the political can be defined as the taking of a decision without any determinate transcendental guarantees. Thus, the hiatus in Levinas allows Derrida both to affirm the primacy of an ethics of hospitality, whilst leaving open the sphere of the political as a realm of risk and danger. Such danger calls for decisions or what Derrida, citing Levinas, calls 'political invention' (A 144), an invention taken in the name of the other without this being reducible to some sort of moral calculus. However, Derrida's position does not, I think, collapse into a vapid formalism or empty universalism. He emphasizes how the very indeterminacy of the passage from ethics to politics entails that the taking of a political decision must be a response to the utter singularity of a particular and inexhaustible context. The infinite ethical demand arises as a response to a singular context and calls forth the invention of a political decision. Politics itself can here be thought of as *the art of a response to the singular demand of the other*, a demand that arises in a particular context—although the infinite demand cannot simply be reduced to its context—and calls for political invention, for creation.

With this in mind, we can, I think, reformulate—indeed formalize—the problem of the relation of ethics to politics in a number of steps:

1. Politics cannot be founded because such a foundation would limit the freedom of the decision. In politics there are no guarantees. Politics must be open to the dimension of the 'perhaps' or the 'maybe', which is the constant refrain of the early and central chapters of Derrida's *Politics of Friendship*.



For Derrida—and this is a version of his implicit worry about Habermasian discourse ethics—nothing would be more irresponsible and totalitarian than the attempt *a priori* to exclude the monstrous or the terrible. He writes, ‘Without the possibility of radical evil, of perjury, and of absolute crime, there is no responsibility, no freedom, no decision’ (PA 247/PF 219).

2. So the relation of ethics to politics is that there is a gap or hiatus between these two domains. And here we confront a crucial qualification of the problem of ethics and politics, namely, that if politics is not founded in the classical manner, *then it is also not arbitrary*, for this would take us back to some *libertas arbitrarium* and its concomitant voluntaristic and sovereign conception of the will. That is, it would lead us back to an undeconstructed Schmittianism, where the possibility of the political decision presupposes the existence of the sovereign subject, defined in terms of activity, freedom, and virility.

3. To summarize the first two steps of the argument in a question: If politics is nonfoundational (because that would limit freedom) and nonarbitrary (because that would derive from a conception of freedom), then what follows from this? How does one think a nonfoundational and yet nonarbitrary relation between ethics and politics? Derrida’s claim would seem to be that there is indeed a link between ethics and politics, claiming in *Adieu* that ‘*This relation is necessary (il faut ce rapport)*, it must exist, it is necessary to deduce a politics and a law from ethics’ (A 198). Against Schmitt, Derrida tries to capture this sense of a nonfoundational, yet nonarbitrary, relation between ethics and politics with the notion of *the other’s decision in me*, a decision that is taken, but with regard to which I am passive. On my understanding, this means that particular political decisions are taken in relation to the universality of an ethical demand for action that I approve: infinite responsibility to the other, justice, the messianic *a priori*, or whatever. Although this is not the way Derrida understands it, I would interpret the other’s decision in me as an experience of *conscience*, where the content of the latter is the other’s demand to which I am infinitely responsible and that counsels me to act in a specific situation.<sup>18</sup>

4. Politics, then, is the task of *invention* in relation to the other’s decision in me—nonfoundationally and nonarbitrarily. But how does one do this exactly? Perhaps in the following way: in a quite banal sense, each decision is necessarily different. Every time I decide I have to invent a new rule, a new norm, which must be absolutely singular in relation to both the other’s infinite demand made on me and the finite context within which this demand arises. I think this is what Derrida means, in ‘Force of Law’ and elsewhere, by his qualified Kierkegaardian emphasis on the madness of the decision, namely, that each decision is like a leap of faith made in relation to the singu-



larity of a context.<sup>19</sup> Such a position might be linked to one of Wittgenstein's more cryptic remarks in the *Philosophical Investigations*, where he writes that in following a rule, 'it would almost be more correct to say, not that an intuition was needed at every stage, but that a new decision was needed at every stage (*es sei an jedem Punkt eine neue Entscheidung nötig*)'.<sup>20</sup>

5. So, each political decision is made experientially *ex nihilo*, as it were, and is not deduced or read off procedurally from a pregiven moral content, and yet it is not arbitrary: there is a rule that shapes the taking of that decision. The demand provoked by the other's decision in me calls forth political invention, which provokes me into taking a decision and inventing a norm for the specific situation. The *singularity* of the context in which the demand arises provokes an act of invention whose criterion is *universal*. All the difficulty of politics consists precisely in this passage from the universal to the particular.

6. To recapitulate, what we seem to have here is a relation between ethics and politics that is both nonfoundational and nonarbitrary, that is, it leaves the decision open for invention whilst acknowledging that the decision comes from the other. The other's decision in me is not so much a Kantian *Faktum der Vernunft* as a *Faktum des Anderen*, an affective, heteronomous, prerational opening of the subject. If the 'fact of reason' is the demand of the good that must be consistent with the principle of autonomy, then the 'fact of the other' would be the demand of the good experienced as the heteronomous opening of autonomy, the affective source for autonomous political action—which does not at all mean that autonomy is abandoned, it is simply rendered secondary.

To conclude this formal argument, in my view there is a universal ethical criterion for action, which has a deeply Levinasian inflection. Yet, I am passive in relation to this criterion, I have a nonsubsumptive relation to the *Faktum des Anderen*, perhaps a little like reflective judgment in Kant's Third Critique. The specific form of political action and decision taking must be singular, situational, and context dependent.

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To return to Derrida's *Adieu*, this understanding of the hiatus between ethics and politics permits Derrida to make an absolutely crucial move in his reading of Levinas, a move that I would like to retain: on the one hand, it enables him to accept the *formal* notion of the ethical relation to the other in Levinas—what Derrida calls here and elsewhere a 'structural' or 'a priori' notion of the messianic (A 204)—whilst, on the other hand, refusing the spe-

cific political *content* that Levinasian ethics seems to entail, namely, the question of Levinas's Zionism, French republicanism, Eurocentrism, or whatever. Derrida writes that

the *formal* injunction of the deduction remains irrefusable . . . ethics entails politics and law. . . . But, on the other hand, the political or juridical *content* thus assigned remains indeterminate, to be determined beyond knowledge and any possible presentation, concept or intuition, singularly in the speech and responsibility *taken* by everyone in each situation. (A 199)

Having established this hiatus or discontinuity between the form and content of Levinas's work, Derrida goes on, a couple of pages later,

Moreover this discontinuity allows one to subscribe to everything that Levinas says to us about peace or messianic hospitality, of the beyond of the political within the political, without necessarily sharing all the 'opinions' which, within his discourse, arise from an intra-political analysis of real situations or of an effectivity happening today, of the terrestrial Jerusalem. (A 202)

Derrida makes this formalistic move in order to avoid what I called above the possible political fate of Levinas's work, which, whilst not simply '*un nationalisme de plus*' (A 202), continually runs the risk of being conflated with such a nationalism, with its 'opinions' on 'the terrestrial Jerusalem'. However, far from being an antipolitical reading of Levinas, we might see Derrida's *Adieu* as a *hyperpolitical* reading. Derrida's avoidance of the possible political fate of Levinasian ethics is not done in order to *avoid* concrete political questions, questions of the specific content of political decisions, but on the contrary to *defend* what he has elsewhere called in relation to Marx, 'The New International'.<sup>21</sup> Although received with more than a little scepticism by the Derrida faithful, I think the New International is a key notion in Derrida's recent work, one that is needed today more than ever and which I see, perhaps simply as a way of provoking my Habermasian friends, as a reactivation of the emancipatory promise of modernity. In response to the good old Chernyshevskian question, 'What is to be done?' we might say that what is required is, as Derrida writes, 'another international law, another politics of frontiers, another humanitarian politics, even a humanitarian engagement that would hold itself *effectively* outside the interest of nation states' (A 176). Sadly, we seem infinitely far from such a politics at the present moment defined as it is by the endless misery of war, a neocolonial theological moralism of good and evil and a neoimperialist projection of military power.

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Let me conclude with a brief plea for an anarchist metapolitics. To my mind, the question of Levinas and politics turns on the issue of the incarnation of ethics in politics, namely, whether ethics becomes somehow incarnated in the form of the state, whether France, Israel, or elsewhere, or whether it is, as I would contend, a moment of *disincarnation* that challenges the borders and legitimacy of the state. It is here that Levinas's thematic of anarchism takes on great interest, particularly the way in which that theme is handled by Miguel Abensour, when he speaks of an anarchic disturbance of politics.<sup>22</sup> This is the anarchy of the relation of proximity and substitution with the other that introduces what we might call a *metapolitical* moment into politics. In my view, Levinasian ethics is not ethics for its own sake in the manner of what we might call 'angelic' readings of Levinas, but nor is it ethics for the sake of the state, which we might think of as the right-wing Levinasian option, whether that is linked to the logic of Zionism or indeed a quasi-Gaullist, quasi-Chiracian argument for French exceptionalism. On my view, ethics is ethics for the sake of politics. Better stated perhaps, ethics is the metapolitical disturbance of politics for the sake of politics, that is, for the sake of a politics that does not close over in itself, becoming what Levinas would call totality, becoming a whole. Following Levinas's logic, when politics is left to itself without the disturbance of ethics it risks becoming tyrannical.

The problem with much thinking about politics is that it is *archic*, it is obsessed with the moment of foundation, origination, declaration, or institution that is linked to the act of government, of sovereignty, most of all of *decision* that presupposes and initiates a sovereign political subject capable of self-government and the government of others. Such is arguably the intent of a tradition of political philosophy that begins in Plato's *Republic*. I would contend that political philosophy in this sense is essentially antipolitical: in Hannah Arendt's terms it consists in the reduction of the political to the social, or in Jacques Rancière's terms it is the reduction of *la politique* to the order or *la police*. That is, the political manifestation of the people is and has to be reduced to their allotted social function in the state as soldier, worker, guardian, or university professor—the social division of labour given in Plato's *Republic* that finds a faithful and deeply troubling echo in Heidegger's *Rektorsrede*. What such a tradition of political thinking fears most is the people, the radical manifestation of the people, the people not as *das Volk* or *le people* shaped by the state, but as *die Leute*, or *les gens*, the people in their irreducible plurality.

One way of thinking about Levinas and politics, and I think it is the most convincing way, is in terms of ethics as an anarchic, metapolitical disturbance of the antipolitical order of the police. It would here be a question of linking

what Levinas sees already in *Totality and Infinity* as 'the anarchy essential to multiplicity' (*TI* 270/*TI* 294) to the multiplicity that is essential to politics. The essence of politics, as far as I'm concerned, consists in the manifestation of the multiplicity that is the people, of the *demos*. Who are the people? They are not the alleged unity of a race, the citizens of a nation-state, the members of a specific class like the proletariat, or indeed the members of a specific community defined by religion, ethnicity, or whatever. The people cannot be identified and policed by any territorializing term. Rather the people is that empty space, that supplement that exceeds any social quantification or accounting. The people are those who do not count, who have no right to govern whether through hereditary entitlement like the aristocracy or by wealth and property ownership like the bourgeoisie.

If the activity of government continually risks pacification, order, the state, and what Rancière refers to as the 'idyll of consensus', then politics consists in the manifestation of *dissensus*, a dissensus that disturbs the order by which government wishes to depoliticize society.<sup>23</sup> If politics can be understood as the manifestation of the anarchic *demos*, then politics and democracy are two names for the same thing. Thus, democracy is not a fixed political form of society, but rather the *deformation* of society from itself through the act of political manifestation. Democracy is a political process, what we might think of as the movement of democratisation. On my view, democratisation consists in the manifestation of dissensus, in demonstration as *demos*-stration, in the street—even dancing in the streets—in London, in Berlin, in New York, but equally in Damascus, in Tel-Aviv, in Cairo, but also in Basra, in Baghdad, manifesting the presence of those who do not count. Democratization is politicization, it is the cultivation of what I call forms of 'dissensual emancipatory praxis' or what might also be called *politicities*, sites of hegemonic struggle that work against the consensual idyll of the state, not in order to do away with the state or consensus, but to bring about its endless betterment.

Politics is now, and it is many. If we are not to resign ourselves to the finally defeatist position of Rancière and many others that politics is rare, the last great example being 1968;<sup>24</sup> if we are not going to bow beneath the fate of contemporary neoimperial power intoxicated by military moralism ('you are evil, we will bomb you'); if we are going to be able to face and face down the political horror of the present, and Levinas's work was always dominated by that horror, then I think politics has to be empowered by a metapolitical moment of disturbance, an anarchic ethical injunction and the experience of an infinite ethical demand. Despite all the political problems discussed in this essay, this is our infinite debt to the work of Emmanuel Levinas.

# NOTES

1. Howard Caygill, *Levinas and the Political* (London: Routledge, 2002).
2. Emmanuel Levinas, *Autrement qu'être ou au-delà de l'essence* (The Hague, the Netherlands: Martinus Nijhoff, 1974), 201; idem, *Otherwise than Being or beyond Essence*, trans. A. Lingis (The Hague, the Netherlands: Martinus Nijhoff, 1981), 158 (hereafter *AE/OB*).
3. Caygill, *Levinas and the Political*, 31.
4. Emmanuel Levinas, *Totalité et infini* (The Hague, the Netherlands: Martinus Nijhoff, 1961), 190; *Totality and Infinity*, trans. A. Lingis (Pittsburgh, PA: Duquesne University Press, 1969), 214 (hereafter *Tel/IT*).
5. Stella Sandford, *The Metaphysics of Love* (London: Continuum, 2000).
6. Jacques Derrida, *Politiques de l'amitié* (Paris: Galilée, 1994), 12 (hereafter *PA*); idem, *Politics of Friendship*, trans. G. Collins (London: Verso, 1997), viii (hereafter *PF*).
7. Emmanuel Levinas, "Politique après," in *L'au-delà du verset* (Paris: Minuit, 1982), 221-28.
8. See Emmanuel Levinas, "Ethics and Politics," in *The Levinas Reader*, ed. by S. Hand (Oxford, UK: Blackwell, 1989), 289-97.
9. Emmanuel Levinas, "Judaism and Revolution," in *Nine Talmudic Readings*, trans. A. Aronowicz (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990), 94-119.
10. Emmanuel Levinas, "Le débat russo-chinois et la dialectique," in *Les imprévus de l'histoire* (Montpellier, France: Fata Morgana, 1994), 172. This article is interestingly discussed in Caygill's *Levinas and the Political*, 182-85.
11. Raoul Mortley, *French Philosophers in Conversation* (London: Routledge, 1991), 18.
12. See, for example, Robert Bernasconi, "One-Way Traffic: The Ontology of Decolonization and Its Ethics," in *Ontology and Alterity in Merleau-Ponty*, ed. by G. Johnson and M. Smith (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1990), 67-80; idem, "Who Is My Neighbor? Who Is the Other? Questioning the 'Generosity of Western Thought'," in *Ethics and Responsibility in the Phenomenological Tradition* (Pittsburgh, PA: Simon Silverman Phenomenology Center, Duquesne University, 1992), 1-31.
13. *Le Monde*, July 26th, 1996.
14. In *L'arche. Le mensuel du judaïsme français*, February 1996, 65.
15. François Poirié, *Emmanuel Levinas: Qui êtes-vous?* (Lyon, France: La Manufacture, 1987), 74.
16. Jacques Derrida, *Adieu à Emmanuel Levinas* (Paris: Galilée, 1997) (hereafter *A*).
17. Jacques Derrida, *Altérités* (Paris: Editions Osiris, 1986), 74.
18. The argument for the experience of conscience as the link between ethical responsibility and political action will be presented systematically in a forthcoming book on ethics.
19. See Jacques Derrida, "Force of Law: The 'Mystical Foundation of Authority'," in *Deconstruction and the Possibility of Justice*, ed. by D. Cornell, M. Rosenfeld, and D. G. Carlson (London: Routledge, 1992), 25.
20. Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, trans. G. E. M. Anscombe (Oxford, UK: Blackwell, 1958), remark 186.
21. Jacques Derrida, *Spectres de Marx* (Paris: Galilée, 1994).
22. See Miguel Abensour, "An-archy between Metapolitics and Politics," *Parallax* 24 (2002): 5-18. See also Abensour's *La démocratie contre l'État* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1997).
23. Ref *La mésentente* (Paris: Galilée, 1995), 141.
24. Ibid., 188; 'La politique, dans sa spécificité est rare'.

*Simon Critchley is a professor of philosophy in the graduate faculty, New School University, New York, and at the University of Essex, England. He is author of five books, most recently On Humour (Routledge, 2002).*