

The Infinite Demand & The Demand of the Infinite

A theological-ethical evaluation of Simon Critchley's experiments in political theology

by

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Declaration

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Abstract

What is a ‘faith of the faithless?’ This study investigates the question of a ‘faithless faith’ and explores its accentuations through the purview of Simon Critchley, author of *Infinitely Demanding* and *The Faith of the Faithless*. Through a heuristic engagement with these two works, it foregrounds Critchley’s understanding of ethical experience in the notion of the ‘infinite demand’ and traces the latter’s influence on Critchley’s experiments in political theology. It attempts to evaluate these experiments through an ethical-theological approach, which highlights particular foci of faith that contribute to a ‘faith of the faithful,’ ultimately problematizing the notion of the ‘demand of the infinite.’

In the first chapter Critchley’s theory of ethical subjectivity and his notion of the infinite ethical demand are foregrounded. The chapter traces the construction of the latter with respect to Alain Badiou, Knud Ejler Løgstrup, and Emmanuel Levinas. It points toward the ‘infinite demand’ as the constitutive force of Critchley’s concept of a ‘faith of the faithless’ and argues for a *theological phenomenological* structure.

In the second chapter two readings are presented, one of Oscar Wilde and the other of Jean-Jacques Rousseau. These readings constitute a first evaluation of a ‘faith of the faithless,’ which brings to the fore the self-articulated and ‘fictional’ nature of this faith. It shows, on the one hand, that faith is not indebted to metaphysical sources, but emerges out of an articulation of the subject, and on the other, that a ‘supreme fictional’ faith is necessary for politics. The chapter concludes by questioning the epistemic implications of such a fiction.

The third chapter unpacks an account of ‘self-eviscerating love’ presented by the medieval French mystic Marguerite Porete. The chapter follows Critchley’s move to ‘communal politics’ that is built on this conception of love, which is a model for the overcoming of original sin and concludes with a critique in an argument that is based on a ‘too-complete negation of the self.’ Finally, it suggests a re-reading of Porete that motivates political formation founded in the *infinite demand of divine love*.

The fourth chapter provides an extended close reading of Martin Heidegger's 1920/21 lectures and sketches four theoretical contours that structure a faith for the faithless, namely, *proclamation*, *meontology*, *impotence* and the *necessity of law*. After situating the infinite demand within this structure, the chapter turns to the distinct *content* of the infinite demand, found in Kierkegaard's 1847 *Works of Love*. It concludes with a meditation that sees Critchley's appropriation of love in Kierkegaard as a '*learning how to love*.'

In the concluding chapter there are two parts. The first makes the connection from ethics to politics explicit, and discusses Critchley's political formulation, namely, 'interstitial distance.' This anarchic vision of Critchley's politics is carried over into a second discussion with Slavoj Žižek and the notion of 'nonviolent violence.' Finally, the second part of the chapter includes two theological points of contact for a 'faith of the faithful,' which are then implicitly situated within a methodological tension that emerges from the presentation of 'the theological' offered by Mark Lewis Taylor.

Opsomming

Waarop sou die term “geloof van die ongelowiges” moontlik kan dui? Hierdie studie ondersoek die vraag na ’n “ongelowige geloof,” waarvan die hooftrekke deur die filosofiese bestek van Simon Critchley, outeur van *Infinitely Demanding* (2007) en *The Faith of the Faithless* (2012), verken word. Deur op ’n heuristiese wyse met hierdie twee werke om te gaan – met spesifieke verwysing na sy begrip van ’n “oneindige eis” (*infinite demand*) – word lig gewerp op Critchley se verstaan van etiese ervaring. Die invloed van hierdie “oortreffende eis” op Critchley se latere eksperiment in politiese teologie word ook aangetoon. Die studie is ook ’n poging om hierdie sogenaamde eksperimente deur ’n eties-teologiese perspektief te beoordeel deur klem te lê op enkele aspekte wat geloof tot ’n “geloof van die *gelowiges*” kan bydra. Hierdeur word die eenduidigheid van Critchley se “eis van die oneindige” beginsel uiteindelik versteur.

In die eerste hoofstuk word Critchley se teorie van etiese subjektiwiteit en sy begrip van die oneindige etiese eis op die voorgrond gestel. Laasgenoemde se samestelling word met spesifieke verwysing na Alain Badiou, Knud Ejler Løgstrup en Emmanuel Levinas bespreek. Die “oneindige eis” idee word as die konstituerende krag agter Critchley se begrip van ’n “geloof van die ongelowiges” aangetoon en ’n argument word gemaak vir ’n *teologies-fenomenologiese* struktuur.

In die tweede hoofstuk word daar onderskeidelik na ’n teks van Oscar Wilde en Jean-Jacques Rousseau verwys as ’n eerste stap in die eties-teologiese beoordeling van ’n “geloof van die ongelowiges.” Die eie-stembaarheid, asook die “fiktiewe” karakter van hierdie geloof word deur die twee tekste duidelik gemaak. Eerstens word aangetoon hoedat geloof nie aan metafisiese bronne verskuldig is nie, maar dat dit in die verwoording van die subjek ontspring. Tweedens, word die noodsaaklikheid van geloof in ’n “allerhoogste fiksie” vir die politiek aangetoon. Die hoofstuk sluit af deur die epistemologiese gevolge van só ’n fiksie te ondersoek.

Die derde hoofstuk ontleed die Franse mistikus Marguerite Porete se bydrae tot ’n verstaan van “self-ontledigende liefde” (*self-eviscerating love*). Die hoofstuk volg Critchley se

wending na 'n “gemeenskaplike politiek” wat hy op hiërdie verstaan van liefde baseer. Hierdie konsep word nie net as 'n model aangebied om erfsonde die hoof te bied nie, maar ook as 'n vorm van kritiek teen 'n “te volledige ontkenning van die self.” Laastens, stel die outeur 'n herlees van Porete voor wat motivering bied vir 'n tiepe politiese formasie wat op die *eindelose eis van goddelike liefde* gebaseer is.

In die vierde hoofstuk word 'n indringende lees van Martin Heidegger se 1920/21-lesings aangebied om vier teoretiese kontoere van 'n geloof van die ongelowiges te skets, naamlik, *proklamasie, meontologie, impotensie* en *die noodsaaklikheid van die wet*. Nadat die oneindige eis binne hierdie raamwerk geplaas is, word ons aandag gerig op die eiesoortige *inhoud* van die “oneindige eis” soos wat dit in Kierkegaard se *Werke van die Liefde* (1847) voorkom. Die hoofstuk sluit af met 'n meditatiewe beskouing van Critchley se gebruik van liefde in Kierkegaard as 'n “leerskool van die liefde” (*learning how to live*).

Die slothoofstuk bestaan uit twee onderdele. In die eerste deel word die verband tussen etiek en politiek duidelik gemaak voordat Critchley se politieke formulering van 'n sogenaamde “interstisiële afstand” (*interstitial distance*) bespreek word. Critchley se anargistiese politieke visie word dan met Slavoj Žižek en die begrip van “nie-geweldadige geweld” in gesprek gebring. In die tweede deel van hierdie slothoofstuk word twee teologiese raakpunte vir 'n “geloof van die gelowiges” uitgelig en in die metodologiese spanningsveld van Mark Lewis Taylor se begrip van “die teologiese” geplaas.

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Introduction

“After Buddha was dead, his shadow was still shown for centuries in a cave – a tremendous, gruesome shadow. God is dead; but given the way of men, there may still be caves for thousands of years in which his shadow will be shown.”¹

- Nietzsche

It was long assumed by philosophers, theologians, sociologists and scientists that the more modern we became, the less religious and more secular we would become. But the story of the ‘God is dead’ movement has been overturned by the postmodern ‘return to religion’ and within theology has sparked attempts to re-think Christian faith in a ‘post-secular’ world.² John Caputo describes this situation in his book *On Religion* (2001), that “a surprising thing happened on the way to the death of God: Enlightenment secularism *also* got crucified on the same Cross, and that spelled *the death of the death of God.*”³ The spark in the return to religion has also ignited a rising interest not only of theologians, but also of atheist philosophers, political and literary theorists. The present project is an engagement in the discourse taken up by the latter but with special interest in the British philosopher, Simon Critchley.⁴ As such, this is an attempt to approach religious faith from ‘the outside,’ as it were, and to continue to press the question of how faith is constructed and practiced within increasingly dislocated visions of society – specifically its religious and political dimensions.

¹ Friedrich Nietzsche, Walter Kaufmann (trans.) *The Gay Science: with a prelude in rhymes and an appendix of songs* (New York: Vintage Books, 1974), 167.

² Representing such attempts see for example, John D. Caputo & Gianna Vattimo, Jeffrey Robins (ed.) *After the death of God* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007) and Terry Eagleton, *Culture and the Death of God* (New Haven/London: Yale University Press, 2014).

³ John D. Caputo, *On Religion: Thinking In Action* (London/New York: Routledge, 2001), 59, emphasis added.

⁴ Simon Critchley is the current Chair and Professor of Philosophy at the ‘New School for Social Research’ in New York. He was born in Hertfordshire, England in 1960 and received his Ph.D. from the University of Essex in 1988. Additionally, Critchley has been involved in the ‘Paris Collège International de Philosophie,’ and was also the president of the ‘British Society for Phenomenology.’ His work crosses boundaries into literary and social theory, literary criticism, politics, ethics and psychoanalysis.

Politics, Ethics, and Simon Critchley

To draw out these religious and political dimensions I would like to begin by way of a short biographical note.

Growing up in the 1990s - the beginning of the next phase of South African history - the words 'new democracy,' 'rainbow nation,' and 'Nelson Mandela' were ubiquitous. It was during this time that I started to become aware of the historical effects of the radical notion of 'politics.' During my early teenage years the notion of politics underwent a dramatic turn and suddenly took the form of 'absolute monarchy.' Overnight, the way of rule dispensed by the wealthy tribal families of the Arabian Gulf during my time in Doha, Qatar, became the new norm. While strict adherence to Sharia Law meant the restriction and censorship of movement, food and film, the abundant wealth and the plastic candy-land fantasia for expatriates and Arabs alike, ensured that the latter was all but forgotten. In sharp contrast to lavish lifestyles was the plight of imported migrant labour; workers crammed into ghettos and kept out of the public eye. They were tinned into confined makeshift housing, sometimes without air-conditioning, often proving fatal during the summer months. This was politics combined with a pseudo-Islam intent on upholding the law but hungry for wealth and power. Finally, a short stint ending my teenage years in the 'buckle' of The Bible Belt, Dallas, Texas, brought together politics and conservative religion in another spectacular combination of colliding and colluding values. The struggle for control over the reigns of society, further problematized by polarizing identity politics, misconstrued Christianity as a political vehicle for personal gain. It was distasteful, and more often than not led to gestures of bigotry, misogyny, sexism, racism and general hatefulness.

Today I am back in South Africa, but these pernicious forms of violence continue to underwrite aspects of my experience of daily public life. The situation is exacerbated, among other things, by perturbing developments in parliament and a growing culture of illicit politicians and technocrats. The recent upsurges of racially charged unrest on the doorsteps of institutions of higher education around the country, reveal a sustained societal dissonance. And the emboldened and ever more intolerant generation of 'born frees,' tired

of broken promises are now challenging unchanged and unchecked systems of inequality, oppression, violence and systemic racism.

The comments in this biographical note allude to a situation of societal dislocation, characterized by a certain ‘lack.’ This lack is the poverty concerning ethics that has dried our institutions and our politics. What is clear given the circumstances, whether as active participants in the institution or as members of civil society, is that a sense of incongruity strikes us deeply.⁵ This sense, indeed the sensitivity toward the unjust, invokes the question of *justice*, extending beyond just the South African context. The sentiment of war, the reality of violence and political disenchantment have become commonplace and hence this question is ubiquitous. It is with precisely the political disenchantment of our societies that frustrations have reached their boiling point; forced refugee migration as an example on the one hand and the turn to hard-left politics on the other⁶ speak volumes in this respect. The diagnosis offered by Simon Critchley, is that of ‘political disappointment’ and it is here that his philosophy begins, seeing this beginning as the impetus to a set of normative principles, or a need for an *ethics*.

The latter is originally described in Critchley’s doctoral thesis, *The Ethics of Deconstruction* (1992).⁷ There, ethics for Critchley does not take the conventional form of a moral-philosophical branch of inquiry, but as suggested by the title, relates rather to ‘*Deconstruction*’ – that supposedly controversial field of French philosophy of the 1960s. Deconstruction for Critchley is not to be described as the *cause* of ethics, nor is ethics derived from deconstruction, but rather the very structure of deconstruction *is* ethical. Through Jacques Derrida’s ‘*reapproachment*’ of Emmanuel Levinas’s works, Critchley raises the question of the ethics of deconstruction. For Critchley, Derridean deconstruction takes its ethical thrust from Levinas’s ‘ethics as first philosophy,’ which is a *primordial* experience – it is the moment of ‘exteriority’ experienced by the subject. As Critchley

⁵Societal ambivalence of this nature is evinced in the recent demonstrations across South Africa against exorbitant student fees. The recent #FeesMustFall protests around institutions of higher education and the subsequent In/Out-Sourcing protests speak of this sense of dissatisfaction, in what is being called, ‘the year of the student.’

⁶One only has to see the recent and unexpected election of the new Labour leadership Jeremy Corbyn in the U.K., the rise of the Syriza party in Greece and Podemos in Spain, Bernie Sanders, the self-proclaimed socialist candidate who has attracted huge crowds for the Democratic Party in the U.S., and the Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF) in South Africa, the third largest party represented in Parliament.

⁷Originally published as a book in 1992 but now in its 2nd edition, see Simon Critchley, *The Ethics of Deconstruction* (2nd ed. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1999).

notes, “The ethical is therefore the location of a point of alterity, or what Levinas also calls ‘exteriority’ (*extériorité*), that cannot be reduced to the Same.”⁸ In more familiar Levinasian terms, this point of exteriority is named the ‘face,’ the condition of possibility for ethics – “For Levinas, then, the ethical relation – is one in which I am related to the face of the Other.”⁹ However, Derridian deconstruction understood in the Levinasian sense, which provides an account of ethical responsibility as the affirmation of the Other’s otherness – the essential thesis of *The Ethics of Deconstruction* – is also shown to come to a certain *impasse*. Namely, the inability of deconstruction to move from ethics to *morality*, or as Critchley preferably calls *politics*.¹⁰ To think through this concern, Critchley once again turns to Levinas, who traces the move from ‘responsibility to question,’ which raises the question itself of the *function* of philosophy; concluded as the continual discourse of *questioning* of the political order.¹¹ Thus, Jens Zimmermann remarks that in *The Ethics of Deconstruction* Critchley “has succeeded in framing postmodern political, philosophical, and literary discussion in the concrete realm of lived ethical experience. The first to do so in a major publication.”¹²

Critchley expands the thesis of *The Ethics of Deconstruction* in other later works, namely, *Very Little...Almost Nothing: Death, philosophy, literature*¹³ (1997) and *Ethics-Politics-Subjectivity* (1999).¹⁴ Finally, in *Infinitely Demanding: Ethics of Commitment, Politics of Resistance* (2007),¹⁵ Critchley lays down his most systematic account of ethics and politics, depicting on the one hand a theory of ethical subjectivity and on the other, an ‘anarchic politics.’ The former theory is understood as grounded in the ethical moment of deconstruction found in Critchley’s earlier work, but now is given a formal structure through his notion of the ‘infinite demand,’ which informs his ‘politics of resistance.’ The infinite demand takes pride of place in Critchley’s work as it surfaces again in *Faith of the*

⁸ Simon Critchley, *The Ethics of Deconstruction* (2nd ed. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1999), 5.

⁹ *Ibid*, 5.

¹⁰ *Ibid*, 188-247.

¹¹ *Ibid*, 237.

¹² Jens Zimmermann, Deborah C. Bowen (ed.), ‘Simon Critchley: The Ethics Of Deconstruction, Or Metaphysics In The Dark,’ in *The Strategic Smorgasbord of Postmodernity: Literature and the Christian Critic*. (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2007), 122.

¹³ Simon Critchley, *Very Little...Almost Nothing: Death, philosophy, literature* (2nd ed. London; New York: Routledge, 2004).

¹⁴ Simon Critchley, *Ethics-Politics-Subjectivity: Essays on Derrida, Levinas, & Contemporary French Thought* (2nd ed. London: Verso, 2009).

¹⁵ Simon Critchley, *Infinitely Demanding: Ethics of Commitment, Politics of Resistance* (London: Verso, 2013).

Faithless: Experiments in Political Theology (2012).¹⁶ Through a series of skillfully articulated ‘experiments’ that engage politics, theology, literature and philosophy; Critchley reveals the nature of this faith rooted in the infinite demand.

These two works, *Infinitely Demanding* and *Faith of the Faithless*, serve as the primary backdrop for the present project, wherein there are two overarching tasks; tasks achieved through a heuristic engagement with Critchley. The first is to engage with Critchley’s ‘ethics of commitment’ by trying to understand the force behind his theory of ethical subjectivity, namely, the ‘infinite demand.’ Further, that the path to understanding this notion will lead to a theological reading of the demand, thus opening the possibility of a ‘demand of the infinite’. This first task ostensibly connects to the second in that a theological reading of the infinite demand raises questions around the *transcendent*¹⁷ nature of this grounding force informing our ethical commitments. As such, in the second task, the movement to the *Faith of the Faithless* illustrates the infinite demand’s assimilation into a type of ‘faith.’ The meaning of the latter we investigate through the apparatus of Critchley’s ‘political theology,’ which illuminates the fact that this faith does not belong to traditional sources but is a multi-faceted and peculiar oxymoronic ‘secular faith’. The ambit of our second task is, then, to evaluate Simon Critchley’s political theological experiments by accounting for this faith and offering points of critique on the one hand, while tracing whether the contours of such faith, evaluated by an ethical-theological approach, might emerge as having any currency for the ‘faith of the faithful,’ on the other.¹⁸

¹⁶ Simon Critchley, *The Faith of the Faithless: Experiments In Political Theology* (London: Verso, 2014[2012]).

¹⁷ The notion of ‘transcendence’ will resurface at different moments in the present study, it is hoped that the sense of the ‘transcendent’ will become more apparent in the investigations which follow. Although the author of this study recognizes the complexity of this term, in this regard, the volume from the series ‘Studies in Philosophical Theology,’ Wessel Stoker & W.L. van der Merwe (eds.) *Culture and Transcendence: A Typology of Transcendence* (Leuven: Peeters, 2012) offers a four-fold typology that is instructive: ‘immanent transcendence,’ ‘radical transcendence,’ ‘radical immanence,’ and ‘transcendence as alterity.’ However, this study resists demarcating a ‘type’ of transcendence according to which Critchley might ascribe, indeed, as Stoker clarifies (pg.9, 10) these typologies are ‘open concepts,’ thus, if one were to simply place Critchley within the ‘transcendence as alterity’ category for example, following his Derridian and Levinasian influence, one would surely miss other nuances of the role that transcendence plays in Critchley’s experiments.

¹⁸ This phrase is borrowed from Katherine Moody, ‘The faith of the faith/less?: emerging experiments in a/theistic association’. *Political Theology*, 14 (2013), 516–526. As a frequent feature in this study, we problematize a ‘faith of the faithful’ as a referent to a group(s) of Christian communities. Indeed, it may also refer to any religiously ‘faithful’ community. However, considering that Critchley writes within the broadly Judeo-Christian tradition (*Faith of the Faithless*, pg. 19) the phrase functions rhetorically in a broadly Christian register.

The goal of the approach outlined above – that flows from ethics to the infinite demand, and to faith – is finally to cast light upon the way in which faith is conceived, not only for those who proclaim an atheistic ‘belief’ but also for those who proclaim a theistic one. If it is true that a robust civil society serves as the middle pillar of democracy between the state and the individual, in order to protect the rights of the individual by keeping the state in check, and if in a narrow definition, ‘faithful communities’ are also members of this civil society, then the way in which they mobilize their faith is of paramount importance for the democratic vision. A fuller conception of faith will hopefully bring to the fore an alternative ethics to all political bodies, including the faithful, a counter-ethics to the prevailing form pervading the current dispensation. While this project does not wish to provide or construct such a program of ‘counter-ethics,’ what it does intend is to bring to the fore a conception of faith from the ‘faithless’ - those who profess not to believe in traditional religion – and in doing so, incite deeper reflection for ‘faithful’ communities attempting to navigate in a pluralistic and politically disappointed world. Before outlining the precise character of the path we intend to take in reaching this goal and accomplishing these tasks, a formal account of what exactly is meant by ‘political theology’ should be given.

Toward Political Theology

Simon Critchley uses the apparatus of *political theology* as the field in which to conduct his experiments; investigating this term further, therefore, is necessary. The phrase ‘political theology’ (*theologia politikē*) is first invoked by Marcus Terentius Varro (116–27B.C.E.),¹⁹ who contrasted it with mythical and cosmological theologies embodied in the laws and cults of the city.²⁰ After a dormant period, although as an idea continuing within political thinking, Hent de Vries locates its reappearance as follows; “The term resurfaces in the title of a treatise by Daniel Georg Morhof, *Theologiae gentium politicae dissertatio prima de Divinitate Principium*, published in Rostock in 1662, in the title of Simon van Heenvliedt’s *Theologico-politica Dissertatio*, of the same year, and in Spinoza’s *Tractatus*

¹⁹ Hent de Vries, in Hent de Vries and Lawrence Sullivan (eds.) *Political Theologies* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2006), 25.

²⁰ John Milbank, ‘Political Theology’ in Jean-Yves Lacoste (ed.) *Encyclopedia of Christian Theology Volume 3*, (New York: Routledge, 2005), 1251.

Theologico-Politicus, published anonymously in 1670.”²¹ After the tradition of Spinoza, ‘political theology’ again moved through a dormant phase, although conceptually discernable in concepts associated with the Enlightenment (the political, law, sovereignty, etc.) and resurfaces again with Carl Schmitt. Seen here in the complex development of its etymological historicity, ‘political theology’ must be approached with a sensitivity with respect to the manner in which it is used, for, as we will see, the invocation of ‘political theology’ will bring to the fore a variety of interests and emphases that are not necessarily understood in the same way. To mitigate distortions and provide clarity, we offer a short investigation below, where we show its origination in modernity and postmodernity, the various streams that characterize it, and other contemporary perspectives in order to situate Simon Critchley’s own project of ‘political theology.’

Conversations that broach politics together with theology/religion in the public domain are usually viewed with great scepticism and discomfort. The possibility of a relationship between politics and religion/theology, let alone an authentic cooperation between the disciplines appears too inimical to comprehend. However, the alleged incompatibility between politics and religion/theology is nonetheless a tension with which we are to be seriously concerned. Only a cursory cross-section of the moments of religious extremism in headlines, politics charged by religious convictions, historical accounts of religiously incited violence and war, complemented by the sweeping and dominant narrative of Western civilization - as moving linearly to full emancipation from a destructive religious model - that was claimed to have been initiated in the triumph of the Enlightenment, is needed in order to convince one of this concern. While the notion of the separation of the state with church or religion is a democratic principle almost universally endorsed, the conflation of these realms reveals the first of many misconceptions about political theology. Far from an academic project to recreate a religious state, political theology invokes a measure of ambiguity within academia itself, multilayered interpretations and lines of thinking are causes for this confusion.

In the first instance, we are confronted with the ‘political.’ The notion of the political is commonly referenced with respect to political parties, their representatives and their interactions with government. However, the term here is used in a far broader sense;

²¹ Hent de Vries, in Hent de Vries and Lawrence Sullivan (eds.) *Political Theologies* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2006), 26.

Marcel Detienne observes the misconception of the notion of the ‘political domain,’ falling out of the sky, as it were, into ancient Athens in the form of democracy is a delusion. Rather, one should think in the more general sense of the ‘political’ as “People assembling” and “the practices of people deliberately assembling in order to debate affairs of common interest,”²² thus, the concept reveals a denotation that describes the sense of a community as constituted by a particular group of social bodies. Inherent within these organizations of social bodies are arrangements that oscillate around power, including economic, social and cultural-psychological. The ‘political’ in political theology, then, is not exclusively about activities of a government but also about groups of people, the arrangements they find themselves in and how these arrangements are constituted. Theology, on the other hand, as we know begins as talk about God (the origin of *theos* and *logos*) and concerns how as creatures along with the rest of creation we relate to God, and how God in turn relates to God’s creation.²³ In this minimal definition of theology we observe that much like the political, theology has to do with people too, we can then make the claim as Daniel Bell does, that “theology is always already political”²⁴ and vice versa. Given these simplistic definitions, it is evident that theology has been engaging politics long before the 20th century, albeit with various modes of intensity throughout its history. However, before we begin our investigation of political theology it is best to draw attention to the one whom is usually credited with being the field’s progenitor in the 20th century, namely, Carl Schmitt.

The life of Carl Schmitt is one of intrigue and not without controversy. Having lived through the fall of the German monarchy, the turbulence of the Weimar Republic, the Hitler regime, and the establishment of the Federal Republic, Schmitt was witness to some of the most definitive events not only in German but also European history. The controversial nature of his career is founded on his association with the Nazi Party of

²² Marcel Detienne, ‘The Gods of Politics in Early Greek Cities’, in Hent de Vries and Lawrence Sullivan (eds.) *Political Theologies* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2006), 92-93.

²³ As with the ‘political domain,’ the notion of the theological is itself a concept that underwent development. It is also then perhaps favorable to follow Detienne again on this point, by looking further back to the ancient Greek city. There, he shows how the public space, or the *agora*, became a sovereign entity to itself, through the encroachment of the gods as symbolic participants in the political domain. See Marcel Detienne, ‘The Gods of Politics in Early Greek Cities’, in Hent de Vries and Lawrence Sullivan (eds.) *Political Theologies* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2006), 91-101. The point here is that the political and theological are perceived and experienced long before their formal distinction and theorization as such.

²⁴ Daniel Bell, ‘State and Civil Society’, in *The Blackwell Companion to Political Theology*. (ed.) Scott, P., Cavanaugh (Malden: Wiley Blackwell, 2006), 423.

which he became a member in 1933 and for which he received the title as the “Crown Jurist”²⁵ of the Third Reich. His important works ‘*Political Theology: Four Chapters on the Concept of Sovereignty*’²⁶ first published in 1922, *The Concept of the Political*²⁷ published in 1927 and *The Leviathan in the State Theory of Thomas Hobbes*²⁸ published in 1938, serve as the core texts around which his political theory and political theology revolve. Two virtually canonical quotations from Schmitt’s *Political Theology*, “Sovereign is he who decides on the exception”²⁹ and “All significant concepts of the modern theory of the state are secularized theological concepts,”³⁰ form the core of his political theology. The interpretations and implications of these ideas have generated a wealth of material more recently from the 1980s until today (since the start of their translation into English). The purview of interest that his work has produced is vast; ranging from arguments for totalitarianism, to the critique of liberalism, or the parallels of sovereignty within the United States political imagination, to its arrogation for the conservative and neo-conservative project, and further the retrieval by the progressive political theorists within ‘agonistic political philosophy.’³¹

At the most elementary level, the vital elements of his claims for the field of political theology in the modern period, are the way in which they grind against the grain of the accepted assumptions of the Enlightenment tradition. Paul Kahn, in the introduction of his book *Four New Chapters on the Concept of Sovereignty* (2011),³² puts it plainly, “The claim of a theological origin for political concepts stands against the widely accepted belief that the turn away from religion by figures such as Locke, Hume, and Smith – not to speak of Machiavelli and Hobbes – laid the groundwork for the modern theory of the state. The social contract not the divine contract is at the centre of modern political theory.” What further distinguishes Schmitt in this regard, John Milbank observes, was that in

²⁵ Joseph Bendersky, *Carl Schmitt, theorist for the Reich* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983), ix.

²⁶ Carl Schmitt, *Political theology: four chapters on the concept of sovereignty* (Cambridge Mass: MIT Press, 1985).

²⁷ Carl Schmitt, *The concept of the political* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2007).

²⁸ Carl Schmitt, *The Leviathan in the State Theory of Thomas Hobbes: Meaning and Failure of a Political Symbol* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1996).

²⁹ Carl Schmitt, George Schwab (trans.) *Political theology: four chapters on the concept of sovereignty* (Cambridge Mass: MIT Press, 1985), 5.

³⁰ *Ibid*, 36.

³¹ Francis Fiorenza, ‘Prospects for Political Theology in the Face of Contemporary Challenges’ in Francis Fiorenza, Klaus Tanner and Michael Welker (eds.) *Political Theology: Contemporary Challenges and Future Directions* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2013), 40,41.

³² Paul Kahn, *Political Theology: Four New Chapters on the Concept of Sovereignty* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011), 1.

contrast to the less realistic political theories of those such as Kant and Rousseau, “which called upon notions of universal norms and general consent, correlated with vague deism,” Schmitt found in more scientific theories derived from the likes of Hobbes, “the priority of the *exception* in politics, the emergency situation that justifies extraordinary measures, and correlate[s] this idea with that of an unfathomable, voluntaristic deity who can suspend every natural law.”³³ His theory of the political was rippling and subsequently initiated debates, famously with Erik Peterson³⁴ and Yves Congar. Although operating in their own reactive contexts, as we will see below, Milbank also proposes that Peterson’s work contributed to the left-orientated political theologies of the German theologians, Jürgen Moltmann and Johann Baptist Metz.³⁵

While the field has become more extensive, the resurgence of Schmittian studies in the late twentieth century and now in the twenty-first century, is distinguishable by the emphases on the implications of such themes as ‘sovereignty,’ ‘violence’ and the ‘friend-enemy’ relation, constituting a brand of political theology that interacts intentionally with political philosophy and political theory, a resurgence largely connected with the events of post-9/11. The *prima* example, in the politically operative sense, of this discourse is with respect to the United States. Fiorenza claims that in the U.S. there is a “remarkable parallelism, if not correlation between ideas and policies advocated by Carl Schmitt in regard to sovereignty, emergency legislation...ideas and policies that [have] gained support within the Bush Administration”³⁶ - and have continued into Obama’s successive presidential terms it should be noted. The ‘exceptionalism’ of the United States is also one of the central concerns in Paul Kahn’s book.³⁷ This is not to say however that there exists no link between these political theologies and the political theology that arose out of the

³³ John Milbank, ‘Political Theology’ in Jean-Yves Lacoste (ed.) *Encyclopedia of Christian Theology Volume 3*, (New York: Routledge, 2005), 1251.

³⁴ Peterson rejected Schmitt’s thesis in the monograph ‘Der Monotheismus als politisches Problem’ in Barbara Nichtweiß (ed.) *Theologische Traktate* (Würzburg: Echter, 1994). There he dismisses a Christian political theology in the Schmittian sense - interpreted as an ideological correlation between political structure and religious belief - by positing a Trinitarian conception of God that resists the dangerous notion for him, of ‘monotheism’. See György Geréby, ‘Political Theology versus Theological Politics: Erik Peterson and Carl Schmitt’. *New German Critique* 35.3 105 (2008), 7-33, for an extended discussion of Peterson’s critique.

³⁵ John Milbank, ‘Political Theology’ in Jean-Yves Lacoste (ed.) *Encyclopedia of Christian Theology Volume 3*, (New York: Routledge, 2005), 1251-1252.

³⁶ Francis Fiorenza, ‘Prospects for Political Theology in the Face of Contemporary Challenges’ in Francis Fiorenza, Klaus Tanner and Michael Welker (eds.) *Political Theology: Contemporary Challenges and Future Directions* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2013), 45.

³⁷ See Kahn’s discussion on ‘American Exceptionalism and Political Theology’ in Paul Kahn, *Political Theology: Four New Chapters on the Concept of Sovereignty* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011), 8-17.

1960s. As we have alluded, a part of the political theology of the 60s was reactive, taking its cue from Peterson's Trinitarian approach. In doing so, these theologians characterized themselves in an alternative trajectory of political theology guided by the German and Latin American profile.³⁸ The translation of Schmitt's work in the 80s and 90s has seen a revitalization in Schmittian studies in the Anglophone world, and has established a rearticulation of political theology with respect to the conservative or neo-conservative retrieval and the radical democratic retrieval³⁹ – known also as 'agonistic political philosophy,' championed by those such as Chantal Mouffe.⁴⁰ Through Carl Schmitt, the proliferation of political-theological projects has created both a fascinating and vast field of enquiry. However, there remains much ambiguity as to what precisely constitutes political theology. In order to tease out some of this ambiguity our investigation refers to an instructive essay by Daniel Bell from the *Blackwell Companion to Political Theology* (2004).⁴¹ Bell's essay is useful for the way in which it carves the different trajectories that constitute the field of political theology. What will hopefully become clear is that there are varying points of reference that scholars follow and that there is a range of political theology's content.⁴² More importantly, this investigation is also important to situate Simon Critchley's political theology within a trajectory among this assemblage.

Political Theology: The Dominant and Emerging Traditions?

The responsive theologies of the sixties and their 'postliberal' reactions are situated after Carl Schmitt's political theology and the debates that followed. The implicit political

³⁸ This trajectory largely assumes the liberation theology movements; such as Latin American liberation theology, black theology, feminist theology, queer theology, and to an extent ecological theology.

³⁹ See Fiorenza's discussion here in his section on "The Contrasting Functions of Schmitt's Ideas" in Francis Fiorenza, 'Prospects for Political Theology in the Face of Contemporary Challenges' in Francis Fiorenza, Klaus Tanner and Michael Welker (eds.) *Political Theology: Contemporary Challenges and Future Directions* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2013), 39-42.

⁴⁰ See Chantal Mouffe, *The Return of the Political* (London: Verso, 1993) and *The Democratic Paradox* (London: Verso, 2000)

⁴¹ Peter Scott and William T. Cavanaugh (eds.), *The Blackwell Companion to Political Theology* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2004).

⁴² *The Blackwell Companion* offers a systematized approach to political theology that embodies the diversity we are trying to describe. Other anthologies, however, are also recognized in this regard; see Hent de Vries and Lawrence Sullivan (eds.) *Political Theologies* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2006), Clayton Crockett, *Radical Political Theology* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011), Francis Fiorenza, Klaus Tanner and Michael Welker (eds.) *Political Theology: Contemporary Challenges and Future Directions* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2013), Paul Kahn, *Political Theology: Four New Chapters on the Concept of Sovereignty* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011).

theologies of Karl Barth and Dietrich Bonhoeffer as Haddon Willmer⁴³ and Stanley Hauerwas⁴⁴ have shown respectively, initiate the first major stream of formal German political theology as represented by the reactive theologies of Jürgen Moltmann and Johann Baptist Metz. Moltmann in his *Theologie der Hoffnung* (1965)⁴⁵ was responding to the inadequacy of the dominant existentialist brand of theology exemplified by Bultmann, while Metz, a disciple of Karl Rahner, took up the task of rejecting Catholic transcendental theology favouring his own new ‘*practical fundamental theology*’.^{46,47} The Moltmannian-Metzian approach (including the work of Dorothee Sölle) typifies what Bell distinguishes as the ‘dominant tradition’ of political theology proper.⁴⁸ Bell observes the sine qua non of ‘*mythos*’; the essential condition that defines how one interprets political theology with reference to the modern state and civil society in the 20th and 21st centuries.

Bell asserts that on the one hand politics embodies a *mythos* - a vision of how society should be structured. For Bell ‘theology is always already political,’ therefore, it too has its own Christian *mythos* of how society is to be structured and organized. To approach the state and civil society with political theology in its contemporary manifestation - that remains faithful to its *mythos* - is, thus, to commit theological myopia. For to do so is to assume or take for granted a particular theory of the state and civil society that is deemed normative, thus synchronously marring and betraying a “crucial theological judgement regarding the character of Christianity’s presence in the world.”⁴⁹ It is precisely this theological judgement(s) that distinguishes the various approaches to contemporary political theology. The standard précis of a genealogy of the modern state and civil society affirms that out of the turmoil of the ‘wars of religion’ emerged the modern nation-state; the emancipator of the people and the emissary of peace, which subsequently relegated religion to its private station and left the public domain to rule itself freely. This

⁴³ See Haddon Willmer, ‘Karl Barth’ in Peter Scott and William T. Cavanaugh (eds.), *The Blackwell Companion to Political Theology* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2004), 123-135.

⁴⁴ See Stanley Hauerwas, ‘Dietrich Bonhoeffer’ in Peter Scott and William T. Cavanaugh (eds.), *The Blackwell Companion to Political Theology* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2004), 136-149.

⁴⁵ See Jürgen Moltmann, James Leitch (trans.) *Theology of Hope: On the Ground and the Implications of a Christian Eschatology* (London: SCM Press, 1965).

⁴⁶ See Johann Baptiste Metz, *Faith In History And Society: Toward A Practical Fundamental Theology* (London: Burns & Oats, 1980).

⁴⁷ See Francis Fiorenza’s discussion here in, ‘Prospects for Political Theology in the Face of Contemporary Challenges’ in Francis Fiorenza, Klaus Tanner and Michael Welker (eds.) *Political Theology: Contemporary Challenges and Future Directions* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2013).

⁴⁸ See Daniel Bell Jr., ‘State and Civil Society’ in Peter Scott and William T. Cavanaugh (eds.), *The Blackwell Companion to Political Theology* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2004), 429.

⁴⁹ *Ibid*, 424.

interpretation of history Bell discloses as the ‘Weberian account,’ whereby Max Weber construes “religion as private, apolitical sphere that serves as a repository of values or ideals that then must be instantiated in the political realm by means of statecraft.”⁵⁰ William Cavanaugh⁵¹ and others have rightly challenged this paradigm on historical and theological grounds, arguing that the modern state was not *de facto* born out of wars that were a result of ecclesial in-fighting but rather that these clashes were *symptomatic* of the materialization of the state that sought to overcome a public religion in general. In other words, the progeneration of the modern state is not precipitated by denominational conflict but by ecclesial annulment, which only *then* leads to the Weberian account, and the perpetuation of the political *mythos* described above.

Keeping this antagonism in mind, the account of civil society - which now includes religion (the Church) - is predominantly seen as a space in between the state and the individual, acting as a buffer if one prefers, against the state wielding too much power. In this sense, civil society is the source of the state’s legitimization, and thus institutions like the Church serve as a moral reservoir offering guidance as the state attempts to care for its citizens. The counter-reading of civil society, however, follows a less benevolent approach; wherein civil society operates under the *illusion* of its role as the state regulator. Instead, it functions to serve the state apparatus and is itself contributing to the modern political *mythos*. The Church, as with the rest of civil society is prescribed a set of categories of meaning that hold it captive to the political vision.

Bell’s schema may appear somewhat facile, but it is useful for its attempt at distinguishing the blurred lines of contemporary political theology. For Bell, in the outcome of contemporary political theology, there are two traditions, the ‘dominant’ and the ‘emerging.’ The former informs three streams; political theology proper, liberation theology and public theology. What consolidates these streams is that they embrace “the Weberian *mythos* of how human community is ordered. Consequently, the fundamental task of political theology becomes propagation of the values and ideals deemed necessary to sustain and perfect the freedom that appeared with the advent of modernity.”⁵² While we should distance ourselves from the strong and sweeping claims Bell makes of the entire so-

⁵⁰ *Ibid*, 426.

⁵¹ William Cavanaugh, ‘A Fire Strong Enough to Consume the House:’ The Wars of Religion and the Rise of the State’. *Modern Theology* 11 (1995), 397.

⁵² *Ibid*, 429.

called ‘dominant tradition,’ the purpose behind this construction is clear. Metz and Moltmann for example, are surely doing something quite radical in the midst of a dormant ecclesiology of the early 60s, but according to Bell they remain within the categories of the modern *mythos*. Consider this excerpt from Moltmann’s *God For A Secular Society: The Public Relevance of Theology* (1999), in which he is describing the project of political theology with the likes of Metz, Sölle, Gollwitzer and Lochman; “Political theology became the first post-Marxist theology – a theology, that is, which had addressed and absorbed the criticism of religion and idolatry put forward by Feuerbach and Marx, and which, challenged by Marxist social criticism, gave contemporary, actualizing force to Jesus’s passion for the poor.”⁵³ This is not Marxism serving political theology for Bell, but political theology serving Marxism – the classic critique of liberation theology. The same basic premise underlying this critique however, applies also to the other two streams, Latin American liberation theology and public theology (predominantly in the United States), viz. that their political theology in its approach to the state (including its recent economic machinations) ultimately contributes to the political *mythos* by being ensconced in a set of categories that are produced as a result of a false narrative of religious relegation dating back from the post-Reformation ‘wars of religion.’

On this account, Bell firmly endorses the so-called ‘emergent tradition.’ Characterized by postliberal theologians such as Stanley Hauerwas, John Milbank, Catherine Pickstock and Oliver O’Donovan, this stream of political theology distinguishes itself in its rejection of the modern vision of politics as statecraft. According to this group, thinkers like Moltmann and Gutiérrez deny political reductionism, not in the sense that their political theology reduces faith to the temporal, dismissing the transcendent aspect of Christianity, but rather that their denial rests in the *manner* in which they attempt to defend this charge of denial. Moltmann and Metz, therefore, will abhor “political religion” and Gutiérrez will renounce “politico-religious messianism,” revealing their “refusal to grant the Christian *mythos* a political presence more substantive than the ‘general’ or ‘indirect’ role accorded to the Church as a guardian of values.”⁵⁴ The political theology of the dominant tradition, therefore, becomes politically captive to the modern tradition itself. It is important to avoid the misunderstanding that the emergent tradition is railing against the modern moment of

⁵³ Jürgen Moltmann, *God for a Secular Society: The Public Relevance of Theology* (Augsburg: Fortress Press, 1999), 50.

⁵⁴ See Daniel Bell Jr., ‘State and Civil Society’ in Peter Scott and William T. Cavanaugh (eds.), *The Blackwell Companion to Political Theology* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2004), 434.

political religion. On the contrary, the emergent tradition might say, for example, that the dominant tradition, which nurtures a culture of human rights and is informed by theological motifs, does not create any problem. Rather, what is problematic is the reaffirmation within this move of a version of politics derived from the correlates ‘modern state’ and ‘civil society.’ For ‘The Emergents,’ the futility of the dominant tradition in trying to distance itself from the state in this way only continues to perpetuate politics as statecraft, thus denying the Church a “true politics” that the emergent tradition seeks to rediscover, through escaping political captivity.⁵⁵

The dual task of ‘escaping political captivity’ and redefining the essence of ‘true politics’ for Christian theology appears as the definitive moment in contemporary political theology. Achieving the latter is made possible by looking toward a distinctly Christian *mythos* that does not find its correlates in the state and civil society, but rather in the liturgical and Eucharistic nature of the Church, which participates and witnesses to Christ’s redemption of politics - the renewal of the friendship/communion of humanity in God. Thus, many of the thinkers of this tradition have revived interest in Augustinian, Platonic and Neo-Platonic metaphysics, Trinitarian ontology and liturgical theology as they attempt to redefine a true Christian politics that inevitably flows from participation in Christ and simultaneously resists the temptation to succumb to the modern *mythos*.⁵⁶

Simon Critchley

To conclude this investigation of political theology, we make a few introductory comments of its nature in the thought of Simon Critchley. In accordance with the distinctions made above, Critchley can be said to fall into a unique group of atheist philosophers who have become interested in the philosophical and political import of the Christian tradition within the last three decades. Unlike the so-called ‘New Atheists’ and their ‘evangelical’ attack on religion, including Richard Dawkins and Christopher Hitchens (whom Critchley

⁵⁵ *Ibid*, 435.

⁵⁶ The *Radical Orthodoxy* movement inspired by John Milbank and his massive work *Theology and Social Theory* (1990), followed by contemporary collaborators Graham Ward, Catherine Pickstock exemplify this attempt. Also *The Ekklesia Project* endorsed by Stanley Hauerwas and William Cavanaugh could be characterized as the practical outworking of the larger project of redefining a true political theology.

following Eagleton calls ‘Ditchkins’)⁵⁷ among others, this group operates with a responsibility toward philosophical rigor. This interest is now well known as ‘the return to Paul,’ and is typified by figures like Alain Badiou, Slavoj Žižek and Giorgio Agamben.⁵⁸ Andrew Davison, who has adroitly tracked the vast relationship of philosophy to theology, says of this contemporary group of thinkers, “They were interested in Paul’s eschatology and the possibility of total change or transformation: what they called ‘the event’ and allied with revolution...For their part theologians show a significant interest in politics, and therefore in political philosophy.”⁵⁹ While most of Simon Critchley’s earlier work concentrates on ethics, politics and subjectivity thought through the French post-structuralist paradigm, and the poetry of 20th century writers like Samuel Beckett and Wallace Stevens, he could be moved into the broader penumbra of this recent atheist resurgence, most notably with the publication of *Faith of the Faithless* – a distinct book in his corpus as we shall see. Risking to get too far ahead of ourselves, we can say here of the latter, though stylistically very different, it accompanies others such as Alain de Botton⁶⁰ in a recovery of religion with explicit secular-political purposes, as he himself states; “Politics is indeed conceivable without religion: the question is whether it is practicable without some sort of religious dimension.”⁶¹ Critchley therefore, does not approach political theology from theology as it were, as some others we have seen above, indeed, he ‘experiments’ with it from a political-philosophical perspective.

⁵⁷ This ‘solitary signifier,’ “Ditchkins,” Eagleton coined in the April 2008 ‘Terry Lectures’ at Yale University, later published as *Reason, Faith, and Revolution: Reflections on the God debate* (New Haven/London: Yale University Press, 2009), 2.

⁵⁸ See Giorgio Agamben, *The Time that Remains: A Commentary on the Letter to the Romans* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005), Alain Badiou, *Saint Paul: The Foundation of Universalism* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997), Slavoj Žižek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology* (London: Verso, 1989).

⁵⁹ Andrew Davison, *The Love of Wisdom: An Introduction to Philosophy for Theologians* (London: SCM Press, 2013), 281.

⁶⁰ Alain de Botton, *Religion for Atheists: A non-believer’s guide to the uses of religion*. (London: Penguin, 2012)

⁶¹ Simon Critchley, *The Faith of the Faithless: Experiments In Political Theology* (London : Verso, 2014), 9-10.

Research Methodology

The methodological approach to this research project will involve a close literary study of Simon Critchley's two books, *Infinitely Demanding: Ethics of Commitment, Politics of Resistance* (2007) and *Faith of the Faithless: Experiments in Political Theology* (2012). The study will draw on a variety of interlocutors throughout. However, it will maintain a sustained and intensive close reading of Simon Critchley that is in a certain sense, limited to the aforementioned works. This stems from the fact that these works are comprehensive amalgamations of many of his ideas, on the one hand, while offering distinctly new ideas that break from earlier work, on the other. This approach is not seen as a weakness; on the contrary, such an approach offers nuanced insights into complex arguments that involve fluid movements with many thinkers that are easily glossed over in less-detailed reading.

At key moments within the evaluations that follow, there remains no hesitation to make deliberate connections and responsible withdrawals from earlier and later work from Critchley's corpus. It is worth emphasizing, however, that Critchley's work covers a wide and diverse set of topics and even genres. His work in philosophy is intricately connected with his interest in poetic literature, and his work in politics emanates from Deconstruction and his influence from the Essex School. His book on *Faith of the Faithless* constitutes his first book that engages directly with religion as far as this author is aware. Critchley's earlier writing, apart from *Ethics of Deconstruction*, has also been criticized for a somewhat disorganized style. *Infinitely Demanding* then, was an attempt he confesses, to synthesize some of his main ideas,⁶² and is, therefore, the main reason we draw much content from this publication. Finally, the methodological approach taken here also involves a theological-ethical evaluation of Simon Critchley's work that seeks to be descriptive rather than prescriptive in nature.

⁶² For a revealing interview published as a book by Polity Press, which covers Critchley's childhood, early life, academic and philosophical influences, and other development, see Simon Critchley and Carl Cederström, *How to Stop Living and Start Worrying: Conversations with Carl Cederström* (Cambridge: Bridge Street, 2010).

Statement of Thesis and Argument

The purpose behind any experiment is to *test* a hypothesis in order to affirm or reject its validity. Through a series of experiments the hypothesis is tested in different ways. This is the approach taken by Simon Critchley; he conducts his experiments with the apparatus of political theology, to test the hypothesis of a so-called ‘faith of the faithless.’

The contention of this research project is that through Simon Critchley’s political-theological experiments that seek to test his faith of the faithless, new vistas of faith would come into view. The claim for Critchley is that such vistas will most readily serve an atheistic audience in the broad wake of political and religious disappointment. While it may be the case that the return to religion by the ‘secular’⁶³ has led to a philosophical discourse that seeks to describe the existential ambiguity felt by the ‘secularist,’ this still leaves open the question of what a return to religion does for those who are religious, those who *have* faith. It is, therefore, that perhaps in the secular understanding of a faithless faith, an unexpected discovery might be made, proving to be fruitful for the faith for the faithful. At this point, the ‘faithful’ reader may object that an engagement with an atheist philosopher concerning faith is at best counterintuitive and at worst simply irresponsible. What could someone who professes not to have faith, say about faith? I want to challenge this notion by claiming that it rests on an incorrect assumption about theological discourse. The assumption revealed in this thinking is that theological discourse is a closed circle that pertains only to people of faith. Therefore, those who share the experience of faith are the only ones who can ‘do theology.’ However, while this is certainly a condition of theological discourse, it is not the only condition. Indeed, theological discourse is not limited to those who express faith, but rather relies on the *structure of faith* itself for the discourse to be theological, despite the absence of faith. Seen in this way, Simon Critchley follows Nietzsche in affirming that ‘God is dead,’ but ‘there may still be caves for thousands of years in which his shadow will be shown.’ Critchley, unlike other atheist philosophers,⁶⁴ affirms religion (discomfortingly it must be said) as a necessary condition

⁶³ See Charles Taylor’s *A Secular Age* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007), which attempts to unpack what is meant by this term, more specifically in Part IV ‘Narratives of Secularization’ in *A Secular Age*.

⁶⁴ Alain Badiou’s disavowal of religion comes to mind in this instance. The discussion of Badiou’s theology is taken up by Hollis Phelps, *Alain Badiou: Between Theology and Anti-Theology* (Durham: Acumen

for ethical action.⁶⁵ He thus participates in the structure of faith for his experiments in *Faith of the Faithless*, while at the same time denying any belief in God. It is the nature and content of this structure and the insights that can be drawn from it for faithful communities, if any, which concerns the present study.

These faithful communities form a part of the body politic, and as such are ‘in the world.’ Such religious communities, by our understanding of politics, are crucial participants; whether with self-reference to their politics of commitment, to the witness of the Church in Jesus Christ, or by their reference to other political bodies by virtue of their organization as persons within society. The crisis of political disappointment we have described and the subsequent need for an ethics directs us to the core of Critchley’s faith of the faithless; opening up for us the avenue to trace his experiments that seek to test a faithless faith serving the atheist. Concurrently, given the ‘transcendent’ character that the faith of the faithless may also imply, a theological reading of this atheistic faith is also possible, albeit with limitations. Such a retrieval it is hoped, will lead to a more nuanced understanding of a faith for the faithful, subsequently shaping their ethical commitment and clarifying their role in a politically and religiously disappointed world.

*In short: This study investigates the question of a ‘faithless faith’ and explores its presentation through the works of Simon Critchley, namely, *Ininitely Demanding* and *The Faith of the Faithless*. Through a heuristic engagement with these two works, it foregrounds Critchley’s understanding of ethical experience in the notion of the ‘infinite demand’ and traces the latter’s influence on Critchley’s experiments in political theology. It attempts to evaluate these experiments through an ethical-theological approach, highlighting particular foci of faith that contribute to a ‘faith of the faithful,’ ultimately problematizing the notion of the ‘demand of the infinite.’*

A theological-ethical evaluation of Simon Critchley’s experiments in political theology, which traces the movement from an *Infinite Demand* to a *Demand of the Infinite*, thus, commences with the following structure:

Publishing, 2013), 121-167, where he shows the shadows of theology that Badiou cannot escape, further complicating his philosophy by locating it between theology and anti-theology.

⁶⁵ See Simon Critchley, ‘On the Ethics of Alain Badiou’ in Gabriel Riera (ed.) *Alain Badiou: Philosophy and its Conditions* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2005), 224.

Chapter One: *The Infinite Demand* begins by laying the theoretical foundation of Critchley's theory of ethical subjectivity and the infinite ethical demand. This theory, which emerges out of his relationship with the Deconstructionists, Levinas and Derrida, serves as the foundation for the constitutive force of his concept of a 'faith of the faithless' and is also the point of reference for the subsequent evaluations. This chapter unpacks his argument with respect to Alain Badiou, Knud Ejler Løgstrup, and Emmanuel Levinas. And it probes aspects of Critchley's argument with the purpose of proposing a *theological phenomenological* structure of the infinite demand.

Chapter Two: *Faith and Fiction*, is the first stage in which an evaluation of Critchley's 'faith of the faithless' takes shape. The chapter begins by engaging with Critchley's 'parable of faith' through his reading of Oscar Wilde. It is shown that faith for Critchley is not indebted to metaphysical sources, but emerges out of an articulation of the subject. The chapter then makes the connection with faith and fiction in Critchley's close reading of Rousseau's *Social Contract*. Here, a belief in a fiction is shown to be necessary for politics. With limitations to the fictions involved in politics, Critchley proposes the infinite demand of the 'supreme fiction.' The chapter concludes with a critique of this 'supreme fiction,' subsequently identifying the poetic necessity of transcendence.

Chapter Three: *Faith and Love*, foregrounds Critchley's most creative and newly developed idea in his work, namely a faith of the faithless that is founded in an infinite demand of love, or a '*politics of love*.' This chapter traces Critchley's negative anthropology through the accounts of Carl Schmitt and John Gray. Subsequently, he offers a proposition of a 'self-eviscerating love,' in the medieval mystical writings of Marguerite Porete. Critchley interprets this text as an example of the expiation of 'original sin,' or as a 'denial of the self that allows for something new to come into being,' thus indicating an initial gesture toward an anarchic communal politics that overcomes original sin and is founded in love. The chapter concludes with a critique of this politics, arguing that a 'too-complete negation of the self' renders an account of agency and motivation problematic. It suggests through a re-reading of Porete an account of divine agency that motivates political formation.

Chapter Four: *Faith and Heidegger*, takes as its point of departure the return to religion in contemporary philosophy as concomitant with the 'return to Paul.' The chapter

commences with two extended investigations of Critchley's reading of Heidegger and Paul and attempts to re-sketch four theoretical contours that structure a faith for the faithless, namely, *proclamation*, *meontology*, *impotence* and the *necessity of law*. These contours illustrate the role of the infinite demand in a faith of the faithless. The chapter then turns to the distinct *content* of the infinite demand, found in Kierkegaard's 1847 *Works of Love*, before concluding with a meditation that sees Critchley's appropriation of love as a '*learning how to love*.'

Conclusion: *Politics and the Demand of the Infinite?* The title of the concluding chapter marks its two divisions. With regard to the former, it is shown that a 'faith for the faithless' is first and foremost a *political* faith. This is dissected through an articulation of Critchley's move from ethics to politics in his early writing, and which culminates in his anarchic theory of politics in *Infinitely Demanding*, defined by what he calls 'interstitial distance.' The latter is then brought into conversation with the popularized polemical debate between Critchley and Slavoj Žižek on the notion of violence, which buttresses his anarchic vision. Finally, the chapter concludes with two theological points of contact for a 'faith of the faithful.' These are then implicitly situated within a methodological tension that emerges from the presentation of a new paradigm for thinking of 'the theological' offered by Mark Lewis Taylor.

Chapter 1: *The Infinite Demand?*

Infinitely Demanding: Ethics of Commitment, Politics of Resistance

The infinite ethical demand for Simon Critchley not only plays a decisive role in his understanding of what it means to be an ethical subject, and therefore how to *act* ethically and to *form* politically, but it also anticipates his notion of the faith of the faithless with which we are chiefly interested. The goal of this chapter then is twofold. First, we walk the contours of Critchley's argument for ethical subjectivity, and specifically consider the role of the infinite demand. Secondly, we pause at the latter and consider more fundamentally its phenomenological structure, which we argue is both theological and philosophical. We do so with caution, however, careful not to give the impression of laying theological claim over the notion of Critchley's infinite demand. Our goal rather is to elicit the theological possibility of such a demand, which functions to underlie Critchley's experiments with an aporetic sensibility toward the transcendent undergirding a faith of the faithless. Notwithstanding these goals, there are other reasons that also serve to answer the first question arising at the beginning of this chapter; why should we start at *Infinitely Demanding: Ethics of Commitment, Politics of Resistance*? The book was published first by Verso in 2007, almost two decades after Critchley first wrote on ethics and its political implications in his Ph.D. dissertation on the 'Ethics of Deconstruction' (1988) in Emmanuel Levinas and Jacques Derrida.⁶⁶ Considering that the approach to this present project is concerned, on the one hand, with the intersection of politics and ethics, the choice to begin with *Infinitely Demanding* appears rather germane.⁶⁷ We are of the opinion

⁶⁶ Blackwell later published his PhD in book form in 1992 with two more subsequent editions, by Edinburgh University Press, 1999 and 2014, respectively.

⁶⁷ This choice is further appropriate considering that it draws together Critchley's ideas that have circulated in his prior works. In this regard, see Simon Critchley, *Ethics-Politics-Subjectivity: Essays on Derrida*,

that despite its construction on a thorough Levinasian and Derridian foundation, inter alia, it remains accessible in so far as it uncovers that foundation without requiring the reader to conduct a full prior study of either Levinas or Derrida. Adding to this, the clarity and precision of this later systematic style of Critchley's writing allow for a manageable, yet erudite reading that represents an attempt to give a full account of his views on ethics and politics.

This chapter will have a tripartite structure, beginning first with a reconstruction of Critchley's opening argument of ethical experience, which will set the stage for the subsequent discussion, prefaced by a brief, yet important note on Critchley's understanding of philosophy. The second chapter of *Infinitely Demanding: Dividualism - how to build an ethical subject* is the central component of the book's argument, and wherein Critchley 'builds' his ethical subject by highlighting important notions borrowed from the insights of Alain Badiou, Knud Ejler Løgstrup and Emmanuel Levinas. After traversing these crucial aspects of Critchley's ethical subject, we pause to problematize the notion of *asymmetry* and *one-sidedness* that Critchley inherits from Løgstrup's interpretation of the ethical demand. In the ensuing discussion, we draw out what we see as the possibility of a *theological phenomenological* structure of the infinite demand. With these insights, we conclude the chapter with some *initial* reflections regarding the theological implications of these findings, notably, we affirm the 'fluidity' that should be recognized between philosophical and theological discourse.⁶⁸

Critchley on Philosophy

In the systematic fashion that is characteristic of Critchley's later work, he articulates from the outset, as he does in some of his other projects, his broad approach to philosophy,⁶⁹

Levinas & Contemporary French Thought (London: Verso, 2009). And Simon Critchley, *The Ethics of Deconstruction: Derrida and Levinas* (3rd ed. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2014).

⁶⁸ As may have been noticed, this chapter does not include Critchley's arguments for 'Sublimation' (see Chapter 3 'The Problem of Sublimation' of *Infinitely Demanding*) or his arguments for politics (see Chapter 4 'Anarchic metapolitics' of *Infinitely Demanding*). Rather, these concerns will be most explicitly dealt with in later chapters of this project. The move from ethics to politics, specifically, is an indelible part of Critchley's project and is presented by way of an appendage. Thus, when discussing the theoretical foundation of Critchley's ethical subject here, there is no need to introduce the political moment in ethics. The explicit move from ethics to politics is addressed in this project's concluding chapter.

⁶⁹ This systematic process can be observed in the following texts; Simon Critchley, *Infinitely Demanding: Ethics of Commitment, Politics of Resistance* (London: Verso, 2013), Simon Critchley, *Ethics-Politics-*

which establishes the motivational force energizing his philosophical pursuits. Noting this in brief will be judicious at this early stage.

Thinking through contemporary philosophy begins and has to take into account for Critchley, the so-called ‘Kantian Copernican Turn’ – wherein the nature of reality no longer can be left to the discovery of the unknowable, but must be located within the knowable structures of nature and mind. It is here that Critchley sees humanity beginning to conscientize itself with the reality of its *finitude* and that perhaps “The great metaphysical dream of the soul moving frictionless towards knowledge of itself, things-in-themselves and God is just that, a dream.”⁷⁰ Critchley describes the morbid picture of humanity as one characterized by a loss of meaning. This loss of meaning was in the first sense religious, aptly summed in Nietzsche’s famous phrase ‘God is dead.’ The ‘religious disappointment’ that ensues, as Critchley calls it, inevitably provokes the question of the meaning life. In tandem with this disappointment of religion, humanity also has experienced a ‘political disappointment.’ Our liberal democratic institutions have failed us. Violence persists through the manipulation of people while an artificialized fear that perpetually maintains a state of war has become the norm. Taking his cue from Nietzsche, Critchley diagnoses humanity’s response to these disappointments as being classified into two forms; either active or passive *nihilism*. Nihilism for Critchley is “the declaration of meaninglessness, a sense of indifference, directionlessness or, at its worst, despair that can flood into all areas of life.”⁷¹ Understood passively, the nihilist “simply focuses on himself and his particular pleasures and projects for perfecting himself, whether through discovering the inner child, manipulating pyramids, writing pessimistic-sounding literary essays, taking up yoga, bird-watching or botany...” He “tries to achieve mystical stillness, calm contemplation: ‘European Buddhism.’”⁷² By contrast, the active nihilist, also seeing no meaning in the world attempts to create meaning by destroying this world to usher in something new. At this point, Critchley references various utopian, radical political and

Subjectivity: Essays on Derrida, Levinas & Contemporary French Thought (London: Verso, 2009), and Simon Critchley, *Very Little ... Almost Nothing: Death, Philosophy and Literature* (2nd ed. London: Routledge, 2004).

⁷⁰ Simon Critchley, *Infinitely Demanding: Ethics of Commitment, Politics of Resistance*, (London: Verso, 2013), 1.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 2.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 3, 4.

terrorist groups as examples of this kind of ‘active nihilism.’⁷³ Returning to Nietzsche, it is in the dissatisfaction of the nihilistic response and the subsequent attempt at providing another, that contemporary philosophy according to Critchley, finds its true élan. Seen in this light, philosophy for Critchley has a tremendously important role to play in the narrative of humanity. His conception of the philosopher as one that is to engage in meaningful ways with ‘the public’ and ‘the political,’ over and against the views of philosophers that has perpetuated in the last two hundred years - as ivory tower objects that ossify in armchairs, lost in their own thoughts - is not something for him that is reactionary, although it certainly is also that. But rather for Critchley, the public, political and energetic engagement of philosophers is something that is as old as Seneca, a love of wisdom, and as he describes elsewhere, a desire to learn how to die and how to live.⁷⁴ The retrieval of this particularly motivating essence of philosophy is a noble effort evident in Critchley, which he hopes to embody in the approach to his work.

The Argument

The corollary of political disappointment is a ‘motivational deficit’ that resides at the epicentre of our Western liberal democratic institutions. It is this deficit that unites both active and passive nihilists in their critique of secular democracy – though we have seen this takes on very different guises. Crucially, the motivational deficit is also the partner of a moral deficiency; morality has been subverted in its secular garb, and therefore according to Critchley what is needed “is a motivating, empowering conception of ethics that can face and face down the drift of the present - an ethics that can respond to and resist the political situation.”⁷⁵ In order to construct any motivating ethics, then, Critchley’s first move necessarily directs him to his initial ‘question of morality’ and what he believes to be the fundamental question of ethics, namely, ‘how does a self bind itself to whatever it determines as its good?’ Answering this question constitutes the argument of *Infinitely Demanding*. However, Critchley’s helpful habit of presenting the argument in sum at the

⁷³ Simon Critchley’s fuller account of his understanding of nihilism can be found in the chapter *Travels in Nihilon* found in *Very Little ... Almost Nothing: Death, Philosophy and Literature* (2nd ed. London: Routledge, 2004), 1-29.

⁷⁴ See Simon Critchley, *The Book of Dead Philosophers*, (New York: Vintage, 2009), xvii. Critchley also expresses some of these thoughts in an online video interview with ‘Big Think’, *Simon Critchley on Living Like a Philosopher*, 2012.

⁷⁵ Simon Critchley, *Infinitely Demanding: Ethics of Commitment, Politics of Resistance*, (London: Verso, 2013), 8.

opening of his books affords us the liberty to simply refer the reader to that presentation in his introduction,⁷⁶ permitting only a short cursory representation of its opening stages.

Demanding Approval

How a self binds itself to a conception of the good is to ask the question of what it means to be an ‘ethical subject.’ Constructing this ethical subject is what Critchley wishes to accomplish, for this allows us to understand what motivates and empowers (i.e. the motivational force) subjects to act politically and morally. The question of *ethical subjectivity* is a question of normative justification that has at its core the notion of an ‘ethical experience.’ Ethical experience for Critchley ‘elicits the core structure of moral selfhood, what we might think of as the existential matrix of ethics,’⁷⁷ thus, it presupposes a model of ethical subjectivity. Critchley seeks to provide a theory of the former in his first chapter through the concepts of *demand* and *approval*, where he contends that ethical experience entails the ‘approval of a demand that demands approval.’ The content of this demand for Critchley can be anything from Plato’s Good beyond Being to Christians’ demand of the resurrected Christ and so on. The ‘virtuous circularity,’ as he calls it, of ethical experience begs the question as to what comes first, the demand or the approval of the demand? Critchley notes that it would seem that the demand comes first because how could a subject approve of anything if there is no demand placed upon it. However, using the example of Christian subjectivity, as the approval of the demand of the resurrected Christ, Critchley explains that this experience may not be the same for a non-believer (the non-believer, may not *feel* the demand as a demand) and thus, the demand is not necessarily given in an objective state. In other words, the demand is *felt* as a demand only when a subject approves it. By this logic, the demand and the approval begin at the same time; at the moment that the demand is felt as a demand and is approved by a subject. Critchley addresses an objection at this point by way of an example concerning the ‘*Immoralist*.’ The Immoralist may affirm the morality tied together with the statement of ‘ending poverty,’ but might not be moved to act. Put differently, the ethical demand is approved but does not provide the *impetus* for action. The model of ethical experience Critchley sketches, therefore, describes a *possible* account of the motivational force to act

⁷⁶ See pages 8-13 of *Infinitely Demanding: Ethics of Commitment, Politics of Resistance*, (London: Verso, 2013), for the full argument outline.

⁷⁷ *Infinitely Demanding: Ethics of Commitment, Politics of Resistance*, (London: Verso, 2013), 9.

morally, but this does not imply that it *will* move the subject to act. If it did *de facto* “it would be self-defeating as it would eliminate the free activity of the self from the moral realm.”⁷⁸

Critchley observes that the ‘existential matrix of ethics’ elicited from the model of ethical experience described above, comes to the fore as a claim that concerns the nature of a ‘self,’ or ethical subjectivity. The latter can be defined “as a self relating approvingly, bindingly, to the demand of its good.”⁷⁹ But further than this for Critchley, the experience of a self that binds itself to the demand of its good, is not only an aspect of moral life that contributes to what it means to be an ethical subject, but also the demand that establishes the fundamental principle of the subject’s articulation. In other words, a self should be first and foremost thought of as an ethical subject. Critchley argues this fundamentally moral articulation of the self negatively, by drawing on the experience of the guilt that is felt whenever I fail at being the ethical subject that I have chosen to be; by being in discordance with the approval of the demand of my good. For example, I have decided not to drink excessively (my conception of the good excludes this activity), I went out last night, and this morning I feel a little worse for wear. I experience guilt; the ethical subject I have chosen to be conflicts with the self that I am.

Critchley then turns to the dilemma of motivation described as the ‘moral problem.’ The heart of the issue revisits the example of the immoralist who affirms the binding moral status of a statement such as ‘poverty must end,’ but is not moved to act on this demand. The contradiction here refers to the generalizability of morality that cannot at the same time be subjectively felt. As might be expected Critchley turns to the example of Kant’s ‘fact of reason,’ (*das Faktum der Vernunft*) as an example that might assist in thinking through this incoherence, “to try to close the gap between justification and motivation.”⁸⁰ The fact of reason is our consciousness of the moral law as supremely authoritative to us, and it is from this *Faktum* that we receive the subjective guarantee of the determination of the will by the moral law. Since as least some of us recognize the fact that the moral law has binding power, the fact of reason then becomes *itself* the auto-authentication or self-justification of the moral law as binding. Thus, Kant seems to close the gap between

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 19.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 20.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 27.

justification and motivation. Auto-authentication, of course, touches upon the centrality of Kantian ethics, namely, freedom. However, Critchley's desire in the construction of ethical subjectivity is to move away from the Kantian and post-Kantian "autonomy orthodoxy" that has dominated philosophy. Looking at this more closely, the difficulty arises at the point where the fact of reason, experienced as the *otherness* of the demand, has to correspond to the will of the ethical subject (the latter is the argument of the categorical imperative wherein the only maxims upon which I can act are those that I can *will* to be a universal law), but further, the demand must also correspond to the *autonomy* of that subject, in order to uphold the primacy of autonomy that is at the basis of Kant's moral theory. As Critchley notes, "In other words, the ethical subject has to be a priori equal to the demand that is placed on it otherwise it would lapse into heteronomy."⁸¹

Returning to the problem of motivation that initiated the discussion of Kant's fact of reason, Critchley notes the crucial dilemma that on his account divides post-Kantian philosophy; namely, the inexplicable fact that within the fact of reason there must be a moment of facticity to deal with the problem of motivation. A translation of this intricacy leaves one, in other words, having to accept that we are interested in the universality of the moral law, without being able to explain this interest. Kant laments this enigma, "*how pure reason can be practical* - all human reason is totally incapable of explaining this, and all the effort and labour to seek such an explanation is in vain."⁸² Critchley observes how figures like Fichte, with his notion of 'intellectual intuition,' Hegel and the 'intersubjective solution,' Marx's communizing autonomy and Heidegger's Dasein calling (*anruf*) itself, can be categorized as negative responses to the tradition of Kant under the designation of the 'autonomy orthodoxy' - with these responses based on the explanatory weakness of Kant's conclusion of incomprehensibility, with respect to human interest into the moral law. The kernel of Critchley's argument is also to adopt a contrary position to the autonomy orthodoxy but to see this so-called weakness of incomprehensibility as a strength. For Critchley, there is no correspondence between the fact of reason and the subject's autonomy, because the overwhelming demand placed on the subject by the former destabilizes autonomy altogether. Thus, it is this moment of *asymmetry* that interests Critchley and which will become central to Critchley's project of constructing

⁸¹ *Ibid*, 33.

⁸² *Ibid*, 33. Critchley's original emphasis.

ethical-subjectivity in his chapter *Dividualism*, the main arguments toward which we now turn.

Alain Badiou's fidelity

In the chapter on *Dividualism* Critchley borrows three ideas from three thinkers. From Alain Badiou, the famous French philosopher, he uses the concept of *fidelity* as it relates to the way in which the subject binds itself to a demand. Secondly, from Knud Ejler Løgstrup, the not as well-known Danish theologian, he uses the aspect of one-sidedness and asymmetry characterizing the ethical relationship created by the ethical demand. Finally, from Emmanuel Levinas, with whom Critchley's work is well associated, he looks to the experience of the infinite in the face of the Levinasian 'other.' The latter finally constitutes for Critchley the moment of heteronomy in ethics as opposed to the autonomy orthodoxy, where this moment 'hetero-affectively' renders the subject a *split subject*.

Beginning first with Badiou, Critchley draws attention to the latter part of Badiou's essay, *Ethics – An Essay on the Understanding of Evil*,⁸³ as the reference point for his discussion. There, Badiou creates an alternate category for ethics, namely, concrete *situations*. This situational ethics for Badiou, Critchley ensures us, is not simplistic relativism but what he calls 'situated universality.' The demand is understood within a specific situation but is not reducible to it; rather it becomes universalized in principle because it is addressed to everyone. According to Critchley, universalization is usually deployed as a means for justification of norms, but strikingly, and this is what interests Critchley, Badiou calls his an "ethics of *truths*,"⁸⁴ where truth is understood not as that which can be subjected to empirical testing, but rather as a series of singular decisive processes, what one might call a 'procedure of justifications.' While it does not directly affect the trajectory of Critchley's argument, Critchley will later take issue with Badiou's insistence on using the word 'truth' when speaking in relation to the event. Critchley would rather substitute the word *justification* for truth, because, according to him, truth is the 'procedure by which norms are justified.' This interpretation Badiou himself rejects. In a debate between Critchley and Badiou held in November 2007 by the Slough Foundation in Philadelphia which sought to

⁸³ Alain Badiou, (trans.) Peter Hallward, *Ethics: An Essay on the Understanding of Evil* (London: Verso, 2001).

⁸⁴ Simon Critchley, *Infinitely Demanding: Ethics of Commitment, Politics of Resistance*, (London: Verso, 2013), 43.

engage with Critchley's book *Infinitely Demanding*, Badiou corrects Critchley, "First, truth is not the procedure by which norms are justified...truth is the construction of something new."⁸⁵ While not becoming too distracted by this debate, what remains important for Critchley in his analysis of Badiou's concept, is a particular aspect of the *nature* of truth, quoting Badiou, "truth is 'the real process of fidelity to an event.'"⁸⁶ Badiou does not take issue with what Critchley says here, in fact, the concept of fidelity to an event is not challenged at all by Badiou, and indeed he seems to affirm Critchley's particular use. His response to Critchley's representation of truth expands his own idea of truth, as seen in the following statement made at the Slough debate; "A truth is always something in relationship to the modification of the *intensity of existence* of something in the world."⁸⁷ It is in this 'modification of the intensity of existence' that Badiou discretely affirms Critchley's interpretation of truth as linked to *fidelity*. To comprehend this notion of fidelity fully, however, one must also account for what is meant by 'the *event*' itself.

In Badiou's formal theory of ethics, the subject is unlike Critchley's subject that can be given a 'pre-given' account. Badiou's situational ethics requires the subject to be in a process of *becoming* that is shaped in so far as it relates to the demand of the event. However, the subject exists within everyday circumstances to what Badiou calls being (*être*), the "sheer multiplicity of the world, a plurality of stuff (facts, states of affairs, etc.) that cannot be reduced to any single organizing principle."⁸⁸ Being (*être*) proves incapable of placing a demand on the subject. The subject thus requires an addition to its place in 'what there is' (*ce qu'il y a*), and it is here that the *event* takes place or rather, 'ruptures' what there is, calling "a subject into existence, into the creation of a truth."⁸⁹ Thus, the event occurs outside of the order of being and appears not as empirically demonstrable but in a concrete situation. Using the Pauline structure of ethical experience as the foil for his argument, Badiou illustrates the relationship between the subject and the event. The event, for Paul, is the event of grace that is approved by the subject in an act of faith. Now

⁸⁵ The text "Alain Badiou, 'On Simon Critchley's *Infinitely Demanding: Ethics of Commitment, Politics of Resistance*.' *Critical Horizons* 10.2 (2009), 158," was transcribed from the debate held by the Slough Foundation in Philadelphia.

⁸⁶ Simon Critchley, *Infinitely Demanding: Ethics of Commitment, Politics of Resistance*, (London: Verso, 2013), 43.

⁸⁷ Alain Badiou, 'On Simon Critchley's *Infinitely Demanding: Ethics of Commitment, Politics of Resistance*.' *Critical Horizons* 10, (2009), 158. Emphasis added.

⁸⁸ Simon Critchley, *Infinitely Demanding: Ethics of Commitment, Politics of Resistance*, (London: Verso, 2013), 45.

⁸⁹ *Ibid*, 45.

crucially for Critchley, the event supplements his theory of ethical subjectivity. It elicits the particular behavior of Badiou's subject, as that which is characterized by a subjective formation, where through a concrete situation the event arises, rupturing *être* and placing a demand on the subject, to which the subject commits in *fidelity*. While at the same time, the subject does not relativize the demand of the event by reducing it to the situation, but rather, universalizes it, as it is in principle addressed to all. The sense of the event that Critchley is after for his theory of ethical subjectivity, might be aptly summarized in Žižek's words on Badiou's event: "a contingency (contingent encounter or occurrence) which converts into necessity, i.e., it gives rise to a universal principle *demanding fidelity and hard work* for the new Order."⁹⁰

The Infinite Demand?

As mentioned above, the polemical contention of this chapter is that upon closer inspection of the structure of the infinite demand, there is a moment of 'phenomenological-theological possibility.' The move toward the latter, targets one of the overarching goals of this project, namely, to posit that in the moment of the constituent force of Critchley's faith of the faithless – the infinite demand – one can elicit an initial resistant but aporetic sensibility toward the transcendent that becomes more fully fledged in Critchley's faith of the faithless. In this section, then, we are led to investigate Knud Ejler Løgstrup, a Danish theologian that provides a philosophical disposition similar to Levinas but presented from *within* the Christian tradition. This disposition is at once surprising considering their close academic development; Critchley locates them as "almost exact contemporaries, they studied in Strasbourg and Freiburg at the same time and were both exposed to similar philosophical influences such as Bergson, Husserl and Heidegger."⁹¹ Despite the debatable philosophical influences had on Løgstrup,⁹² his approach to ethics undoubtedly runs contrary to the "major traditions in moral theory, such as Kantianism or any teleological conception of morality, whether utilitarian or Aristotelian."⁹³ Let us turn directly to

⁹⁰ See Slavoj Žižek, *Event: Philosophy in Transit* (London: Penguin, 2014), 179, 180. Emphasis added.

⁹¹ Simon Critchley, *Infinitely Demanding: Ethics of Commitment, Politics of Resistance*, (London: Verso, 2013), 51.

⁹² See discussion in Kees van Kooten Niekerk 'The New Edition of K.E. Løgstrup's The Ethical Demand' in *Ethical Theory and Moral Practice* 2.4 (1999), 418-422.

⁹³ Simon Critchley, *Infinitely Demanding: Ethics of Commitment, Politics of Resistance*, (London: Verso, 2013), 51

Løgstrup and his ethics as presented by *The Ethical Demand* (1971), before returning to Critchley's reading.

Løgstrup was a Danish philosopher-theologian born in Copenhagen in 1905. He had a middle-class upbringing and was involved in the YMCA movement during his youth. He later completed his degree in theology at the University of Copenhagen in 1930 after which he was granted scholarships that allowed him numerous periods of study. Many thinkers influenced him during this time as Fink and MacIntyre show in their introduction; “at Strasbourg (Jean Hering), Paris (Henri Bergson), Göttingen (Hans Lipps and Friedrich Gogarten), Freiburg im Breisgau (Martin Heidegger), Vienna (Moritz Schlick) and Tübingen.”⁹⁴ From 1943 to 1975 he was Professor of Ethics at the University of Aarhus in Denmark. He held critical but delicate views of World War Two; pressured the Danish government not to give in to Nazi commands, opposed *ex-post facto* laws that sought to indict Danes who showed collaboration with the Nazis and he was careful to distinguish between the latter ‘Germans’ in general.⁹⁵ For Løgstrup, the ethical demand is the injunction of Jesus Christ to Love one’s neighbor, grounded in the universal human phenomenon of *trust*. The notion of trust is fundamental for Løgstrup, for it is upon this premise that we open ourselves up to others and place our lives in their hands. For Løgstrup, without trust human life could hardly exist.⁹⁶ However, it is also because of the nature of trust as a disposition that all human beings possess, that Løgstrup can claim that his ethics is not necessarily theological but a philosophical human ethic. This claim ultimately fails to be convincing in Løgstrup’s argument, and it is the *implications* of Løgstrup’s philosophical failure that a good atheist like Simon Critchley chooses to gloss over, “for good Kantian reasons.”⁹⁷

In the opening chapter of *The Ethical Demand*, the ethical demand is described in relation to trust. According to Løgstrup, in every encounter we have with other human beings we surrender something of our lives to the other person, and they surrender something of themselves to us; this self-surrender requires trust, a trust that the other person will not

⁹⁴ Knud Ejler Løgstrup, Hans Fink and Alasdair MacIntyre (eds.) *The Ethical Demand* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1997), xvi.

⁹⁵ Trudy Gover, ‘Book Review: Knud Logstrup, *The Ethical Demand*’ in *Journal of Value Inquiries* 33 (1999), 267.

⁹⁶ Knud Ejler Løgstrup, Hans Fink and Alasdair MacIntyre (eds.) *The Ethical Demand* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1997), 8.

⁹⁷ Simon Critchley, *Infinitely Demanding: Ethics of Commitment, Politics of Resistance*, (London: Verso, 2013), 55.

manipulate or misuse. It is out of this trust that an obligation arises to take care of the other person by safeguarding that which they have surrendered. This trust Løgstrup repeatedly refers to as the “fact” which is the source of the demand.⁹⁸ Gover’s illustration is instructive here; she says, “if a woman asks me the time, she is implicitly trusting me to honestly tell her what time it is; she expects something of me and is in this respect relying on me. In this respect she delivers herself into my hands, risking that I will deceive or manipulate her.”⁹⁹ It is in her self-surrendering to me that she places herself *trustingly* into my care, out of which the ethical demand arises for me to respond. As Niekerk¹⁰⁰ observes, this does not mean that the circumstances must always abide by a situation of self-surrender, but rather “the demand arises from the mere fact of persons being delivered over to others.” It is in this way that Løgstrup can write, “The demand...asks us to take care of whatever in the other persons life has been placed in our hands...regardless of the manner in which he or she has been placed in our hands, whether it be through a confidence in us which we appreciate or through an enmity which arouses us to self-assertion.”¹⁰¹

As Løgstrup’s argument unfolds, four characteristics of the ethical demand come to the fore. Firstly, since the demand is implied, the response of the person on whom the demand is placed, will not necessarily align with the other person’s expectations. Løgstrup calls this the ‘unspokenness’ of the demand, where “the demand [is] implicit in every encounter between persons [and] is not vocal but remains silent. The individual to whom the demand is directed must him or herself in each concrete relationship decide what the content of the demand is.”¹⁰² Secondly, the demand expresses itself *radically* as a result of its ‘unspokenness.’ The reason for this is that the one to whom the demand is directed must determine for themselves the way in which to take care of the other person’s life. Further, the radicalness also manifests itself when taking care of the other person’s life may not “strengthen me but also when it is very unpleasant, because it intrudes disturbingly into my existence.”¹⁰³ Thirdly, the demand is *one-sided*, and reciprocity cannot be claimed. And,

⁹⁸ Knud Eijler Løgstrup, Hans Fink and Alasdair McIntyre (eds.) *The Ethical Demand* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1997), 8-18.

⁹⁹ Trudy Gover, ‘Book Review: Knud Logstrup, The Ethical Demand’ in *Journal of Value Inquiries* 33 (1999), 267.

¹⁰⁰ Kees van Kooten Niekerk ‘The New Edition of K.E. Løgstrup’s The Ethical Demand’ in *Ethical Theory and Moral Practice* 2.4 (1999), 416.

¹⁰¹ Knud Eijler Løgstrup, Hans Fink and Alasdair McIntyre (eds.) *The Ethical Demand* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1997), 45.

¹⁰² *Ibid*, 22.

¹⁰³ *Ibid*, 44,45.

finally, the demand cannot be fulfilled because of its susceptibility to human selfishness. It is to do with the third feature of the demand, its one-sidedness, which we investigate further as it is here that a critical moment of indifference is located between Løgstrup and Critchley's interpretation.

Critchley's interpretation of the one-sidedness of the ethical demand proceeds accordingly; he correctly infers that from Christ's proclamation to love your enemies, (that Løgstrup never directly cites, but indirectly references) a demand is placed upon us, that becomes in a certain sense a demand to be 'god-like,' for to fulfill the demand one would have to be perfect. It is the implied paradoxical character of the demand that radicalizes it.¹⁰⁴ At this juncture it can be said that Løgstrup does not frame his argument in these terms, his account of the radical nature of the demand is rather more nuanced. Nonetheless, Critchley captures the essence; the *radicality* lies in the fact that what the demand requires of me "intrudes disturbingly into my own existence."¹⁰⁵ The one-sided nature of the demand also stems from its paradoxical character, as Critchley writes, "It is one-sided because it makes an asymmetrical claim – I am not the equal of the demand that is made upon me and the ethical relation is not a relation of equals." The responsibility that I have toward the other "does not imply here reciprocity. On the contrary, the other person always stands higher than oneself."¹⁰⁶ However, Critchley neither goes further in sharing the explicit reasons *why* 'the other person always stands higher than oneself,' nor *why* there can be no reciprocity. Instead, he refers to the *fact* of the ethical demand, "what we will describe below as *the fact of the other* rather than the fact of reason,"¹⁰⁷ anticipating his discussion with Levinas. He references the latter in a footnote that refers the reader to Løgstrup's chapter 'The Fact Which Is The Source Of The Silent Demand,' wherein this *fact* for Løgstrup becomes precisely the fact of *trust* – a basic characteristic of human existence. What is important for Critchley's argument is that Løgstrup contributes to his construction of ethical subjectivity by highlighting the demand as radical, one-sided and unfulfillable. It is in our view that this side-step of Critchley's, namely, to *not* provide a reason for why reciprocity can *not* be possible, is firstly a purposeful omission, since it would lead him to

¹⁰⁴ Simon Critchley, *Infinitely Demanding: Ethics of Commitment, Politics of Resistance*, (London: Verso, 2013), 53.

¹⁰⁵ Knud Eijler Løgstrup, Hans Fink and Alasdair McIntyre (eds.) *The Ethical Demand* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1997), 45.

¹⁰⁶ Simon Critchley, *Infinitely Demanding: Ethics of Commitment, Politics of Resistance*, (London: Verso, 2013), 53.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid*, 53.

what he would call ‘philosophical wheel spinning’ about metaphysical emanations. This will become fully apparent as we consider the argument below for Løgstrup’s palpable failure at providing an expressly defensible secular ethics that takes precedent over a theological system. Second, Critchley’s indifference for providing reasons here speak further to the aporetic quality of his work that seeks to affirm its resistance to metaphysical categories, while at the same time drawing from them. As we will see, he will defer a discussion of asymmetry and one-sidedness to another distinguishable form in the work of Emmanuel Levinas, through the concepts of *infinity* and *the fact of the other*. Let us consider then Løgstrup’s argument of the ethical demand.

In the opening pages Løgstrup states the intention of *The Ethical Demand*, a philosophical investigation that wants to express a religious proclamation, “in strictly human terms.”¹⁰⁸ He remarks later that it is nothing but an irritation that there is “the idea that there are laws governing people’s lives, which only Christians understand, and that there are reasons which are intelligible only to Christians.”¹⁰⁹ But Løgstrup’s defense of the distinction between the ethical demand seen in human terms and its religious nature is porous. Recalling the argument, Løgstrup is determined to ground the foundation of his radical demand in the *facts* about trust that emphasize the understanding that the responsibility involved in the ethical relation in no way implies reciprocity - without the latter the claim of one-sidedness and asymmetry becomes dislodged. But as Michelle Mason has correctly discerned, Løgstrup faces a problem when he explains that his concern is “only to point out the intimate connection between the fact and the demand, to point out that to a great extent, the demand flows out of the fact.”¹¹⁰ According to Mason, Løgstrup has “denied (without providing an alternative) any number of plausible candidates which might provide an agent with reasons to avoid indifference to the demand,”¹¹¹ which subsequently raises the obvious question; if the only thing which motivates us to heed the demand is the fact of trust, and there can be no other fact(s), what exactly accounts for the demand’s *authority*? It can be argued at this point, that the question of authority is precisely the question that Løgstrup wishes to insulate. As alluded to above, his concern with the ethical demand as an indispensable *human* ethic cannot and should not cross the line into theological

¹⁰⁸ Knud Ejler Løgstrup, Hans Fink and Alasdair McIntyre (eds.) *The Ethical Demand* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1997), 2.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid*, 111.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid*, 18.

¹¹¹ Michelle Mason, ‘Book Review: The Ethical Demand’ in *Ethics* 109.2 (1999), 447.

justification. However, his attempt is a methodological failure, as his resistance to a theological justification terminates in his chapter, *Opposition to the One-sided Demand*. The argument there, as alluded to by the title, is a defense of his claim that the ethical demand does not involve reciprocity - that it is a one-sided demand. Reciprocity extinguishes the one-sidedness of the demand, for it asserts the “right to make counter demands of others,”¹¹² it maintains selfishness. Summarized below is Løgstrup's answer to these objections;

“A person is a debtor not because he or she has committed some wrong but simply because he or she exists and has received his or her life as a *gift*...the demand which makes void the protest from the viewpoint of reciprocity does not arise exclusively from the fact that the one person is delivered over to the other. This demand makes sense only on the presupposition that the person to whom the demand is addressed possesses nothing which he or she has not received as a *gift*.”¹¹³

Indeed, the absence of the notion of life as a gift dislodges and undermines the structure of Løgstrup's ethical relation. To see life as a gift implies that we are indebted, this debt disallows any claims for mutual reciprocity and turns us toward others and shapes our care for them; he admonishes with a pastoral tone that “Care of the other person's life can never consist in words or deeds which prevent his or her discovering that he or she has received his or her life as a gift. Our care of his or her life must never support him or her in his or her ingratitude or aid him or her in oppressing others, thereby denying that his or her own life is a gift.”¹¹⁴ In this important emphasis on the gift, the *non-theological* nature of Løgstrup's ‘human ethic’ is no longer a tenable claim. To quell any uncertainty of this, Løgstrup cements his *theological* position more firmly in a later chapter, “the demand does not come from the other person's life, which the demand says we are to take care of. On the contrary, it comes from the *ultimate authority* which has given us our life and has blessed it with a trust through which the other person places something of his or her life into our hands.”¹¹⁵ It is difficult not to see the theological phenomenological structure in Løgstrup's allusions to the ‘gift’ and ‘ultimate authority’ in these passages. To be sure, this

¹¹² Michelle Mason, ‘Book Review: The Ethical Demand’ in *Ethics* 109.2 (1999), 447.

¹¹³ Knud Ejler Løgstrup, Hans Fink and Alasdair McIntyre (eds.) *The Ethical Demand* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1997), 116. Emphasis added.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid*, 117.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid*, 173. Emphasis added.

theological structure does not invalidate his argument but only undermines his non-theological claim at the outset of his book.

As it stands, Critchley affirms the one-sidedness of the ethical demand that Løgstrup describes. In agreement, this demand is “one-sided because it makes an asymmetrical claim – I am not the equal of the demand that is made upon me and the ethical relation is not a relation of equals.”¹¹⁶ Further, the responsibility that the demand demands is not to be understood as reciprocal in nature (for once again, there can be no one-sidedness where there is reciprocity), because “the other person always stands higher than oneself.”¹¹⁷ As we have already shown, this is as far as Critchley’s justification of one-sidedness in defense of the objection to reciprocity goes. What Critchley appears to have done is subsumed the logic of the one-sidedness of Løgstrup’s ethical demand into his argument, but is allegedly indifferent to the reasoning that informs it. Put differently, Critchley wants the one-sidedness of the ethical demand but not its grounding authority, which Løgstrup locates in the theological notion of ‘life as a gift.’ As he writes in the chapter, “the question of the metaphysical ground or basis of ethical obligation should simply be disregarded as a philosophical wheel spinning.”¹¹⁸

Now, Critchley is correct in making this claim, because Løgstrup has also made (albeit contradictory as we have shown) clear that he wants something similar, viz. a purely human ethic. The *content* of the ethical demand for Løgstrup, as later becomes apparent, is Christ’s injunction to love our neighbor as ourselves, to love our enemies and to be perfect as our Father in heaven is perfect.¹¹⁹ Critchley interprets that this is morality not in its Christian guise, but it is a morality that is “*phenomenologically* the same for the secularist or the theist.”¹²⁰ But if we accept the phenomenological character of this morality as the same for the secularist and the theist, we will also, by implication, accept that the grounding notion of the one-sidedness of the ethical demand cannot be seen as ‘life as a gift’ – at least in the way that we have shown Løgstrup ultimately to understand the implications of this notion. And if the latter is the case, namely, that the one-sidedness of

¹¹⁶ Simon Critchley, *Infinitely Demanding: Ethics of Commitment, Politics of Resistance*, (London: Verso, 2013), 53.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 53.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 53.

¹¹⁹ See chapter 12 in Knud Eijler Løgstrup, Hans Fink and Alasdair McIntyre (eds.) *The Ethical Demand* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1997).

¹²⁰ Simon Critchley, *Infinitely Demanding: Ethics of Commitment, Politics of Resistance*, (London: Verso, 2013), 55.

the ethical demand does not find its grounding in the *gift*, then how can Christ's injunction to love our neighbor as ourselves and to love our enemies be operative, if there is no defense for the objection to reciprocity, a defense, which as we have seen is located in the *gift*. The ethical demand, exemplified by Christ's injunction, regarding its one-sided character, therefore, becomes itself *inoperative* as a result of a phenomenology stripped of theology. In other words, the question is raised, what stops me from demanding that my enemy also treats me with dignity, respect, etc., what defies my claim to selfishness? Our contention, therefore, is that the particularly one-sided aspect of Løgstrup's ethical demand must be understood within its theologically phenomenological structure, for to ignore this dimension renders the structure unable to support itself. And it is this theological phenomenology that Critchley resists. But does his resistance to this structure impair his argument as a whole? This question leads us to his reading of Levinas.

Emmanuel Levinas and asymmetry

Throughout Critchley's chapter on *Dividualism* he emphasizes that what he wishes to gain from Løgstrup are three characterizations of the infinite demand; its *radicality*, *unfulfillability*, and *one-sidedness*. The radicality and unfulfillability are characteristics that Critchley has no problem inheriting based on the formal structure of Christ's injunction, namely, the proclamation to forgive seventy-seven times (radicality), and to not only love your neighbor as yourself but to love your enemies and to be perfect as our Father in heaven is perfect (unfulfillability). Critchley assimilates the final feature of one-sidedness or asymmetry of Løgstrup's demand only by association, because following Løgstrup's theological phenomenology to its end results in intolerable metaphysical conclusions. To circumvent this end, Critchley locates according to him, a deeper philosophical description of asymmetry and one-sidedness in his reading of Emmanuel Levinas.

It is valuable, as we turn to Levinas, to appreciate the context in which he writes, for it points to otherwise veiled motivations. As Critchley has elsewhere described, Levinas's project has been interpreted canonically as 'ethics is first philosophy.'¹²¹ To understand this one must understand the relationship between Levinas and Heidegger. Heidegger's

¹²¹ Simon Critchley, *The Ethics of Deconstruction: Derrida and Levinas* (3rd ed. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2014). 281-287.

association with the Nationalist Socialist party is well documented. It is this association that sent Levinas into turmoil as a young student of Heidegger and where the question became for Levinas, how such a brilliant mind like Heidegger could succumb to the ideology of the Nazis? As Levinas was a Jew himself, the horrific atrocities of World War Two left an indelible mark on him and the nature of his work. In this regard, Levinas sees Heidegger's fatal flaw in his pre-occupation with autonomy. In actuality it is the entire project of the Western philosophical tradition that is complicit of this fact. Critchley writes of the philosophical tradition; "the domain of the Same maintains a relation with otherness, but it is a relation in which the 'I,' ego or *Dasein* reduces the distance between the Same and the Other, in which their opposition fades."¹²² The Western philosophical project that Levinas critically opposes, most immediately represented by Heidegger, has been an attempt at "the reduction of the other to the Same, where the other is assimilated like so much food or drink."¹²³ Levinas therefore, sees philosophy as a reversal of the question of Being in Heidegger (and by implication the whole Western philosophical tradition), viz., 'what does it mean for things to be at all?' to 'what does it mean to be a *human* being.' This notion is what he means by 'ethics as first philosophy,' it is ethics that concerns itself with the other human being that should occupy the primary position of ethics.

Unlike Heidegger, who would place the human being within the realm of the many, as he seems to have done with the Jewish population, Levinas wants to acknowledge the humanity of the other person. In this vein, Critchley writes that failure to recognize the humanity of the other for Levinas, could result in "what took place in the Holocaust and in the countless other disasters of the twentieth century, where the other person becomes a faceless face in the crowd, someone who the passerby simply passes by, someone whose life or death is for me a matter of indifference."¹²⁴ This brief description of the relation between Levinas and Heidegger reveals that the choice of Løgstrup as a benefactor for Critchley's ethical construction takes on a more poetic meaning. Both Løgstrup and Levinas were students of Heidegger and both have distinguished their ethical projects by orientating themselves toward the other in a critical move that appears to resist the dominant philosophical tradition. We can, therefore, anticipate a discussion with Levinas that follows Løgstrup.

¹²² *Ibid*, 4,5.

¹²³ *Ibid*, 6.

¹²⁴ *Ibid*, 285.

The moment of asymmetry in Levinas for Critchley occurs when a demand is placed on the subject that finds itself in the accusative case, constituted by an approval that it is fundamentally inadequate of approving. Drawing from Levinas' *Totality and Infinity* (1961), this demand comes from God through the imperative 'thou shalt not kill,' but is delivered through the face of the other. Therefore, the ethical relation can be described as asymmetrical because "the subject relates itself to something that exceeds its relational capacity."¹²⁵ The 'relation without relation,' Levinas' famous phrase, is what he seeks to describe as ethical. The difficulty with the latter, as Critchley points out, is the paradox that underlies the task of attempting to define a relation between beings that remain absolute within that relation. However challenging it may be, it is such a task that Levinas takes up with the concept of the infinity of God that relates to the *res cogitans* in Descartes' Third Meditation. In Descartes's classic argument Levinas is interested in the moment where the subject has an idea of the infinity of God that by definition contains 'an excess.' Critchley expounds the relevance of the contours of this relation for Levinas; "The Cartesian picture of the relation of the *res cogitans* to God through the idea of the infinite provides Levinas with a picture or formal model of a relation between two terms that is based on height, inequality, non-reciprocity and asymmetry."¹²⁶ Crucially, Levinas substitutes God in the Cartesian model for 'the Other.' More significantly for Critchley, "Levinas is making no substantive claim at this point, he is not saying that I actually *do* possess the idea of the infinite in the way Descartes describes, nor is he claiming that the other is God."¹²⁷ The substantive claim that Levinas makes to fill out the formal content of this structure, rather, is that it is the *ethical* relation to the other that corresponds to this model.

For Løgstrup, we see the one-sidedness of the ethical relation is determined by a theological phenomenology, constituted by the gift, but for Levinas rather, what is garnered from Descartes is 'theological' in its content and structure, as a relation between the *res cogitans* and the infinity of God. But becomes what Critchley calls a "social expression of this formal structure." And again quoting Levinas, "the idea of infinity is the social relationship...The way in which the other presents himself, exceedingly *the idea of*

¹²⁵ Simon Critchley, *Infinitely Demanding: Ethics of Commitment, Politics of Resistance*, (London: Verso, 2013), 57.

¹²⁶ *Ibid*, 58.

¹²⁷ *Ibid*, 58.

the other in me, we here name face.”¹²⁸ The transformation of the ethical relation from a theological phenomenology in Descartes to an anthropological one in Levinas is understood by observing that Levinas has maintained the aspect of *infinity* but has relocated it in the Other as opposed to God. The relation of the *res cogitans* to the infinity of God found in the other for Descartes, now becomes the relation between the subject and the infinity of the ‘otherness’ in the other. It is, therefore, the case that when I am in the ethical relation I experience the other as the high point of what Maurice Blanchot calls the ‘curvature of intersubjective space,’ and as such my relation to the other can be seen as one-sided and asymmetrical, and my responsibility infinite. The asymmetry within the Levinasian ethical relation, Critchley explains, elicits the experience of trauma for the subject. ‘Trauma’ understood in the sense of a heteronomous fact that irrupts into the very subjectivity of the subject. It is the experience of the latter that is created by the demand of the other, an experience that is “not some benign benevolence, compassionate care or respect for the other’s autonomy, but is the obsessive experience of a responsibility that persecutes me with its sheer weight.”¹²⁹ The experience of the demand from outside the subject from a heteronomous source leaves its imprint within the subject, and subsequently, using Critchley’s language, *hetero-affectively* constitutes it. Thus the subject is divided by the demand, it is a traumatically *split* ethical subject. Through the coterminous link of the psychoanalytical experience of trauma, Critchley moves into a reading of Lacan. (While we do not have time to investigate Critchley’s discussion, we will make reference to one of the interesting reasons he decides to do so below.) The latter part of this construction, namely the *hetero-affectivity* and the subsequent traumatic split, is a condition of the subject that according to Critchley is nothing short of a bleak prospect for ethical subjectivity. In his next chapter, ‘*The Problem of Sublimation*,’ it is through *humour*¹³⁰ that the philosophical concept of sublimation can take its place as an anti-depressant that can remind us to be humble, laugh at ourselves, and “recalls us to modesty and limitedness of the human condition.”¹³¹ The practice of ‘minimal sublimation,’ as he also calls it, will both maintain and alleviate the division of the ethical subject, a division that also is the experience of *conscience* for Critchley. In an alternative approach to Nietzsche and Freud that describe the conscience as self-hating and cruel, conscience

¹²⁸ *Ibid*, 59.

¹²⁹ *Ibid*, 60, 61.

¹³⁰ Critchley’s book *On Humour: Thinking In Action* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2002), first explores this concept of sublimation. See pg. 93-109.

¹³¹ *Ibid*, 82.

becomes for Critchley “not some form of masochistic self-flagellation, but rather *the experience of an ever-divided humorous self-relation*. In this way, I can bear the radicality of the ethical demand because I can laugh at myself.”¹³² Such is the nature of Simon Critchley’s infinitely demanding ethics.

This section began with the claim that upon a closer inspection of the infinite demand, the moment of a theological phenomenological structure of the demand would become a possibility. After our engagements with Alain Badiou, Knud Løgstrup, and Emmanuel Levinas some initial conclusions can be made. In Badiou, Critchley saw the importance of the relation between the subject and the event in the subject’s *commitment* and *fidelity* to the demand placed on it. While a devout atheist, Badiou nonetheless sees the most explicit example of the subject’s interaction with the event in the event of Christ’s resurrection as theologically explicated by the Apostle Paul.¹³³ In particular, our conversation with Løgstrup and Levinas illustrated the possibility of the theological phenomenological structure of the ethical demand. With the former it became apparent that the notion of the gift as understood by Løgstrup was the explicit feature, which grounded the one-sidedness of the ethical relation. It was also shown that without the notion of the gift, Critchley’s use of Løgstrup would lead to unacceptable theological-metaphysical speculation. Thus, out of the mere association, the *indifference* to reasons that address the problem of reciprocity in Løgstrup, is attributable to the aporetic sensibility of Critchley’s hermeneutics; where the discussion is deferred and at the same time distinguished by its content through his reading of Levinas. Subsequently, what is first seen through Levinas, is the similarity in philosophical disposition held by Løgstrup - a turning away from ‘autonomy’ to ‘the other.’ And secondly, what occurs in Levinas initially promotes a theological phenomenology of the ethical relation between the *res cogitans* and the infinity of God. Critchley makes clear that Levinas transforms this into a model of ethical subjectivity that is a ‘*social* expression of this formal structure,’ demarcated by the ethical relation between the subject and the infinite otherness found in the other, located at the high-point of the ‘curvature of intersubjective space.’

¹³² *Ibid*, 86.

¹³³ The scope of this project does not allow for a discussion of Alain Badiou’s work. But it should be noted that a similar atheistic theology is at work in Badiou as it is in Critchley. In this regard, Hollis Phelps provides a fascinating engagement with Badiou in his book, *Alain Badiou: Between Philosophy and Anti-Theology* (Durham: Acumen, 2013).

Conclusion: The Infinite Demand?

One of the goals of this chapter was to find the possibility of a theological phenomenological character of the ethical demand. The outcomes of our discussions above are evidence that at a referential level, the phenomenology of the ethical demand occupies a particular theological ‘language game’ as it were. From the concepts of fidelity to Christ’s injunction, the gift, and the infinity of God relocated to the infinity of the other, the infinite demand displays a distinct theological phenomenology. It will be a step too far to say, however, that it is only theological. This is quite clear from Critchley’s construction and is not the ambition of the claim being made. Rather we would like to point to an observation and one concluding remark.

The first is that there is a discernible hesitation in the resistance to ‘the theological’ in Critchley, which surfaces with frequency as we progress through our evaluations. For example, it was parenthetically mentioned above that one of the reasons why Critchley moves to a reading of Lacan presents an especially interesting nuance; in the conclusion of his Levinasian-Lacanian analysis, he says the following:

“My use of psychoanalysis is intended to be critical of Levinas...It is hoped that using Freudian categories to offer a reconstruction of Levinas’s work as a theory of the subject *minimizes some of the metaphysical residua and religious pietism in Levinas’s texts*, but even more present in certain interpretations of those texts. In my view, *psychoanalysis provides a non-theological account of the nature of what we have called above ‘exciting reasons,’* a vocabulary of desire, affection and the passions.”¹³⁴

Critchley’s attempt to concurrently minimize philosophical formulations from theological ‘metaphysical residua and religious pietism’ in Levinas and others, while at the same time actively drawing on those metaphysical residua for his philosophical formulations, is a project that could describe the contemporary philosophical engagement of certain pundits within contemporary continental philosophy. Taken seriously, Critchley accomplishes this task successfully, however, one is left feeling not entirely persuaded. The lack of

¹³⁴ Simon Critchley, *Infinitely Demanding: Ethics of Commitment, Politics of Resistance*, (London: Verso, 2013), 67.

confidence felt here is sensed in a sentiment drawn by Alain Badiou in his feedback to Critchley's book that was mentioned earlier at the Slought Foundation debate. If we recall Critchley's initial remarks on philosophy; it begins in disappointment, and as such leads to our coming to terms with our finitude and limitedness. The devastation caused by the latter consequently drives us to reject the world, and thus a need for ethics, a 're-motivating set of ethics,' as Critchley would say. But here Badiou identifies intuitively a problem underlying Critchley's approach, "Yes, we have the utmost difficulty in accepting our limitedness and so on. But if there exists something like the possibility of an infinite demand, there is something infinite in human nature. And maybe the problem sometimes is not at all to accept our finitude, but to accept our infinite dimension."¹³⁵ Badiou is calling attention to an apparent paradox in Critchley's synthesis of philosophy and ethics. On the one hand, there is the negative dimension of disappointment in philosophy, and the affirmative dimension of the infinite demand in his ethics. Badiou's point is to call for the recognition in Critchley's philosophical approach that affirms both the *tragedy* "of our non-recognition of our finitude" and "another sort of tragedy, which is our inability to recognize our infinity."¹³⁶ It is this moment of possible infinity within human creation that is fascinating, for it is here where the theological continues to display its intractable nature.

This chapter has made clear that its intention is not to inscribe 'the theological' into the infinite demand, but rather to point toward its theological possibility and *potential*. The latter is magnified when the infinite demand serves as the constitutive force in Simon Critchley's *Faith of the Faithless*, a 'faith' that theologians will need to become preoccupied with, especially when considering its *potential* for inspiring new depths of reflection for the 'faith of the faithful.' By pointing to the potential of theological language that relates to one of the most fundamental philosophical discourses, viz., ethical subjectivity, in the current chapter, we hope to have reaffirmed the fluid movement that exists between philosophy and theology. In the dramatic ambivalence of traditional religion for a growing number of 'secular' South Africans, a reminder of this fluidity comes at a critical time in our nation's history where religion still plays a determinative role not only in respective faith communities but also in the 'secular' politics of the public domain. As we anticipate the argument in Simon Critchley's *Faith of the Faithless*, his

¹³⁵ Alain Badiou, 'On Simon Critchley's Infinitely Demanding: Ethics of Commitment, Politics of Resistance.' *Critical Horizons* 10.2 (2009), 156.

¹³⁶ *Ibid*, 156.

faith of the faithless embodies at once a mode of thinking that reminds and assists us in engaging with a 'faithless faith' that may neither be wrested by its faithless philosophical motivators nor by its theologically inclined recipients.

Chapter 2: *Faith and Fiction*

*“You must become an ignorant man again
And see the sun again with an ignorant eye
And see it clearly in the idea of it.”
- Wallace Stevens¹³⁷*

Introduction

This chapter is about *faith* and its relation to *fiction*. In thinking about faith one’s impulse is to recall the verse from Hebrews, “Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen” (Heb 11:1, NRSV),¹³⁸ a formulation perceived as universally canonical for Christians. But exactly how faith ‘assures,’ ‘convicts’ and the nature of ‘things not seen,’ have not always been so apparent. Indeed, Christian faith is at times known to be intolerantly particular and not quite universal at all - one needs only to marvel at the denominational variety within the Christian tradition in this regard. But it is not the faith of ‘traditional religion’ that Critchley has in mind. It is rather the faith of a philosophically and sociologically complex phenomenon that is being witnessed in the 21st century.¹³⁹ In lieu of this phenomenon it is possible for Critchley to posit a faith from the genitive; the *‘faith of the faithless.’* The narrative that answers the question of how a situation of a ‘faithless faith’ becomes even a possibility, consists of a discussion involving the interwoven processes that constitute what we would call today, *secularity* and *post-*

¹³⁷ See Wallace Stevens, *Collected Poems of Wallace Stevens* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1971), 380.

¹³⁸ All Scripture quotations that follow labelled NRSV are from the New Revised Standard Version of the Bible, copyright © 1989 the Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

¹³⁹ Christopher Watkin’s book is extremely informative in this regard. *Difficult Atheism: Post-Theological Thinking in Alain Badiou, Jean-Luc Nancy and Quentin Meillassoux* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2011). It follows the move in French philosophy that attempts to think ‘without God’ but in a manner that more *authentically* thinks ‘without God,’ unlike other versions of ‘parasitic’ and ‘ascetic’ atheisms. As such, these thinkers do not rely on religious categories, but neither can they simply leave them alone.

secularity. Such a conversation exceeds the horizon of this current project, but many noble attempts have been made to articulate this unfolding phenomenon of history.¹⁴⁰

The intent of this chapter is to begin the first stage of an evaluation of Simon Critchley's *Faith of the Faithless* through an engagement with his experiments in political theology. Indeed, a book about faith and religion for Simon Critchley appears out of place. His early work involved a project of locating the ethical moment in the deconstructionism of Derrida and Levinas as a response to the negative aura of post-structuralism. It also entailed a subsequent focus on the function of poetry, in Wallace Stevens and Samuel Beckett for example,¹⁴¹ but these areas of concern have now evolved into a discussion that touches religion. His more recent interest in Agamben and Badiou mark his shift to the religio-political that culminates with the *Faith of the Faithless*. However, *Faith of the Faithless* appears to be the only thorough work that engages with religion in general. After its publication in 2012, Critchley's work has expanded further with titles on Hamlet, Theatre, David Bowie and a most recently published book on suicide.¹⁴² A work on faith protruding like a sore thumb in the corpus of Critchley's work is, therefore, one to take note of.

Critchlean faith expounded in *Faith of the Faithless* is not a dogmatic description, nor is it a systematic formulation of atheistic faith. It is also neither a populist handbook for atheists, something close to Alain de Botton's *Religion for Atheists* (2012).¹⁴³ It is a philosophical and historical investigation that explores the possibility of 'a faith' for faithless people and what the meaning of such a faith might entail. Critchlean faith is disjointed and displays "décalages" (displacements, tensions, ambiguities) - the word he uses to describe Rousseau's divergent writing style and is a taut literary element he has employed himself. Indeed, as we will see, there is a hermeneutic at work in Critchley functioning to maintain distance from the poetic transcendent. Critchlean faith also has a *political* function. Critchley describes the return to religion in terms of a political situation

¹⁴⁰ Names which come to mind in this regard, include, Charles Taylor's *A Secular Age* (2007), Hent de Vries and Lawrence E. Sullivan (eds.) *Political Theologies: Public Religions in a Post-Secular World* (2006), John Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory* (1991), Philip Blond (ed.), *Post-Secular Philosophy: Between Philosophy and Theology* (2002). More names could be added to this list.

¹⁴¹ See Simon Critchley, *Things Merely Are: Philosophy in the poetry of Wallace Stevens* (London & New York: Routledge, 2005), and *Very Little...Almost Nothing* (London & New York: Routledge, 2004), 165-207, for Critchley's reading on Samuel Beckett.

¹⁴² See Simon Critchley, *The Hamlet Doctrine* (London: Verso, 2013), *Memory Theatre* (Fitzcarraldo Editions, 2014), *Bowie* (New York & London, OR Books, 2014).

¹⁴³ See Alain de Botton, *Religion for Atheists: A Non-Believer's Guide to the Uses of Religion* (London: Penguin Books, 2012).

that flows from metaphysical conflict, and that can be triangulated around the entanglement of politics, religion and violence. This situation leads him to seek out a middle way between two polarities; characterized either by a response that defends a version of secularism or one that dispassionately acquiesces to a version of theism. Unsatisfied by this either/or option, Critchley's approach leads him through a series of four experiments in political theology that are orientated from a philosophically atheistic persuasion. The ambit of political theology for Critchley weds him with some of his favourite interlocutors; Rousseau, Heidegger and more recently, the Apostle Paul. With other familiar names in the field such as Schmitt, Badiou, Agamben, Benjamin and Žižek all featuring prominently in the text, and others perhaps not as well known, like John Gray and Marguerite Porete, the horizon of Critchley's faith of the faithless reveals an intricate but enriching diversity of thinkers.

The goal of this chapter and the three chapters that follow is to wean the essence of Critchlean faith from his political-theological experiments. This chapter will be the first stage of that process beginning with two movements: the first consists of a reading of Critchley's "Wilde Christianity," which serves as the parable for the type of faith he is attempting to describe. It is here that we will see that faith is not understood in any traditional sense, but is a matter of *artistic self-actualizing* that is brought into being by the subject. The theme of self-actualizing, self-creation/decreation, and self-proclamation is an important aspect of Critchley's faith that is carried throughout his book. The emphasis that Wilde's parable seeks to foreshadow is the stress on faith as an act of the subject, a unique experience of the human self. Thus, any claim for metaphysical sources of faith is not of Critchley's concern, yet, as we will see the relationship with these sources becomes blurred in the articulation of such a self-creating faith. In the second movement of this chapter, we look at the motivating role that 'fiction' occupies in Critchley's reading of Rousseau's *The Social Contract* (1762). Of central concern for Critchley regarding this fiction is not whether politics is conceivable without religion, but more pointedly, whether politics is *practicable* without religion. This discussion will lead us to an extended evaluation of this *fiction* and a controversial expansion of the fiction in politics. The former is illustrated through a discussion with Rousseau as he attempts to find an answer to the problem of politics, namely, how to motivate people to act politically for the good of society as a whole. This discussion brings to light the fictional forces involved in contemporary politics, with particular reference to the United States. Critchley follows by

proposing an alternative fiction for politics, namely, a concept he calls the ‘*supreme fiction*,’ borrowed from Wallace Stevens. After a brief reflection on *fiction*, we show the paradoxical character of the supreme fiction; that is, a requirement of a belief in a fiction that one necessarily knows to be a fiction - a *necessary epistemic paradox* that demands the subject to deceive itself knowingly. Through a reading of one of Critchley’s critics and a comparison with his earlier work, a strained or aporetic hermeneutical character becomes increasingly evident, leaving open the question of transcendence.

Wilde Christianity: Immanence, Loss, and Artistic Creation

Critchley describes the opening to *Faith of the Faithless* as a parable. This parable is read through a text by Oscar Wilde published in 1905 with the title *De Profundis*, that Critchley notes as the Latin *incipit* of Psalm 130, “Out of the depths I cry to you, O Lord” (NRSV).¹⁴⁴ The context immediately becomes necessary for Critchley as it illuminates the religious dimension in which he is chiefly interested. Wilde’s text originates during his time in prison, a time that is marked by great despair and melancholia. Wilde’s response in his destitute and dejected state becomes the kernel of the type of faith Critchley is after. Wilde does not rely on external temporal forces for his emancipation, and crucially, Wilde does not place any determination in transcendent hope. Rather, “he sees his sufferings as the occasion for a ‘fresh mode of self-realization.’”¹⁴⁵

Critchley’s interpretation of Wilde’s testimony underscores a response to absolute loss that does not ‘give in’ to a transcendent option, but rather, through the emphasis of self-determining phrases like, “self-formation,” “self-artistry,” and “self-realization,” reveals an *immanent* response – a kind that is conceived virtuously as a faith of the faithless. Thus, Critchley rules out early on the transcendent as a viable solution. However, taking the immanent a step further, he shows that Wilde declares his subjectivity to be found neither in religion, morality, nor reason, since “each of these faculties requires the invocation of some sort of external agency.”¹⁴⁶ Moral trepidation, the religious, and reason, owe themselves to agents of exteriority, but for Wilde, his struggle is experienced not only in a prison but also in the prison of the self, in the core of his being and is occasioned by

¹⁴⁴ Simon Critchley, *The Faith of the Faithless: Experiments in Political Theology* (London: Verso, 2012), 1

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 2.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 2.

suffering, loss or the void. In order for him to transcend this void, he cannot locate his ‘transfiguration’ – the allusion to Christ we will see below – externally, but must be addressed by confronting, indeed, embracing the void by himself and within himself. Here the horizon of Critchley’s faith begins to take shape as characterized by a Wildean experience of faith that embraces the void of loss in such a manner that interprets it to be that which makes us human. We do not attempt to fill the void with religion or reason but embrace it as a part of our subjectivity.

Creston Davis has alluded to the poet, Edgar Allan Poe, and his infamous poem ‘*The Raven*’ as representing something of this faith.¹⁴⁷ In the sobering setting of a debilitated lover on a wintry December night, the unnerving flickering of a dying fire is interrupted by a mysterious raven. Though initially sceptical of the raven and its repetitious pronouncements of ‘Nevermore!’ – “But the Raven, sitting lonely on the placid bust, spoke only / That one word, as if his soul in that one word he did outpour¹⁴⁸” - the narrator begins a dialogue with the Raven. But the haunting repetition of that word soon foreshadows the narrator’s rising sense of profound bereavement, with every pain-filled repetition he moves closer to a violent crescendo of unbelief that his beloved *Lenore* is and will be ‘Nevermore.’ Finally, as the cathartic divulges of mourn and grief settle, and in resignation he placidly laments; “And the lamp-light o’er him streaming throws his shadow on the floor; / And my soul from out that shadow that lies floating on the floor / Shall be lifted—nevermore!¹⁴⁹” Critchlean faith begins in this darkly romantic self-articulated loss, that is, a self that is also at terms with itself over this loss. It is worth noting as an aside, that the acceptance of our impotence and loss is a strong theme in Critchley’s philosophy and essential for capturing his understanding of faith. Later, when we discuss Critchley’s reading of Heidegger, it is there that this paradox of being that is constituted by *not* being, or being that embraces impotence, takes a fuller philosophical form in a so-called ‘Pauline Meontology.’ Further, he will also make use of John Gray,¹⁵⁰ the modern prophet of human doom and gloom in articulating the human condition, a condition he describes morosely as ‘*Homo Rapien*’ – drawing the rapacious nature of humanity out into its fully-fledged abasement as devastators of the Earth and of each other.

¹⁴⁷ Creston Davis, ‘The paradox of subjective truth’ in *Political Theology*, 14.4 (2013), 513.

¹⁴⁸ See Edgar Allan Poe, *Delphi Complete Works of Edgar Allan Poe (Illustrated)*, (Delphi, 2013), 275-289.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid*, 288-289.

¹⁵⁰ Simon Critchley, *The Faith of the Faithless: Experiments in Political Theology* (London: Verso, 2012), 109-117.

It is Gray's naturalizing of original sin that Critchley will also attempt to overcome through the mysticism of Porete. The baseness of our condition resurfaces again in his chapter on *The Nature of Faith*, in the last two sections, *Crypto-Marcionism* and *Faith and Law*, where sin he argues cannot be separated from our condition as humans, for to do so would deprive the Self of its freedom.

Wilde's 'faith' responds by proclaiming that "Everything to be true must become a religion"¹⁵¹ - the central claim of Wildean faith for Critchley. He interprets this as an aesthetic fidelity to whatever one constitutes as true, the contents of which he might describe in *Infinitely Demanding* as 'a conception of the good,' but which are not necessarily important. However, the quotation also becomes the explicit declaration of what defines the *experience* of faith For Critchley, "What is true, then, is an experience of faith, and this is as true for agnostics and atheists as it is for theists. Those who cannot believe still require religious truth and a framework of ritual in which they can believe,"¹⁵² thus the need for a 'faith of the faithless.' For Wilde, his aesthetic fidelity is modelled on an *imitatio* of Christ's suffering. Christ is "the supreme romantic artist, a poet who makes the inward outward through the power of the imagination."¹⁵³ What Wilde is interested in is Christ's recreation of himself in an imaginative and aesthetic self-articulation that transforms suffering into a projection of love. As Critchley articulates, the paradox is located in the fact that a faith of the faithless, for it to be credible, must become a religion that is *authoritative* for the faithless and that this can only materialize if the faithless are themselves the authors of that authority. The question of authority reveals the parabolic nature of Critchley's discussion with Wilde, for it is precisely this question that Critchley continues to struggle with in the next chapter, the answer to which is dubious at best. Nonetheless, the example for Wilde is found in the example of Christ; "Wilde is able to become himself, to deepen what he relentlessly calls his individualism into a subjectivity defined by the transfiguration of suffering, the transformation of passion. In this, Wilde's artistic exemplar is Christ."¹⁵⁴ Thus, Christ is not a saviour in any traditional sense, but only a demonstration of subjectivity coming to terms with its suffering and loss in an artistic transformation. The possibility of artistic self-formation for Wilde is only possible under the conditions of socialism. The latter, Wilde observes rather one-dimensionally, is

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 3.

¹⁵² *Ibid.*, 3.

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*, 5.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 6.

the condition needed to eliminate poverty in society, thereby alleviating the pressures that force one to look toward others, and at the same time avoiding the dismissal of concern for ourselves in the process. Such socialism makes way for a utopian individualism. However, this political expression ignores the pain that it seeks to transcend in the first place. It is for this reason that Critchley will describe Wilde's experience not as individualism, but as 'dividualism,' for the self-articulation and self-mastery of Wilde's subject is insufficient until it appears face-to-face with an infinite demand that exposes our loss and impotence. In the previous chapter, we saw more precisely how Critchley constructs his dividual subject in relation to this infinite demand. Here we see it again as that which "allows us to become the subjects of which we are capable by dividing us from ourselves, by forcing us to live in accordance with an asymmetrical and unfulfillable demand – say the demand to be Christlike – while knowing that we are all too human."¹⁵⁵ It is this demand that requires an experience of faith and is the point of reference for Wildean faith.

The Fictions of Politics

With the parable of Critchley's faith in place, he turns next to politics in *The Catechism of the Citizen*.¹⁵⁶ Here he shows that Rousseau deliberately employs the politicization of the theological concept 'catechism' in a letter to Voltaire that requests of him a poem along these lines. The latter implying the notion of a civil religion later explicated in *The Social Contract*. There the problem of the political, what Critchley calls a 'paradox of Sovereignty,' is drawn inexorably toward its religious dimension. Which is to say, according to Critchley, "Rousseau's purportedly purely internal or *immanentist* conception of the being of politics requires a dimension of externality or *transcendence* in order to become effective."¹⁵⁷ It is then the question of whether or not politics is *practicable* without religion that Critchley seeks to answer through his close reading of Rousseau, which turns on the notion of *fiction* in politics.

'Practicability' in the quasi-religious and political sense can also be understood as that which motivates, shapes and mobilizes people for political action. This is the political form

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid*, 7.

¹⁵⁶ See 'The Catechism of the Citizen' in *The Faith of the Faithless: Experiments in Political Theology* (London: Verso, 2012), 21-102.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid*, 23.

of Critchley's ethics – the *Faktum*, the moment of heteronomy experienced by the subject as it faces an infinite demand, placed in obligation to the face of 'the Other.' Notably, the acknowledgment of the religious dimension of the political, or the presence of the sacred, is an uneasy one for an atheist like Critchley. He describes such a conclusion as providing "no particular joy," and the re-theologizing of politics as "the darkest period in my lifetime."¹⁵⁸ In his close reading of Rousseau, Critchley draws attention to the chapter on civil religion that did not appear in the final manuscript of *The Social Contract* but appeared as an appendage scribbled on the verso of the Geneva Manuscript. The reasons for which are owing to Rousseau's own doubt about the place of religion in relation to politics. Critchley observes, however, that it is the content of this chapter, which is the site of the solution to the problem of politics that Rousseau is attempting to solve. Rousseau's dilemma revolves around answering the question, 'why does the need for political institutions arise?' After showing how human beings are incapable of governing themselves with the assistance of natural law, he goes on to point out the tension that arises between a private individualism and the public good. In order for people within society to act for the latter, divine will must be rejected, as this will lead to fanaticism. Instead, he appeals to philosophy but again vacillates, since philosophy turns us back to the human race, inciting the individualism against which he is guarding. Unable to think through this deadlock, Rousseau concedes that there is a motivational inadequacy in the philosophical account and that there should be a description of a political religion.¹⁵⁹ Critchley then makes the following conclusion; what is necessary is the need for *fictions* or *fictional forces* that are "other than philosophical in order to unite the general will with interest to act on that will."¹⁶⁰ This admission points not only to the fact that a blithe atheist tendency to remove religion from politics is highly improbable, but also that what lies at the heart of authentic politics seems to be the necessity of at least vague transcendent assumptions. Continuing his discussion with Rousseau, Critchley experiments with the latter through the concepts of sovereignty and fiction.

The *Social Contract*, contra the English-speaking world, which seems to aggregate it as an apologetic for liberalism is, in fact, a critique of liberal individualism emanating from a popular sovereign. The general will of the latter Critchley indicates, "is not private interest

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid*, 25.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid*, 29-34.

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid*, 34.

but the common interest that tends towards the public good...To choose in accordance with the general will is not to choose in relation to my particular, private interest but in line with what I see as good for the form of political association as a whole.”¹⁶¹ Drawing the contrast with the Hobbesian monarch that represents the sovereign who legislates for society, Critchley shows that, for Rousseau, the act of law making arises out of the act of the general will of the people, as an expression of that will. The Rousseauian case is one in which the subject and the sovereign are identical, where there is no distinction that orders the power of one over the other. However, this becomes a qualified generality, for the sovereign people transform themselves into a government; “the establishment of legitimate government necessarily requires a passage *through* democracy, and from there into the elective aristocracy that he [Rousseau] recommends as the most felicitous form of government.”¹⁶²

Referring to the series of *decalagés* (displacements, tensions, ambiguities) that Rousseau’s thinking exhibits, Critchley indicates the contradictory move that Rousseau’s argument conceptualizes – Rousseau is positing that the general will must manifest in particularity. The paradox is upheld in the function of the law; following the argument to this point, if it is the case that the law is an act of the general will, then the authority given to this act, is a ‘self-authority.’ The latter remains consistent with the immanentist conception of politics that Rousseau is after, however, *without* a heteronomous source for this authority the self-authorizing of the general will in legislative action becomes, Critchley notes, a “collective narcissus.”¹⁶³ Between the persistent tensions of the popular sovereign and government - the general and the particular - what constitutes the animating force that authorizes the law between these tensions, at once rejecting monarchical dictatorship and collective narcissism, is the heart of what Critchley sees as Rousseau’s paradox. This is found in the notion of the ‘legislator’ and subsequently the inextricable relationship of politics, law, and transcendence. At this threshold - a deadlock of paradoxes - Critchley’s use of Rousseau steps into the realm of the quasi-transcendental. As we will see below, however, Critchley will relentlessly refer to this realm by varying descriptions of *fictions*. Within this philosophically vacuous space, it can be seen that the philosopher is drawn necessarily to a ‘folding back’ into the theological resources from which it attempts to emancipate itself.

¹⁶¹ *Ibid*, 42.

¹⁶² *Ibid*, 58.

¹⁶³ *Ibid*, 60.

Critchley, in our parlance, is wrestling with this very problematic as an atheistic philosopher attempting to philosophize for ‘the secularist.’

The legislator is the one that exists outside the law, he “belongs neither to the order of nature, as he intervenes in politics by establishing the constitution, nor to the political order, because he is not subject to the laws that he declares. The office of the legislator is strictly paradoxical.”¹⁶⁴ The fictitious figure of the legislator provides the possibility of legislative authority, however, this is only possible with reference to religious authority vis-à-vis the transcendent. The mortalizing of this transcendent authority, Rousseau rightly interprets, is the point of dictatorship and tyranny. This anticipates the familiar idea within political philosophy; the legal suspension of the law (or *iustitium*) during times of national emergency, executed by the sovereign - the one who has power to decide on the state of exception.¹⁶⁵

Rousseau’s fictional legislator solves the problem of authority with respect to the law. His next task is to address the problem of civil religion, which can be thought of as “a profession of faith that is paradoxically both transcendent and subordinate to the immanence of popular sovereignty.”¹⁶⁶ Critchley introduces this problem by referencing *The Broken Covenant* (1975),¹⁶⁷ a classic formulation of American civil religion by Robert Bellah. For Bellah, despite the doctrine of the separation of church and state, what underpins American life, and more specifically, the political life, is a religious dimension.¹⁶⁸ This dimension is what he calls the ‘civil religion,’ borrowed from Rousseau’s usage of the term in *The Social Contract*. In an analysis of Kennedy’s inaugural address, Bellah shows that the religious dimension of the American way of life is not limited to private affairs, but is made evident in the ceremonial and ritualistic practices of its public political institutions;¹⁶⁹ the pledge to the flag coupled with the phrase ‘under God,’ the Declaration of Independence concluded by the motto ‘In God We Trust,’ to

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid*, 61.

¹⁶⁵ See ‘*Iustitium*’ in Giorgio Agamben, *State of Exception* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2005), 41-51. This concept has been thoroughly investigated by Agamben in the line of Carl Schmitt.

¹⁶⁶ Simon Critchley, *The Faith of the Faithless: Experiments in Political Theology* (London: Verso, 2012), 68.

¹⁶⁷ See Robert N. Bellah, *The Broken Covenant: American Civil Religion in Time of Trial* (Chicago, Chicago University Press: 1992 [1975]).

¹⁶⁸ For our own discussion we reference an essay published in the 1967 issue of *Dædalus*, that appeared eight years before *The Broken Covenant*, it contains some of Bellah’s original ideas in a more compacted form. See Robert Bellah, ‘Civil Religion In America’ in *Dædalus* 134.4 (2005), 40-55.

¹⁶⁹ Robert Bellah, ‘Civil Religion In America’ in *Dædalus* 134.4 (2005), 42.

name a few examples. He also observes, notwithstanding that the notion of a civil religion is not present in the texts of the founding fathers, it remains prevalent beneath the surface. Thus, through a particular idea of God – not distinctly ‘Christian’ by any means – a utilitarian, providential deity relating more “to order, law, and right than to salvation and love”¹⁷⁰ is shown to undergird “a collection of beliefs, symbols, and rituals with respect to sacred things and institutionalized collectivity.”¹⁷¹ The religious dimension in civil religion according to Bellah is deepened with the civil war, where new notions of ‘death,’ ‘sacrifice’ and ‘rebirth’ enters the civil religion.¹⁷² The notions of death and sacrifice and its relation to sovereignty and torture persist in the civil-religious imagination of the United States even today. This is nowhere more evident than in the post 9/11 policies of George W. Bush, where the defence of liberal democracy is presented in any masquerade from liberal killing and being killed. As Paul Kahn observes, the “means of survival is sacrifice, not because killing and being killed are effective tools – although they might be at certain times and places – but because absent sacrifice there is no sacred presence of the sovereign. When sacrifice disappears from the political imagination, democracy becomes a voting rule and popular sovereignty an aggregation of individual preferences.”¹⁷³ To belabour the point that American civil religion is healthy and thriving, Critchley intimates that Barack Obama’s entire political campaign for the presidency is a “mimesis of Lincoln’s political theology, right down to the location where his candidacy was announced in February 2007: outside the State Capitol in Springfield, Illinois, Lincoln’s last resting place.”¹⁷⁴

Critchley’s interest in Rousseau turns on the way in which the latter attempts to unite the political and the theological in the civil religion. Rousseau anticipates and rejects the contradictory notion for him of a ‘Christian Republic’ that such a unity might imply. Yet Rousseau struggles to find a solution to the question “how can love of the supreme, true, and universal God of Christianity be compatible with the love of the laws and the external rites necessary to draw citizens toward that love? What must be avoided is the anti-political nature of Christianity, on the one hand, and the political exclusivism and

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid*, 45.

¹⁷¹ *Ibid*, 46.

¹⁷² *Ibid*, 47, 48.

¹⁷³ Paul Kahn offers a lucid account of these notions in Paul W. Kahn, *Sacred Violence: Torture, Terror, and Sovereignty* (Michigan: The University of Michigan Press, 2008), 173.

¹⁷⁴ Simon Critchley, *The Faith of the Faithless: Experiments in Political Theology* (London: Verso, 2012), 70.

chauvinism of paganism on the other.”¹⁷⁵ Ultimately he decides on a ‘civil profession of faith.’ However, as Critchley laments, this is not as liberal as one might think, for Rousseau cannot resist ‘positive dogmas’ of civil religion like belief in an omnipotent deity, just punishment of the wicked, and belief in the afterlife, etc. For Critchley, the discussion with Rousseau leads him to three observations; first, in Rousseau’s system of conceptual *decalagés*, there is a moment of possibility for political association found on the one hand in the exteriority of the legislator giving authority to the law, and on the other in the transcendent notion of a deity that sacralizes the civil religion. However, the second observation Critchley draws, is that these conditions of *possibility* are precisely their condition of *impossibility*, as they inevitably unravel into violent abuse; “it does not require much imagination to see how such sacredness might be violently employed to legitimate the most ugly forms of state oppression and state terror.”¹⁷⁶ Finally, these two outcomes lead Critchley to a third; the identification of *fiction* in politics and the passage through it to a *supreme fiction*.

Conclusion: The Supreme Fiction?

Up to this point, we have traced closely Critchley’s reading of Rousseau as he deals with the problem of politics in *The Social Contract*. We have seen that, for Rousseau, the solution to this problem resides in an immanentist conception of transcendence, represented on the one hand by the legislator who authorizes the law, and on the other, by the sacralization of civil religion. Critchley’s argument now turns to the idea of a *fictional* force that enables ‘the many to be governed by the few,’ and leads him to a subsequent hypothesis of a so-called *supreme fiction*. But before we polemically engage these ideas, we note the manner in which Critchley suggests them.

In politics, there are multiple fictions at work, fictions that are required in order for modern political society to function. According to Critchley there is a double miracle involved here; the government requires a suspension of disbelief, and at the same time receives it. What does he mean by this? The government *requires* ‘the many’ to believe that they are represented by ‘the few,’ for, in order for them to represent the general will of the people,

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid*, 74.

¹⁷⁶ *Ibid*, 77.

they need to believe that they are imbued with the force of the general will. This is a necessary fiction, since ‘the many’ are not in reality *de facto* represented by ‘the few.’ In the U.S. for example, there is one representative for every 100,000 citizens.¹⁷⁷ The second miracle, miraculously, is that despite the force of politics residing in the many, they wilfully *submit* to the few, since they believe the fiction that they are themselves represented by the few who embody their collective will. This double miracle is essentially two sides of the same coin; the government *requires* fiction, and also *receives* fiction.¹⁷⁸ The metamorphosis of sacralization for Critchley rests in the fact that this fiction never leaves us; it just gives way to the next version of itself,¹⁷⁹ thus the metamorphosis from the fiction of the divine right of kings to the fiction of the popular sovereign. This sacralization of the popular sovereign is what Rousseau accomplishes in *The Social Contract*; Rousseau politicizes the theological. Citing Patrick Riley¹⁸⁰ Critchley observes that “The general will is transformed from God’s supposed will to save all men into the human will insofar as one wills as a citizen and which can provide the key to political legitimacy.”¹⁸¹ The retention of the theological moment in the immanentization of the transcendent to sacralize the popular sovereign, not only remains a *fiction* but also taking it a step further, is a lie, albeit a ‘noble lie.’¹⁸² However noble, the fiction is necessary, as Critchley concludes; “Politics requires fictions of the sacred and rituals of sacralization for its legitimation, and these fictions need to be exposed for what they are.”¹⁸³ The current political dispensation in the West invokes these fictions. In South African politics there is no exception; political mouthpieces claim to speak on behalf of millions of voting South Africans. If we adhere to this line of thought, the fictive notion of ‘representation’ is cast in a disturbing new light, especially when the authenticity of this fictive representation is evaluated. It is clear that the need to continue to expose these fictions is a task that Critchley rightly endorses.

On his view; in “the realm of politics, law, and religion, there are *only* fictions.”¹⁸⁴ Critchley does not see this as a sign of weakness but as a source of possible strength. The

¹⁷⁷ *Ibid*, 88.

¹⁷⁸ *Ibid*, 81-82.

¹⁷⁹ Critchley owes this thought to Edmund Morgan’s *Inventing the People: The Rise of Popular Sovereignty in England and America*.

¹⁸⁰ Patrick Riley, *The General Will Before Rousseau* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986.)

¹⁸¹ Simon Critchley, *The Faith of the Faithless: Experiments in Political Theology* (London: Verso, 2012), 83.

¹⁸² *Ibid*, 86.

¹⁸³ *Ibid*, 90.

¹⁸⁴ *Ibid*, 91.

entire operation of government rests on these fictions, and since no alternative has yet been envisioned, Critchley deliberately steps into the realm of speculation by an expansion of the concept of fiction into, what he calls, a ‘*supreme fiction*’ in politics following Wallace Stevens. This turn marks a point of contention in Critchley’s reading as well as the ‘strained hermeneutics’ referred to above. The *supreme fiction* in politics is where Critchley has argued for the reluctant necessity of fictional religious transcendence in order to bind and motivate, and appears at a threshold in Rousseau’s discourse. The latter’s conflation of transcendent religious loyalty that is channelled into loyalty toward civic religion, which requires ‘fictions,’ becomes inevitably and dangerously intolerant.¹⁸⁵ To circumvent a dangerous deterioration into totalitarian forms of Rousseau’s civil religion, Critchley needs to create distance. In the language of *fiction*, we need a shared space for *belief* in fiction and *unbelief* in fiction. In other words, for politics to be *practicable*, we rely on transcendent categories that are filled out by religious ritual and other content, but in order to negate any manipulation of the content of these categories, the content itself needs to be transcended. Here is where the *supreme fiction* as Critchley defines it; “a fiction that we know to be a fiction – there being nothing else – but in which we nevertheless believe,”¹⁸⁶ becomes the condition required for distance. This is an aporetic approach that relies on an obvious and impossible paradox. To help think through this concept, Critchley refers to Wallace Stevens¹⁸⁷ and poetry’s ability to allow us to see “fiction as fiction, that is, to see the fictiveness or contingency of the world.”¹⁸⁸ The connection between fiction and belief is made with Stevens because for him this is a matter of (paradoxical) faith. Quoting Stevens, Critchley says, “‘the final belief,’ he asserts, ‘is to believe in a fiction, which you know to be a fiction, there being nothing else. The exquisite truth is to know that it is a fiction and that you believe it willingly.’”¹⁸⁹ The *supreme fiction* is, therefore, an extension of the moment of fiction in poetry that demystifies “any empiricist myth of the given and showing the radical dependency of that which is upon the creative, ultimately imaginative, activity of the subject.” Stated more plainly Critchley

¹⁸⁵ Cf. ‘the dogmas of civil religion’ described above.

¹⁸⁶ *Ibid*, 91.

¹⁸⁷ In Critchley’s footnotes, his reference to Stevens come from two different sources of Stevens work; *Opus Posthumous* (New York: Knopf, 1989) and *The Palm at the End of the Mind* (New York: Vintage, 1967). Critchley also wrote a book on Stevens, *Things Merely Are* (London and New York, Routledge: 2005) where the connection between politics and poetry is not yet made by Critchley.

¹⁸⁸ Simon Critchley, *The Faith of the Faithless: Experiments in Political Theology* (London: Verso, 2012), 91.

¹⁸⁹ *Ibid*, 91.

notes that “the critical task of poetry is to show that the world is what you make of it.”¹⁹⁰ Bringing poetry together with politics in this way creates for Critchley the possibility of thinking creatively about the political in a radically new way.

The question now; what should we make of fiction and Critchley’s subsequent *supreme fiction*? On the one hand, we should note in the first place the ‘positive’ elements of Critchley’s reading at a broad fundamental level. First, while not comfortably so, Critchley affirms the inherency of the religious dimension of thinking in politics. The unfolding of the layers of this dimension reveals the intersections between religion and politics, and thus sheds light on the motivations behind contemporary political imagination. Thus, to recognize the influence of religion in history and society enables us to perceive a more authentic self-understanding that does not separate us from this history but informs its complexity. Secondly, Critchley has shown at the fundamental level that ignorance of the sacralizing tendency in politics, is to risk the deterioration into fundamentalist religious values that work themselves out in often violent and fatal manifestations. Finally, what Critchley’s reading implies, is that the conditions of a cohesive society, at least in part, reflect a dependence on transcendent categories of thinking that legitimizes systems of order and the sense of common identity.

On the other hand, Critchley’s proposal of a secular commitment to politics that is rooted in religious/political fiction has questionable premises with equally uncertain outcomes. The first question hangs on Critchley’s use of Rousseau, considering the latter’s understanding of reality as influenced by the Enlightenment. In this regard, Jens Zimmermann observes that Critchley’s orientation as an atheist - which sees belief in God/gods as a resource, generated in the mind, necessary to respond to human political need - is based on acquiescence to a ‘contractarian’ understanding of reality.¹⁹¹ This contractarian understanding of reality, Zimmermann locates in Charles Taylor’s famous notion of the ‘subtraction narrative.’ According to Taylor, the secularization process is initiated through the loss of divine grace as the condition for ethics and the development of the theological doctrine of *ex nihilo* that disenchant the relationship between God and the

¹⁹⁰ *Ibid*, 91.

¹⁹¹ Jens Zimmermann, ‘Catechizing the secular imagination: a response to Simon Critchley’ in John H.A. Dyck, Paul S. Rowe, Jens Zimmermann (eds.) *Politics and the Religious Imagination* (New York, Routledge: 2010).42-56.

created order by distancing the two from each other.¹⁹² Coupled with this development, the added epistemological feature of this process is “the assumption that a universal measure of our humanity can be detached from its religious origins and sustained, perhaps improved, or even conjured up by the creative power of human reason itself.”¹⁹³ Despite what we have seen as an admission of the transcendent in Critchley’s thinking, what we may describe as a reserved agnostic stance, he nonetheless grips onto an immanentist conception of reality.

Together with Rousseau’s “contestable assumption of the modernist individualistic self, binding itself voluntarily to a collective,”¹⁹⁴ Critchley’s proposition of an imaginative self-creating of the supreme fiction of politics, is based on the same narrow conception of reality “whose false concept of autonomous subjectivity emerges from the subtraction narrative of secularism with its disembedding of the self from a larger cosmological order.”¹⁹⁵ This conception of history also explains why Critchley observes such a self-creation of fiction, as a ‘paradox of sovereignty,’ where a sovereign self must create a fictional sovereign. Zimmermann, drawing from Jean Bethke Elshtain,¹⁹⁶ further shows that due to Rousseau’s Calvinist heritage, he ultimately distorts the notion of sovereignty in his political formulations, arbitrarizing divine sovereignty and thus relegating the incarnational and relational model of God’s sovereignty. Without mediation between the spiritual and the governmental, “the state is no longer merely an interpretation or reflection of a greater authority to which it remains accountable, but the unmediated religion of the general will, this metaphysically propped up Leviathan cannot accommodate any other religion but its own.” With this in mind, Critchley’s expansion of the necessary fiction in politics to a supreme fiction slides into the very fundamentalist deteriorations he wants to avoid in Rousseau in the first place. Zimmermann’s critique of Critchley’s supreme fiction initially appears misdirected, when in fact it should be directed at the *fictions* found in Rousseau. We might pre-empt Critchley’s rebuttal by saying that it is precisely to *avoid* a critique such as Zimmermann’s, that he posits the supreme fiction; for it is in the *fiction* of Rousseau’s conflation, not a *supreme fiction*, that the danger of fundamentalist dogmas can encroach. By contrast, the supreme fiction introduces the double requirement of belief and

¹⁹² *Ibid*, 43.

¹⁹³ *Ibid*, 43.

¹⁹⁴ *Ibid*, 45.

¹⁹⁵ *Ibid*, 44.

¹⁹⁶ Zimmermann references from Jean Bethke Elshtain’s, *Sovereignty: God, State, and Self* (New York: Basic Books (2008)).

unbelief into the idea of fiction, where unbelief becomes the moment that destabilizes any cemented authority the fiction might believe to possess by placing it in question. This hermeneutic remains a perplexing notion to digest, one that paradoxically seeks stability in instability and belief in unbelief. On a closer reading, perhaps Zimmermann's critique holds.

The thrust of Zimmermann's criticism is the evaluation that illustrates Critchley's consent to a subtracted understanding of reality that emerges out of the Enlightenment, as individualistic and autonomous self-creation. The extent of this claim is supported, we have seen, by observing that the notion of a supreme fiction is a requirement of the self to creatively imagine and subsequently believe a fiction that it knows to be a fiction. The kernel of this argument is that Critchley's subject creates this fiction *ex nihilo*, Zimmermann observes, "Is our vision of what humanity means and, hence, what politics should pursue self-created, imagined *ex nihilo*, or does it derive from a transcendent reality?"¹⁹⁷ On this reading, the supreme fiction is created by means of the imagination that taps into nothing; the self-creation of reality emerges out of nothing. Zimmermann, therefore, seems to be accurate in his judgement that this description requires a leap of faith; how do we create this fiction *ex nihilo*?

A closer reading reveals that Zimmermann's article is not based on the text that appears in *Faith of the Faithless*. His reference is to an article by Critchley, published in 2007, five years before *Faith of the Faithless*, titled 'The Catechism of the Citizen: Politics, Law and Religion in, after, with and Against Rousseau.'¹⁹⁸ There, an original formulation of this chapter's argument in *Faith of the Faithless* is presented verbatim, although with a particular and important distinction. In his discussion of the supreme fiction, Critchley brings together the fictional potential of poetry together with politics, insinuating that in their collision there might be a moment of supreme fiction in politics. Following this collision two responses are given in the 2007 article and in *Faith of the Faithless*, respectively; "This requires that we begin to start thinking about politics as radical *creation ex nihilo*, as bringing something into being out of nothing."¹⁹⁹ However, in a revealing redaction of the text that appears in *Faith of the Faithless* subsequently, this

¹⁹⁷ *Ibid*, 46.

¹⁹⁸ See Simon Critchley, 'The Catechism of the Citizen: Politics, Law and Religion in, after, with and Against Rousseau' in *Law and Humanities* 1.1 (2007), 79-109.

¹⁹⁹ *Ibid*, 108. Original emphasis.

sentence appears; “This requires that we begin to start thinking about politics as *radical creation*, as the possibility of what Rousseau called ‘perfected art,’ which might repair ‘the ills that the beginnings of art caused to nature.’”²⁰⁰

Critchley omits the *ex nihilo* claim, and replaces it with an ambiguous quotation from Rousseau. It can be contended, then, that Zimmermann’s critique (and maybe others), draws out the shortfall of Critchley’s supreme fiction in a way that demonstrates the incompatibility between a subject creating *ex nihilo* and the utilitarian goal of religion and transcendence, which by definition cannot create out of nothing. Therefore, Critchley’s later omission should be understood as a recognition of this critique, that nevertheless serves to hold his paradoxical hermeneutic in place, by ensuring that this contradiction remains open, viz., for Critchley in *Faith of the Faithless*, the supreme fiction is the fiction we know to be a fiction in which we nevertheless believe, with its imaginative creation exhumed *ex nihilo* no longer, but is now exhumed with no specificity relating to its source. Further evidence that Critchley has amended his thinking again resides in a revealing comparison between the conclusions of the text of the 2007 article, and the redacted version in *Faith of the Faithless*. Following Critchley’s reminder that a Rousseauian ‘catechism of the citizen’ would represent the supreme fiction he has described, and that the catechism Rousseau seeks from Voltaire, should be in the form of poem, he concludes respectively;

“Is the fact that we are still asking for this poem a sign of hope or a symptom of despair? It is possible, possible, possible it is the former, *but the paralyzing prospect of the latter causes me to hesitate, and I suddenly see the fancy of a supreme fiction breaking up like an ice-flow. At that point, to be honest, I am not sure what to think. What can I hope?*”²⁰¹

“Is the fact that we are still asking for this poem a sign of hope or a symptom of despair? It is possible, possible, possible it is the latter; but it is also possible, possible, possible it is the former.”²⁰²

²⁰⁰ Simon Critchley, *The Faith of the Faithless: Experiments in Political Theology* (London: Verso, 2012), 92. Emphasis added.

²⁰¹ Simon Critchley, ‘The Catechism of the Citizen: Politics, Law and Religion in, after, with and Against Rousseau’ in *Law and Humanities* 1.1 (2007), 109. Emphasis added.

²⁰² Simon Critchley, *The Faith of the Faithless: Experiments in Political Theology* (London: Verso, 2012), 92. Emphasis added.

In the first quotation, Critchley himself admits to the paradoxical nature of the supreme fiction, and sees little hope in the materialization of such an idea, for his hope has to “not only overcome the obstacle of the human condition...but also the absence of God.”²⁰³ In the second, the aporia is left unmistakably present, and the reader is left only to wonder.

Critchley’s acquiescence to the subtraction narrative receives its explanation when one considers his philosophical disposition as an atheist searching for sources to support his political creativity, although paradoxically at the same time wanting to transcend the limitations of this disposition. To do so, his proposition calls for the secularist to do precisely what the secularist cannot do; to create a *supreme fiction* in a way that reminisces the function of poetry, and then knowingly believe in the pseudo-religious potential of that fiction. This contradiction exposes Critchley’s proposition as a last resort; requesting a subject to create a fiction ex-nihilo, where the latter is only found in the imagination of the subject. Indeed the supreme fiction is an infinite demand for Critchley around which the subject shapes itself in commitment to political association. If the experience of faith resides in the subject’s response to this infinite demand of the supreme fiction, then after what we have seen, the experience of faith is a giant leap perhaps no greater than the experience of the faith of the faithful, whose demand is infinite. Although perhaps a bit harsh, it appears along with Wallace Stevens quoted in the epigraph of this chapter, ‘one must become an ignorant man again,’²⁰⁴ in order to accept Critchley’s proposition.

²⁰³ Jens Zimmermann, ‘Catechizing the secular imagination: a response to Simon Critchley’ in John H.A. Dyck, Paul S. Rowe, Jens Zimmermann (eds.) *Politics and the Religious Imagination* (New York, Routledge: 2010), 50, 51.

²⁰⁴ Wallace Stevens, *Collected Poems of Wallace Stevens* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1971), 380.

Chapter 3: Faith and Love

*“God of his divine majesty sees himself in her, and by him this Soul is so illuminated that she cannot see that anyone exists, except only God himself, from whom all things are”*²⁰⁵ – Marguerite Porete

Introduction

The agenda which undergirds Simon Critchley’s experiments is to answer the question of how those without faith can be invigorated with a faithless faith for authentic political engagement, and to do so in a way that avoids, the violent conflation of religion and politics, the liberalism that panders to constitutional norms, authoritarianisms, and a political realism that has at its end a secessionist passivity. In the first stage of our evaluation, Critchley’s horizon of faith took us through a description of the fictions in politics via a reading of Rousseau. At the end of the last chapter the beginnings of a hypothetical suggestion were given that sought to offer up a ‘faithless’ account of the binding force in politics, namely, a ‘supreme fiction.’ This suggestion presented insightful analyses, but equally problematic outcomes, inter alia, a hermeneutical framework that is reliant on an aporetic account of reality, constituting a philosophical approach that espouses the tension between immanence and transcendence.

In this chapter, the second stage of our evaluation of Critchley’s faith of the faithless, we will see the return of the concept of a ‘binding force’ in a notion coined by Norman Cohn called, ‘Mystical Anarchism.’ Here Critchley offers another account of a faith of the faithless that marks, he admits, a new development in his work, with respect to what he calls a ‘politics of love.’ The kind of love that he has in mind takes its cue from medieval mysticism, which culminates in anarchic political formation. This chapter begins by

²⁰⁵ Margaret Porete (Marguerite Porete), Edmund Colledge, Judith Grant, J.C. Marler (trans.) *The Mirror of Simple Souls* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1999), 145.

investigating Critchley's account of the limitations in politics that emerge from a negative anthropology based on the doctrine of original sin. These limitations lead Critchley to the so-called heretical medieval writings of Marguerite Porete found in the mystical text '*The Mirror of Simple Souls*,' delineating the process of self-annihilation and emptying. After tracing these stage or states of annihilation, the result is the emptying of the Soul where 'the place of God's reflection on himself, in-himself and for-himself' takes place. In the latter a kind of love is evinced that makes the self literally nothing, and thus a space that God can fill. This, crucially, Critchley interprets as the overcoming of original sin and subsequently an expression of freedom experienced in the divine unity, an experience not limited to individuals but shared by all who are 'free in spirit.' This points to a communistic form of politics according to Critchley. The viability of his political suggestions is brought into a polemical discussion with a former student at the philosophy department in Essex, James Corby.²⁰⁶

A part of this evaluation considers the condition for Critchley's politics of love, suggesting a moment of the recognition of 'religious space,' that is to say, a religious space that serves as the condition for political space. The carving of a religious space, therefore, is shown to be an important move for Critchley's political ambitions. The creation of religious space is arguably the format of the experiments in *Faith of the Faithless*, in this regard then, we should take note that again Critchley's experiments into a faithless faith draw him inexorably into theological categories of speech, plumbing its depths for resources to incite political action. Finally, an experimentation of the theological moment in Critchley's politics of love will conclude the chapter.

Overcoming Original Sin?

Critchley's argument for a politics of love begins with an affirmation of a negative anthropology, viz. the doctrine of original sin. Original sin is the reason for which Carl Schmitt develops his theory of sovereignty, namely, the revival of 'the political' in its

²⁰⁶ James Corby teaches in the English department at the University of Malta. He read for his Ph.D. in the department of Philosophy at the University of Essex which was awarded in 2007. Although Critchley had already moved to the New School in New York by the time Corby had completed his Ph.D., the two appear to have an academic relationship. They collaborated in a 'Style in Theory / Styling Theory Conference' in November 2009.

dictatorial form commonly known as ‘the state of exception.’ For Schmitt, this became further necessary in the face of the rise of the liberal-constitutional state, which depoliticized the political by subordinating political decision to legal precedents derived from constitutional norms and subsequently filling them with endless procedural deliberation; “within liberalism, everything becomes everlasting discussion, the glorious conversation of humankind, the sphere of what Schmitt calls with a sneer, ‘culture.’”²⁰⁷ The restoration of true politics is made possible through Schmitt’s ‘decisionism.’ The decision is what breaks this endless cycle of deliberation in liberal democracy because it is not constrained by the law, and thus through the state of exception – the ultimate expression of Schmitt’s decisionism – the true subject of the political is revealed. Critchley observes, “The subject that is revealed by the decision on the state of exception is the personage of the state...and that the state must always stand higher than the law.”²⁰⁸ There is no need to go further into what becomes an implied argument for dictatorship in Schmitt’s decisionism, especially when one considers the constitutionalism of the Weimar Republic in the 1920s, coupled with the economic meltdown that led to the rise of Nationalist Socialism.

For Schmitt, a test of political theories and ideas can be found in their anthropological claims where “they consciously or unconsciously presuppose man to be by nature evil or by nature good.”²⁰⁹ For him, the sphere of the political “is in the final analysis determined by the real possibility of enmity, political conceptions and ideas cannot very well start with an anthropological optimism.”²¹⁰ Schmitt’s anthropological pessimism thus necessitates his rejection of any denial of the concept of original sin;

“The fundamental theological dogma of the evilness of the world and man leads, just as does the distinction of friend and enemy, to a categorization of men and makes impossible the undifferentiated optimism of a universal conception of man. In a good world among good people, only peace, security, and harmony prevail. Priests and theologians are here just as superfluous as politicians and statesmen.”²¹¹

²⁰⁷ Simon Critchley, *The Faith of the Faithless: Experiments in Political Theology* (London: Verso, 2012), 106.

²⁰⁸ *Ibid*, 105.

²⁰⁹ Carl Schmitt, George Schwab (trans.) *The Concept of the Political: Expanded Edition* (Chicago & London: Chicago University Press, 2007), 58.

²¹⁰ *Ibid*, 64.

²¹¹ *Ibid*, 65.

Indeed, Schmitt's political solution of original sin²¹² takes the form of authoritarianism, and this is, of course, the response he wants to level against the pervasive liberalism of his day. On the other hand, if one were to adopt anthropological optimism, that is, that human beings are essentially good, then the only response to liberalism for Schmitt is anarchism.²¹³ These contrasting anthropological points of reference are opposing ontological states with enormous political significance. By seeing humanity as defective, the state (and the church) becomes the means of control, "authoritarianism – in the form of dictatorship, say – becomes necessary as the only means that might save human beings from themselves."²¹⁴ When humanity is essentially good, anarchism expresses itself, not as the caricature of clandestine socio-paths wearing balaclavas and hurling pipe bombs, but as an expression of freedom from the state that allows the possibility of societal organization "on the basis of mutual aid and cooperation," and this is the appropriate response to liberalism. The idea of a political expression of freedom is linked to the theological notion of the expression of freedom from original sin. The latter becomes important for Critchley in his argument for a politics of love, viz. an *overcoming* of original sin for an anarchic political vision.

Critchley illustrates that original sin is not some archaic theological concept from bygone traditions; he notes that there have been several 'post-Christian' attempts to rethink this ontological defectiveness, including Freud and his theory of libidinous desire and more recently, Heidegger's phenomenological account of Dasein's lack of responsibility for itself and subsequent 'inauthenticity.'²¹⁵ In contemporary philosophy, Critchley turns to John Gray, whom he calls 'the Schopenhauerian European Buddhist of our age' due to his epigrammatic pessimism. Gray provides a compelling critique of liberalism that he sees as a political surrogate for religious salvation in the wake of a naturalized version of original sin.²¹⁶ Where Schmitt's response to original sin was authoritarianism in contrast with liberalism, it is political realism in contrast to utopian millenarian politics (of which liberalism is complicit) for Gray.

²¹² While Schmitt does us the phrase 'original sin' he does not mean it in a doctrinal sense. Rather the emphasis lies on the anthropological disposition that it implies, namely, evil. Evil for Schmitt manifests as 'corruption, weakness, cowardice, stupidity, or also brutality, sensuality, vitality, irrationality, and so on.' See *Ibid*, 58.

²¹³ *Ibid*, 60.

²¹⁴ Simon Critchley, *The Faith of the Faithless: Experiments in Political Theology* (London: Verso, 2012), 108.

²¹⁵ *Ibid*, 109.

²¹⁶ *Ibid*, 111.

Looking at Gray's argument more closely, Critchley observes that in his provocative Darwinian assessment, *Homo sapiens* are brutal killing apes, nasty and aggressive creatures that are more accurately described with the designation '*Homo rapien*,' that is, rapacious hominids.²¹⁷ Fundamentally, however, humans are metaphysically orientated and thus engage in various attempts, whether consciously or subconsciously, to overcome their defectiveness. For Gray these attempts are characterized, Critchley agrees, in dogmas of liberal humanism that espouse perceived conceptions of the good in ideals such as progress, improvement, the perfectibility of humankind, science and reason, etc.²¹⁸ Critchley calls this faith in progress a 'superstition' and the "reality of human progress is the barely secularized version of Christian belief in Providence."²¹⁹ What this assessment implies, is that beneath these secularist ideals there is a utopian political project that relies on a secularist faith in humanity's ability to overcome its own imperfections. Such utopianism points toward an ontological optimism for Gray that is by default an oxymoronic claim because it assumes human kind's ability to alter its defective ontological state. Utopianism in politics for Gray is related to *millenarianism*, which he derives from Norman Cohn's books *The Pursuit of the Millennium* (1957)²²⁰ and *Cosmos, Chaos and the World to Come* (2001).²²¹ In these works, Cohn traces the history of millenarian thought back to Zoroastrianism somewhere between the 14th and 11th century BCE and to 1st century Christian thought exemplified in the apocalyptic theology of St. John and St. Paul and their crucial identification of the Anti-Christ.²²² The latter is central to Gray's thesis; the incarnational logic of the Anti-Christ as evil undergirds Western civilization's justification for the extermination of the enemy, whatever and whoever that might be.²²³ This thesis would apply to the language of 'the enemy' during the Bush and Blair administrations, justifying their 'neo-liberal militarism.'

As we have mentioned, these utopian political forms for Gray lead him to a political realism that Critchley diagnoses as 'passive nihilism' – a response to the contemporary political situation that he argues should be refused. What is important for Critchley's

²¹⁷ *Ibid*, 109.

²¹⁸ *Ibid*, 110.

²¹⁹ *Ibid*, 110.

²²⁰ Norman Cohn, *The Pursuit of the Millennium: Revolutionary Millenarians and Mystical Anarchists of the Middle Ages. Revised and Expanded Edition*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1970).

²²¹ Norman Cohn, *Cosmos, Chaos and the World to Come* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001).

²²² Simon Critchley, *The Faith of the Faithless: Experiments in Political Theology* (London: Verso, 2012), 112.

²²³ *Ibid*, 113.

discussion of Schmitt and Gray is that it serves as the foil of his argument, which refuses the authoritarian and political realist response to liberalism by positing a version of anarchism that at the same time responds to and rejects liberalism itself. He draws his position by focusing on a medieval form of revolutionary millenarianism – that posits a way of overcoming original sin – found in the so-called heresy of the Free Spirit, which Cohn describes as emerging from those marginalized and socially dislocated in society. Although medieval millenarian mystical writings appear as a bizarre starting point, Critchley's interest here stems, on the one hand, from the anarcho-communal politics he has articulated elsewhere,²²⁴ and on the other, from the potential it offers for an anarchic association that finds its motivation in 'self-eviscerating love.'

The Mirror of Annihilated Souls

In Joanne Robinson's book *Nobility and Annihilation in Marguerite Porete's Mirror of Simple Souls* (2001), she describes what is at stake in one of the central writings of *The Movement of the Free Spirit*,

“Porete shifts the focus of Christian life away from systematic discipline based on the institutional church as mediator of all knowledge of, and access to, God. She thus explicitly rejects the tradition of affective spirituality by attacking the “works-based” ethic of the official church and by carving out a new path for what she considers the soul's eternal vocation: union with God.”²²⁵

The notion of divine union and its implied negation of ecclesial authority and tradition prompted the pronouncement of *The Movement of the Free Spirit* as a heresy and sent Porete to her death at the stake in Place de Grève, May 1310.²²⁶ Critchley highlights that this claim of *The Movement of the Free Spirit* has to do with one of two hermeneutical possibilities of 2 Corinthians, “Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom” (2 Cor 3:17, NRSV). The Lord's Spirit is either outside or inside the self. If the former is the case, as it is with the standard Christian teaching, then freedom only comes from a divine source outside the self. If the latter is the case, then freedom

²²⁴ See Simon Critchley's chapter on 'anarchic meta-politics' in *Infinitely Demanding* (London: Verso, 2007), 88-130, for his most systematic treatment of this politics as 'interstitial distance' from the state.

²²⁵ Joanne Maguire Robinson, *Nobility and Annihilation in Marguerite Porete's Mirror of Simple Souls* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2001), xi.

²²⁶ Simon Critchley, *The Faith of the Faithless: Experiments in Political Theology* (London: Verso, 2012), 122.

comes from within the self, and the church is in no way a part of the mediation required between the self and God. Critchley states, “If the Lord’s Spirit is within the self, then essentially there is no difference between the soul and God.”²²⁷ *The Mirror*, a didactic text attributed to Porete, was meant to be read aloud Critchley says, where it traces seven stages of precisely this notion of the soul attaining deification, that is, self-deification or auto-theism.²²⁸ It will be important for us to trace the logic of overcoming original sin in *The Mirror* for two reasons; first, the logic of self annihilation where a self becomes nothing, and the ‘no-place’ of the Soul becomes the place of God’s infinite self-reflection, is the condition for Critchley’s communal anarchic politics of love. Secondly, the logic of self-annihilation raises the question of ‘religious space,’ that must be cleared away for political space to take over. *The Mirror*, however, is a mystical text with distinct features that can appear convoluted at times; it has been called “a jumble of unrelated ideas and disconnected notions,”²²⁹ lacking in comprehensibility and a “highly charged theological fantasia.”²³⁰ Therefore, before we consider the stages of annihilation, a word on Christian mystical writing in general and on *The Mirror* itself in particular, is prudent.

Mysticism connotes an ambiguity of spiritual religious experience that claims to have encountered mystery. Theologically it attempts to describe this experience and textually it wants to articulate mystery that evades understanding with words. Concerning the latter, Nicolas Watson describes mystical writings as “phenomenological, concerning individual felt experience in addition to systems of knowledge or belief,” and “as transcendent, involving an encounter – whether direct or mediated, transformatively powerful or paradoxically encountered everyday – with God.”²³¹ As such, the nature of mystical writings, are by definition an *attempt* at expressing the inexpressible, Longchamp observes that there is “an irretrievable devaluation between the mystical experience and the account of it” and it is precisely this devaluation in mystical writing that “the mystic wants to remedy, for he has had the privilege of tasting things in their eternity, of contemplating them in the Word, beyond language.”²³² With some of these characteristics in mind, it is

²²⁷ *Ibid*, 121.

²²⁸ *Ibid*, 124-125.

²²⁹ Joanne Maguire Robinson, *Nobility and Annihilation in Marguerite Porete’s Mirror of Simple Souls* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2001), 34.

²³⁰ Nicholas Watson, ‘Misrepresenting the Untranslatable: Marguerite Porete and the *Mirouer des simples ames*,’ in *New Comparison*, 12 (1991), 124–125.

²³¹ See Nicholas Watson in Samuel Fanous & Vincent Gillespie (eds.), *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval English Mysticism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 1.

²³² See Max Huot De Longchamp, ‘Mysticism,’ in Jean-Yves Lacoste (ed.) *Encyclopedia of Christian*

not surprising that *The Mirror* is considered a classic mystical text, which Robinson tells us, “is a dialogue in the Boethian tradition in which three principal allegorical figures—*Dame Amour* (Love), *L’Ame Adneantie* (the Annihilated Soul), and *Raison* (Reason)—discuss seven stages of the soul toward annihilation and glorification.”²³³ ‘Annihilation and glorification’ allude to the so-called *unio mystica* (mystical union), a common theme in Christian mysticism that was cause for great clerical alarm in its “espousal of a doctrine that included surpassing the traditional earthly path toward Christian perfection (as mediated through the Church and Jesus Christ).”²³⁴ The idea of union with the divine in Christian mysticism, Bernard McGinn shows, has its roots in Greek philosophy, specifically Plotinus’s view of *henôsis* or ‘oneing’ with the First Principle.²³⁵ This was then later taken up into Christian thought throughout the New Testament (Rom 5:5, 8:1–9; 2 Cor 3:17–18; Gal 4:6; Phil 1:19). With Marguerite Porete and the other Beguine mystics of the late middle ages, the notion of *unio* became possible for all believers from all walks of life.²³⁶ This was due to Porete and her contemporaries pioneering the introduction of the language of *indistinction* with relation to God into the vernacular. What is most dramatic about *The Mirror* despite its apparent heretical content, was firstly its production by a woman, and secondly, its preference for middle French over the dominant exercise of writing in Latin. Barbara Newman notes that despite Porete’s aristocratic stature – explaining why she was given numerous opportunities to recant – she was a pragmatist concerning language; “She saw no correlation between nobility of soul and knowledge of Latin, and thus no reason to refrain from teaching the most abstruse theology in the vernacular.”²³⁷

One can see the effect the subversive character of such a text might have; it would have undermined clerical authority, not only regarding language but also by absolving the clergy’s mediating role for salvation and relinquishing the dependence of the laity on the church. Paradoxically, texts that are written in a mystical register like *The Mirror* would probably not have been accessible to the laity despite being written in the vernacular. This

Theology Volume Two, (New York: Routledge, 2005), 1083.

²³³ Joanne Maguire Robinson, *Nobility and Annihilation in Marguerite Porete’s Mirror of Simple Souls* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2001), 34.

²³⁴ *Ibid*, 31.

²³⁵ See Bernard McGinn, ‘*Unio Mystica/Mystical Union*’ in Amy Hollywood, Patricia Z. Beckman *The Cambridge Companion to Christian Mysticism* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 200.

²³⁶ *Ibid*, 205.

²³⁷ See Barbara Newman, ‘Latin and the Vernaculars’ in Amy Hollywood, Patricia Z. Beckman *The Cambridge Companion to Christian Mysticism* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 228.

is because, as Newman explains, “the practices described and recommended in them require a high degree of leisure, interiority, self-discipline, and institutional support,” luxuries hardly come by for the peasantry of medieval Europe. This background offers us insights into the character of mystical writing, specifically that of *The Mirror*, and illustrates its subversive political potential. For Simon Critchley and our purposes, *The Mirror* indeed is an extraordinary example of a phenomenological description of faith, one that crucially clears a space for political formation.

Seven States of the Soul

The process to overcome original sin and attain the *unio mystica* in *The Mirror*²³⁸ occurs in seven stages or states through a dialogue between the allegorical characters of the Soul, Reason, and Love (Love is the personification of God, and is also identified with the Holy Spirit).²³⁹ It is to be remembered that this process is ‘upward’ toward glorification but is achieved through temporal and inward self-annihilation.

(1) In the first stage the Soul has already died to sin and committed to a life following the commandments of Loving God and Neighbour, and is achieved in a state or experience of Grace. (2) When the Soul has properly died to nature, the persistence of the imitation of Christ commences, however, what is to be stressed in the second stage, is that this persistence is ultimately futile. Robinson writes quoting Porete “God must do the rest of the work. ‘How the grain decays, how it revives and yields fruit one hundredfold through great multiplying, no one knows but God, the only one who does this work; but this happens only after the laborer has done his work and not before.’”²⁴⁰ (3) In the third stage, while the Soul has attached itself to the ‘works of goodness,’ being consumed by divine love, the Soul must now put to death the will and its determination for material things, for this is a distortion of true spiritual priorities. Critchley draws our attention to the violent nature of the subsequent martyrdom of the Soul, with its ‘hacking’ and ‘hewing’ at itself to

²³⁸ See Margaret Porete (Marguerite Porete), Edmund Colledge, Judith Grant, J.C. Marler (trans.) *The Mirror of Simple Souls* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1999) for the complete text. Here I refer to Critchley’s presentation of the argument in, *The Faith of the Faithless: Experiments in Political Theology* (London: Verso, 2012), 124-130 and to Joanne Maguire Robinson, *Nobility and Annihilation in Marguerite Porete’s Mirror of Simple Souls* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2001).

²³⁹ Joanne Maguire Robinson, *Nobility and Annihilation in Marguerite Porete’s Mirror of Simple Souls* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2001), 35.

²⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 40.

create a space for Love; “Such metaphysical masochism is the beginning of the painful process of the annihilation of the Soul.”²⁴¹ (4) Once this is complete, the Soul is now at a stage that has moved away from the first stage, a slowly stripping away of its nature and will, and now filled with an apparent abundance of Love. So copious is this experience of Love that the Soul becomes ‘intoxicated’ or to use Porete’s word, ‘inebriated.’ Indeed, the Soul believes it has reached the apex of perfection. Though dying to self, viz. to sin and nature, would be acceptable even by the Church, Porete then moves into the language of annihilation of the spirit. For Porete, the fourth stage is, in fact, a deception and the Soul remains under the burden of the will. (5) In the fifth stage then, it is in light of this sobering reality that the Soul sees the will, and understands that to will is to will evil, for the will is vitiated from the start. A paradox is thus created by the fifth stage, with the question arising, how does the Soul will not to will? This is impossible, for any act of the will is considered evil and, therefore, this stage is described as an ‘abyss,’ “the gap between the willful and errant nature of the Soul and divine goodness. It cannot be bridged by any action.”²⁴² (6) To overcome this paradox - to overcome the abyss - the Soul itself becomes the abyss. That is to say, after the ordeal of the fifth state, wherein the Soul realizes its depravity, torn between divine love and the will toward evil, the Soul is put to ‘rest’ between these two tensions as it comes to terms with its inherent lack. The Soul’s will goes through an extinction, without which the Soul ceases to be, or rather is completely ‘emptied,’ incapable of seeing itself or God. Crucially, what takes place in the sixth state according to Porete, “God of his divine majesty sees himself in her, and by him this Soul is so illuminated that she cannot see that anyone exists, except only God himself, from whom all things are.”²⁴³ (7) The seventh stage is the final glorification that only takes place with full participation with the divine after death. The sixth stage is, therefore, the highest state of union that one can reach in this life.

The logic of the sixth stage is critical for Critchley. What must be comprehended is that Porete’s goal is not a simple process of attaining deification. It involves an extreme and intense denial of the self, which includes nullifying the self so that Love may fully abide. It is a full removal of ‘I’ for ‘Love.’ Paul’s words in Galatians reflect this sentiment; “I no

²⁴¹ Simon Critchley, *The Faith of the Faithless: Experiments in Political Theology* (London: Verso, 2012), 125.

²⁴² *Ibid.*, 127.

²⁴³ Margaret Porete (Marguerite Porete), Edmund Colledge, Judith Grant, J.C. Marler (trans.) *The Mirror of Simple Souls* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1999), 145.

longer live, but Christ lives in me” (NRSV, Gal 2:20). But more than a denial of the self, Porete’s process reflects a violent and painful ‘decreation’ of the self in the name of Love. In the economy of masochism that renders the Soul null, Critchley locates the moment of political articulation, he says, “mine becomes thine, I become thou, and the no-place of the Soul becomes the space of the activity of divine self-reflection. Such an experience of divinity, of course, *is not an individual’s private property, but is the commonwealth of those who are free in spirit.*”²⁴⁴

The Politics of Love

At this point Critchley makes the move to the political, stating that the political form of the Movement of the Free Spirit, found in *The Mirror*, is a communism that is defined by the annihilation of the Soul that opens a space for Love. Love that replaces the Soul in its emptiness gives way to complete freedom. This is freedom not to private property but freedom to embrace God’s wealth of Love that is given communally to all. It is for this reason that the ‘binding force’ - akin to the ‘supreme fiction’ for politics we saw in the previous chapter - in this communism, is the ‘social bond of love.’²⁴⁵ The latter is understood as the love of the divine, and from it a communism is derived that, for Critchley, is higher in authority than the law. We saw in Carl Schmitt that in order to avoid a reduction into a deliberation process that is derived from norms, a decision on the exception has to be made that breaks this cycle. For Critchley this communism acts in a similar manner, he says, in “the communism of the Free Spirit, law loses its legitimacy because it is a form of heteronomous authority as opposed to an autonomously chosen work of love.”²⁴⁶ With the prospect of overcoming original sin now a reality, leaving the mediation and authority of the church in question, freedom is given a form that flows from the communality of the Free Spirit. Critchley resists the objection that this freedom implies licentious exuberance, for this is to miss the point, but rather Porete’s text speaks of a “*disciplining of the self*”²⁴⁷ and “a stringent and demanding ethical disciplining of the self

²⁴⁴ *Ibid*, 133. Emphasis added.

²⁴⁵ *Ibid*, 134.

²⁴⁶ *Ibid*, 134.

²⁴⁷ *Ibid*, 136. Original emphasis.

all the way to its nihilation.”²⁴⁸ In a certain sense, to use Paul’s logic, this is a freedom not from the law, but for the law.

The discussion of the Movement of the Free Spirit was for Critchley an example of a utopian political movement that might have the potential to overcome original sin, a movement that according to the trajectory of Gray and Cohn should be condemned. Since, as Gray might say, the attempt to overcome original sin is futile and humanity must ultimately accept its ontological defectiveness. Thus, the quest to overcome original sin is rendered a form of millenarianism not to be welcomed in the world. Critchley seeks an alternate lineage of interpreters that build on his critique of Gray’s implied passive nihilistic conclusions and offers a different position on such a movement.

Beginning with Raoul Vaneigem, one of the leading political theorists of the *Situationist International* alongside Guy Dubord, he defends the Movement of the Free Spirit by positing it as a precursor to the 1968 uprising in France. The Movement of the Free Spirit for Vaneigem casts a political vision that contrasts with that of the ‘spectacle’ – the term developed by Dubord in *The Society of the Spectacle* (1967)²⁴⁹ – which highlights the dystopian features of advanced capitalism in a developed expansion of Marxist notions of ‘commodity fetishism’ and ‘alienation.’ For Vaneigem, the Movement of the Free Spirit “is an emancipatory movement that operates in the name of life, bodily pleasures, and untrammelled freedom.”²⁵⁰ The Movement of the Free Spirit’s emphasis on the poverty of spirit functions as a critique of the market system “in which life is reduced to purposeless productivity and life-denying work.”²⁵¹ But for Critchley the anarcho-socialist, Gustav Landauer, who wrote at the turn of the 20th century,²⁵² provides a more compelling argument that makes the connection between self-annihilation and anarchism more explicit. In Landauer’s assessment, anarchism cannot be conceived of as violent, as forms of violence for him are despotic. Anarchism is rather a way of life that is concerned with an ‘inward colonization’ that can be described as “a new people arising from humble

²⁴⁸ *Ibid*, 138.

²⁴⁹ See Guy Dubord, Donald Nicholson-Smith (trans.) *The Spectacle of Society* (New York: Zone Books, 1994).

²⁵⁰ Simon Critchley, *The Faith of the Faithless: Experiments in Political Theology* (London: Verso, 2012), 141.

²⁵¹ *Ibid*, 141.

²⁵² Critchley’s reference here is to an essay written in 1901. See, Gustav Landauer, ‘Anarchic Thoughts on Anarchism,’ J. Cohn and G. Kuhn (trans.) in *Perspectives on Anarchist Theory*, 6.11. (2007).

beginnings in small communities that form in the midst of the old.”²⁵³ Inward colonization is accomplished by a conquest into the depths of oneself, indeed not by killing others, but by killing oneself in the mystical sense that resonates with self-annihilation in Porete’s account. What is crucial for Critchley is the denouncing of killing others in the subjective transformation of killing oneself. Thus, anarchism is not to be understood as violent rupturing of society to achieve political goals but is rather a question of “individuals breaking with the state’s authority and uniting together in new forms of life.”²⁵⁴ Critchley shows that since the uprisings in France we have been living in an extended anti-1960s, where the utopian impulse is disparaged. We are he says, all passive nihilists that continue to require a belief in original sin because we think there is something ontologically defective with humanity. Critchley’s desire is to move beyond such a stalemate by offering an alternative. He shows scepticism, however, toward contemporary manifestations of utopian millenarian movements – that echo the movement of the Free Spirit – because, for him, they fall into what he calls a ‘politics of abstraction,’ in the sense “of being overly attached to an idea at the expense of a frontal denial of reality.”²⁵⁵ He locates these movements in contemporary art forms and radical politics, the latter evinced by the Tarnac Nine and other groups like the Invisible Committee.²⁵⁶

Despite the weariness that Critchley displays to a politics of abstraction that is found in programs of sabotage, secession, and resistance - that cultivates “invisibility, opacity, anonymity, and resonance,”²⁵⁷ - he does not want to throw away the utopian impulse in politics. On the contrary, to lose this impulse in political thinking is to resign to the current state of the world and give up hope for any alternative. Indeed, this resignation in the West is nothing less than to remain under the auspices of liberal democracy and accept the ‘divine hand of the market.’ Here Critchley’s proposal of a ‘politics of love’ takes centre stage. Not wanting to digress into speculation about mystical union, what Badiou calls the ‘obscurantist discourse of glorification,’ he points rather toward the conditions that bring about ‘the immortal dimension of the subject.’ A politics of love is “the idea of love as an *act of absolute spiritual daring that eviscerates the old self in order that something new*

²⁵³ Simon Critchley, *The Faith of the Faithless: Experiments in Political Theology* (London: Verso, 2012), 142.

²⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 143.

²⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 145.

²⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 145-151.

²⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 151.

can come into being.”²⁵⁸ Love is an *act* of the self that opens up something new. It thus attempts to “extend beyond oneself by annihilating oneself, to project onto something that exceeds one’s powers of projection.”²⁵⁹ What Critchley is after is the paradox of love that is the suppression of the self to make way for others. It is the denial of the self in order to be orientated toward others, “a new way of conceiving the common and being with others.” In this way, within the context of a faith for the faithless, the mystical anarchism elicited from the Movement of the Free Spirit, is an experiment in political theology in so far as it postures a form of anarchism that maintains the utopian dimension in politics but which is crucially undergirded by love. The subtle emphasis in Critchley’s chapter, *Mystical Anarchism*, is placed on the moment of impotence, conceived not as weakness but as strength, since it is in weakness that the self can ‘project onto something that exceeds its powers of projection.’ This emphasis is a thought carried through into the next chapter in his discussion with Paul and Heidegger, but we should note its development here already in mystical anarchism.

Political and Religious Space

In the two preceding chapters an attempt was made on the one hand to read Critchley’s infinite demand with a theological point of reference, this revealed we argued, that at the core of Critchley’s theory for ethical subjectivity, there is an inescapable moment of ‘the theological.’ On the other hand, in chapter two, we problematized the notion of the ‘supreme fiction,’ where Critchley’s desire for the subject to imagine ex-nihilo is a request that requires epistemic self-deception for it to become operative. The latter, so-called ‘ex-nihilo claim,’ appeared in an earlier article by Critchley that is almost a verbatim copy of the later text in *Faith of the Faithless* except for a revealing alteration. While the possibility of a merely late editorial adjustment is not out of the question, what we argued is that the removal of the ex-nihilo claim could be seen as a corrective redaction. Assumedly aware of the paradoxical impossibility that such a claim would imply, Critchley excludes it, thus revealing that the imaginative source for such a fiction must be located in a realm other than the self - the ‘poetic-transcendent.’ This furthered the hermeneutical claim that has been underpinning our evaluations, namely, a struggle

²⁵⁸ *Ibid*, 152. Emphasis added.

²⁵⁹ *Ibid*, 153.

between the immanence/transcendence binary. Here, we continue our investigation of this thesis through a discussion of the concepts of religious and political space in Critchley's mystical anarchism.

To cue us into this section we turn to James Corby and his critique of Critchley's *Faith of the Faithless*.²⁶⁰ In Corby's reading of Critchley, he identifies three fundamental areas of distance or space - poetic, political, and religious. His concern is to what extent can these spaces be considered 'critical.' In the poetry of Wallace Stevens there is an affirmation of poetic space, expressed in Critchley's 2005 book *Things Merely Are*.²⁶¹ For it can create a 'critical distance' and thus foster a sense of calm that allows it to "push back against the world and perhaps even imagine it poetically transfigured."²⁶² Poetic space is not distanced from the world but is an experience of radical and critical indifference. However, Corby observes that Critchley seems to have distanced himself from this stance in *Faith of the Faithless*. There, 'lyric poetry'²⁶³ is subsumed into the passive nihilistic withdrawal found in John Gray's pessimism. In consequence of this failure of poetic space to resist ineffectual resignation, Corby indicates that Critchley attempts to locate *critical distance* elsewhere, namely, in the political sphere. Here, Critchley is sympathetic toward the secessionist movements already mentioned above, but as we have seen, they risk abstraction. His suggestion, therefore, of 'interstitial distance' as distance *from* the state but *within* the state, becomes the anarchic alternative developed in *Infinitely Demanding*.²⁶⁴ Since according to Corby, this option still takes convincing – "how is interstitial distance different from the indifference to the state characteristic of all forms of the political secession?" – he points to the third sphere of religious space; namely, the space of Critchley's 'politics of love.' The latter presents a way through this tension as the motivational force in politics that avoids the slide into abstraction. Through the annihilation of the Soul and the consequent opening of the self by its becoming nothing, God can enter, and the 'I' becomes 'the you'. The anarcho-communist leanings that

²⁶⁰ See James Corby in 'Critical Indifference in the Aesthetics and Politics of Simon Critchley,' *The London Conference on Critical Thought*, (2012).

²⁶¹ Simon Critchley, *Things Merely Are: Philosophy in the poetry of Wallace Stevens* (London & New York: Routledge, 2005).

²⁶² See James Corby in 'Critical Indifference in the Aesthetics and Politics of Simon Critchley,' *The London Conference on Critical Thought*, (2012), 3.

²⁶³ Simon Critchley, *The Faith of the Faithless: Experiments in Political Theology* (London: Verso, 2012), 116.

²⁶⁴ See Simon Critchley, 'Anarchic Meta-Politics' in *Infinitely Demanding: Ethics of Commitment Politics of Resistance* (London: Verso, 2007), 88-131.

Porete's mystical 'inward colonization' produces, then, represents the critical distance that Critchley has wrestled to find. For Corby, a commitment to the politics of love guards against the risk of abstraction and reconciles the tensions "between activity and passivity, self-emptying indifference and commitment, incapacity and agency, indebtedness and self-authoring, distantiated, solitary contemplation and close, communal praxis."²⁶⁵ This is what Corby argues as the clearing away by religious space in order to create space for the political. Critical distance, therefore, is "the consequence of religious space serving as a condition for political space."²⁶⁶ But scepticism persists for Corby; he asserts that Critchley's notion of violent self-annihilation slips into the passive abstractionism he is trying to circumvent, employing a kind of rigid finitude modelled on "a too-complete negation of the self."²⁶⁷ The consequence of this is an account of the de/creation of the self in a religious space that is deprived of 'affirmative collective activity,' or what we might call 'agency.' Critchley's chapter on *Mystical Anarchism* is indeed silent in this regard, with no account of agency as such; leaving unanswered the question of what *motivation* is required to stimulate critical distance.

The notions of 'motivation' and 'critical distance' are synonymous with the 'binding force' in politics and the sentiment of 'resistance to the status quo,' both of which are encountered in *Faith of the Faithless*. As we have seen, the articulation of these is problematic, either sliding into passivity or lacking in tangible agency. Corby's suggestion is for Critchley to return to poetry in order to cultivate a situation where agency may be realized. For Corby, Critchley is on the right path with his 'poeticopolitical task,' presented with the notion of the 'supreme fiction.' Where the latter poetically reveals the contingency of the world – thus allowing us to push back against it – and also presents itself as a motivating force around which political formation could take place. But the poeticopolitical task of the supreme fiction, according to our analysis, contains its own set of limitations that itself requires a giant leap of faith. In light of this, a theological questioning of the problem of motivation found in Porete's mystical anarchism is necessary.

²⁶⁵ See James Corby in 'Critical Indifference in the Aesthetics and Politics of Simon Critchley,' *The London Conference on Critical Thought*, (2012), 9.

²⁶⁶ *Ibid*, 11.

²⁶⁷ *Ibid*, 12.

The Theological Moment

In the process of self-annihilation, the relationship between autonomy and love is somewhat ambiguous; it appears unclear who performs the autonomous ‘work of love.’ This relationship is crucial; for to determine agency yields insight into motivation. If one proceeds in reverse order, in the fifth and the sixth state, the intimation is made that the Soul comprehends that it cannot will *not* to will, for to will is always to will evil. In the ensuing state of tension between love for the Divine Love and the inerrant will, the Soul is emptied and thus open to be filled by God who occupies the space of the Soul. The Soul sees neither itself nor God, and the ‘I’ then becomes the ‘you.’ This means that the Soul in the fifth and sixth state is in fact rendered *impotent* - when the annihilation occurs the Soul is no longer. The autonomous work of love then does not arise from the agency of the Soul in the fifth and sixth state, but is rather the place where “God reflects on himself, where ‘God sees himself of himself in her.’”²⁶⁸ In the first four states something quite different is taking place however. In Robinson’s description of the seven states she says; “souls in any of the first four stages continue to labor in some degree of servitude because they continue to possess will.”²⁶⁹ Here, the Soul has died to sin and to its evil nature and performs works that “imitate Christ in his suffering and sacrifice.”²⁷⁰ It would appear that agency resides here with the Soul, where the motivation for annihilation is autochthonous – originating within the Soul itself. But crucially, and this is the point to be emphasized, Porete sees the early stages as futile without *God’s* agency, Robinson explains:

“She provides an analogy for the necessity of God’s aid in human production by noting the role of work in the growth of grain. When ‘the wise laborer has plowed and hoed the earth and placed the wheat in it, all his power cannot do any more . . . and this you can see through the sense of nature.’ *God must do the rest of the work.* ‘How the grain decays, how it revives and yields fruit one hundredfold through great multiplying, *no one knows but God, the only one who does this work.*”²⁷¹

Porete is resolute in ascribing the activity of self-annihilation to the agency of the Soul but also subordinates it to the divine agency, the work of ‘the sower’ Robinson adds, is

²⁶⁸ Simon Critchley, *The Faith of the Faithless: Experiments in Political Theology* (London: Verso, 2012), 129.

²⁶⁹ Joanne Maguire Robinson, *Nobility and Annihilation in Marguerite Porete’s Mirror of Simple Souls* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2001), 39.

²⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 40.

²⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 40. Emphasis added.

“nothing without God’s aid.”²⁷² In Porete’s project, the delicate emphasis between the agency of the Soul on the one hand and the divine agency on the other, was historically interpreted as an exclusive work of the former, as we have seen this understanding of autonomy meant the relinquishment of ecclesial mediation and power as well as an implied licentiousness. The latter ultimately contributing to Porete’s indictment and execution. Critchley has shown how modern interpretations of this autonomous work acquiesce to variations of anarchic political formation, but vitally are most compelling in a ‘politics of love.’ But would the outcome be different if the relationship between autonomy and love recovered a more explicit emphasis on the work of the *divine* love? We have noted that the autonomous Soul is dependent on *divine* agency to complete its work; and also that the Soul is “then ‘carried by divine graces’ through the seven stages.”²⁷³ We might also add that, in the mystical sense, the Soul is on a journey drawn by God to become united with its divine source. Critchley is not shortsighted with respect to this divine agency in Porete’s annihilation; responding to Cohn’s criticism of the Free Spirit being ‘reckless and unqualified,’ he says “individual acts of willfulness are overcome by being directed outside themselves *toward a divine source*.”²⁷⁴ It appears therefore that motivation for self-annihilation depends not merely on the self but also on divine agency.

Critchley’s use of a theological heresy for his politics depends on an interpretation of the self that is individualistic and raises questions with respect to agency. This appears repeatedly in Critchley’s mantra of extreme self-negation: an “act of absolute spiritual daring that eviscerates the old self in order that something new can come into being.”²⁷⁵ But importantly, this self-annihilation is underpinned by a divine source as the basis for commonality. A reading that does not relegate the theological emphasis of the role of the divine source - that *enables* the self to negate itself and thus be filled by God who becomes the basis for commonality – sets equal weight to agency. With such a reading, motivation no longer originates from an autochthonous source alone within the self, but is also found in the enabling power of the divine. For Critchley, indeed, this may imply a return to Corby’s suggestion of some version of a supreme fiction that might be able to articulate a concrete account of agency. However, in Critchley’s ambiguous Kantian conception of

²⁷² *Ibid*, 40.

²⁷³ *Ibid*, 39.

²⁷⁴ Simon Critchley, *The Faith of the Faithless: Experiments in Political Theology* (London: Verso, 2012), 138. Emphasis added.

²⁷⁵ *Ibid*, 152.

reality that is shaped by an act of our imagination, one wonders if the question of motivation can even be answered within Critchley's horizon of faith. Nonetheless, what is pertinent in Critchley's political project is to advance an account of agency, which also receives its motivation in the divine, and thus allow for a communal political vision that might in actuality be realized.

Conclusion: Theological Conditions?

The second stage of our evaluation of Critchley's faith of the faithless has seen a new perspective of his secular faith coming to the fore. In response to a naturalized version of original sin, Critchley brings the theological directly into view with an investigation in what Norman Cohn calls 'mystical anarchism.' There, Critchley described a faith-based communism that is rooted in the idea of overcoming original sin. This theological moment is expressed in a medieval Christian heresy that annihilates the self. Complete annihilation opens the space for God to enter, providing the theological condition necessary for Critchley's anarchist politics. The latter was described in terms of a clearing of religious space in order to make way for the political. However, the theological condition, which is the shared communal space of those who are 'free in spirit,' was exposed as being too reliant on a negation of the self that confounds that which animates political formation. The notion of *divine* agency was proposed in order to balance an account of Porete's self-annihilation. The latter then creates an opportunity for politics that is motivated by the agency of the divine, which produces the possibility of a theologically re-worked notion of Critchley's 'politics of love,' into what now might be called a 'politics of *divine* love.' It is doubtful that Critchley's project is able to accommodate the latter considering his perspective on reality as a broadly *transcendental* Kantianism, which justifiably, debars the transcendent.

What should be highlighted for this study is that the faith of the faithless in mystical anarchism requires a *theological* condition for politics. This condition is explicit in Critchley's 'politics of love;' the way to materialize formulations of anarcho-communistic politics is through the de/creation of the self that makes room for God to fill the Soul. Secondly, we have seen that the act of 'self-evisceration,' that constitutes a 'politics of love,' is also dependent on the agency of 'divine love' to produce and motivate Critchley's

new political subjectivities. Third and finally, a faith of the faithless according to Critchley must come face to face and confront the ontological defectiveness of John Gray or original sin with respect to Carl Schmitt. Critchley's proposal to overcome original sin through mystical anarchism's auto-theism is not an attempt to challenge the doctrine of original sin in its secular garb, but to *overcome* the doctrine of original sin, and in doing so, find new ways of thinking through politics. The recognition of humanity's defectiveness is an important aspect of the faith that Critchley is describing and also speaks to the version of atheism he espouses. For people of faith and for those who are called faithless, the collective experience of ontological defectiveness or original sin is an important reference point for the shared and communal task of thinking through the contemporary political and ethical milieu.

Chapter 4: Faith and Heidegger

“They told me I was everything. ‘Tis a lie” – King Lear²⁷⁶

Introduction

“‘Paul’ became, therefore, the name under which religion seemed to return to itself in precisely that moment of finding itself dead or rendered the mere ‘dead letter’ of traditionalism, all of this installing securely a scrambling of religious and secular identities that is still with us, despite our efforts to feign a kind of ‘surprise’ about the ‘return’ of religion today.”²⁷⁷

The controversial figure of the Apostle Paul and his description of faith, if glossed over, would render a ‘secular’ investigation into political theology incomplete. One of the main reasons for this comes in a time where there has been a ‘scramble’ for ‘secular identities.’ When modernity realized that there was nothing certain about being purely secular or religious, it found that the only way to articulate itself was by means of the borrowed language and ideas of religion. In a certain sense, Critchley’s *Faith of the Faithless* is a part of this scramble for identities, as it attempts to articulate a faith for the faithless that relies on religious categories of speech. The main entry point, for secular theorists, into this attempt at articulating what it means to be modern, has been through the Apostle Paul. The move to Paul, Critchley interprets as unsurprising. To his mind, Paul has always been a reforming thinker and “a new figure of activism...the spirit of Paul the movement of

²⁷⁶ William Shakespeare, Jay L. Halio (ed.) *The Tragedy of King Lear* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 223.

²⁷⁷ See Ward Blanton, in ‘On The Post-Liberal Paul and a Mystical Militancy of the Everyday,’ *Angelaki: Journal of Theoretical Humanities*, 12.1 (2007), 27.

reformation.”²⁷⁸ In light of the condition of liberal democracy, late-capitalism and general sentiments of ‘political disappointment,’ the figure of Paul stands at the helm of particular continental philosophies located in the legacies of post-Marxist, materialist, atheist, and radical Left critical theorists such as, Schmitt, Agamben, Taubes and Badiou (we could perhaps add Critchley to this list) to name a few. One could also say that the so-called ‘return to religion’ is possible in so far as it has also been a ‘return to Paul.’ The connection to Critchley is discerned in the introductory comments to *Faith of the Faithless*, where he affirms the cliché of the ‘return to religion’ in contemporary theory, which for him is grounded in the reality of religious violence and war.²⁷⁹ Since what motivates such violence and war is the malevolent belief in a metaphysical God or some analogous form, the notion of faith must be directly addressed to interpret this crisis. The unsurprising characteristic of the return to Paul that Critchley finds in continental philosophy is, therefore, no more unsurprising than Critchley’s turn to Paul in *Faith of the Faithless*, where the latter is the principal representative of primordial Christianity with respect to a description of faith.

In Critchley’s *Faith of the Faithless*, there are two dominant foci of faith that his experiments in political theology seek to describe. The first we saw in the last chapter as a new development in his work, namely, a ‘politics of love.’ Where love is as an *act* of absolute spiritual daring that attempts to eviscerate the self, making space for love to enter. Despite the ambiguous nature of this program within Christian mysticism, Critchley sees in this theological transformation of the self a potential for anarchic politics that is undergirded by love, undermining the self in order to make space for the other. This aspect of Critchley’s atheistic faith – peculiarly reminiscent of Paul’s conclusion to the second chapter of his letter to the Galatians viz., “it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me” (Gal 2:19, NRSV) – pre-empts his anarchic political gesture and is also the connection to the second dominant foci of faith. The latter is none other than a conception of faith as a declarative *act*, more specifically, a *commitment* to an infinite demand and an *enactment* of the self, that *proclaims* itself into existence. It is in this final evaluation of Critchley’s experiments that the nature and formal structure of this faith take centre stage, which as we will see below, correlates to Critchley’s earlier theory of ethical subjectivity. The present

²⁷⁸ Simon Critchley, *The Faith of the Faithless: Experiments in Political Theology* (London: Verso, 2012), 155.

²⁷⁹ *Ibid*, 8.

chapter commences with three investigations into these core insights of Critchley's Faith. The first highlights the notion of *proclamation*. The proclamation of Paul mirrors Critchley's theory of ethical subjectivity, where Paul's proclamation constitutes his subjectivity in so far as it responds to a call – the infinite demand of the resurrected Christ. Critchley links his comments with Agamben's reading of Paul that describes faith as a 'performative force.' Indeed, the latter brings into view one of the earlier claims made in this project, namely, that it is Critchley's theory of ethical subjectivity – as a commitment to an infinite demand – that is the constituting force of his faith of the faithless. The precise content of the infinite demand we will consider in the third investigation of this chapter, which interprets Critchley's appropriation of Søren Kierkegaard's *Works of Love*. There we will see that Critchley's infinite demand, which involves a self that commits itself in fidelity to the demand, is the infinite demand of *love*. With the first and third investigation accounted for, the second involves Heidegger's reading of Paul in his 1920-21 lectures and is presented as the kernel of Critchley's attempt to give cogency and structure to a faith of the faithless. It raises four key contours of faith; *proclamation*, *meontology*, *the impotence of Dasein*, and the relationship between *faith and law*. These contours afford Critchley a re-reading of Heidegger's *Being and Time* specifically with respect to the double impotence and 'nullity' of *Dasein*, the latter giving structure for the interpretation of Pauline faith.

Paul and Proclamation

The recovery of the Pauline moment in primordial Christianity marks the gesture toward the 'return to religion.' This moment is not a move toward safeguarding the tradition of the church. On the contrary, the move to Paul evokes instability and what Badiou calls a 'new militancy' in an age of relativism, identity politics, and capitalism.²⁸⁰ For Critchley, this move is situated in a vision of faith, and an existential commitment to an infinite demand that is capable of facing down the mood of political disappointment in which we find ourselves.²⁸¹ The significance of Paul lies in the potency of the proclamation of Christ as the Messiah (Christ Messiah) and with its consequent implications. For one, this proclamation occurs as a response to the resurrection and asserts the 'in-gathering' of a

²⁸⁰ Alain Badiou, Ray Brassier (trans.) *Saint Paul: The Foundation of Universalism* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003), 4-15.

²⁸¹ *Ibid*, 157.

degenerate community. This is a politics of “the remnant, were the off-cuttings of humanity are the basis for a new political articulation.”²⁸² Secondly, the proclamation is to be carried through the tension of a historicity characterized by the ‘already’ and ‘not yet’ of the coming of Christ. It is, therefore, a proclamation that reacts to the urgency of the situation. But what fascinates Critchley is the reactive nature of this proclamation. He notes that nowhere does Paul, in fact, describe a conversion experience - except for the obscure passage in Acts 9 – rather, Paul’s proclamation is always seen as a response to a ‘call’ (*kletos/klesis*). It is Paul’s response to the call in proclamation that constitutes his subjectivity. Indeed, as Critchley writes “Paul is called Paul because he was called. Before the call, he was Saul or *Saulos*.”²⁸³ In the transition from Saul to Paul, however, Paul also became small; he is diminutized in becoming a slave to the Messiah. It is this antithesis of strength in weakness, what Critchley will refer to as ‘impotence,’ – “for whenever I am weak, then I am strong” (2 Cor 2:20, NRSV) – that becomes a dominant theme in Heidegger.

Critchley sees in Agamben’s commentary on the Epistle to the Romans a resonance in the theme of faith as *proclamation*. He notes that in Agamben’s books, most notably *Homo Sacer* (1998) and *The State of Exception* (2005), Agamben wants to create a space between law and life, where we know the law has to do with the juridification of ‘bare life’ or *zoē*.²⁸⁴ Agamben says that since Paul, there has been a stiffening of the law and as a result, faith has become exclusively sacramental and shored up in the affirmation of creeds and dogmas, “if the *performativum fidei* is completely covered by the *performativum sacramenti*, then the law itself stiffens and atrophies and relations between men lose all sense of grace and vitality.”²⁸⁵ Agamben, therefore, sees in Paul a recovery of the true essence of faith that can vitalize and perhaps even begin to restore the space between law and life. The connection to proclamation for Critchley, then, resides in Agamben’s re-interpretation of Pauline faith in the notion of an ‘oath.’ Faith, conceived as a kind of pledge, does not entail a belief in a metaphysical reality, and thus is not ontological at all

²⁸² Simon Critchley, *The Faith of the Faithless: Experiments in Political Theology* (London: Verso, 2012), 159.

²⁸³ *Ibid*, 160.

²⁸⁴ See Giorgio Agamben, Daniel Heller-Roazen (trans.) *Homo-Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998), here Agamben investigates the intersection between the juridico-institutional and biopolitical models of power. See also the final paragraph of Agamben, Kevin Attell (trans.) *State of Exception* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2005), 88.

²⁸⁵ Giorgio Agamben, Patricia Daily (trans.) *The Time That Remains: A Commentary On The Letter To The Romans* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005), 135.

but is “expressed in the more compressed pledge of the *Faktum*: ‘Jesus Messiah.’”²⁸⁶ The contour of faith Critchley wants to emphasize here is that faith is not a belief *in* Jesus Messiah; indeed he writes, “Being is not something that we can predicate of Christ through a constative proposition or even Hegel’s speculative copula. Rather, Jesus Messiah is something otherwise than Being or beyond essence, to coin a phrase”²⁸⁷ from Levinas.

Faith is not an experience in relation to categories of being; according to Critchley, it is not Paul’s faith in the historical Jesus (Gal 1:16-17), but rather the ‘performative force’ in the words of the proclamation, ‘Jesus Messiah,’ that constitute the experience of faith. To summarize “Faith is a word, a word whose force consists in the event of its proclamation.”²⁸⁸ This thought for Agamben, Critchley shows, is linked to Foucault’s idea of ‘veridiction,’ where the truth lies in the telling alone. Additionally, Critchley sees in Lacan’s *énonciation* (the subject’s act of speaking) and the *énoncé*, the transference of the act into a proposition, as also reminiscent of Levinas’s conception of the Saying and the Said. To further simplify this point, we could say in other words, that faith for Critchley is certainly not metaphysical or ontological, but faith consists as an *act* of proclamation, oath or pledge, that responds to the *call* of the infinite demand, and in Paul’s case also proclaims the calling of the infinite demand, ‘Jesus Messiah.’ For Agamben, who quotes Scholem, Paul is seen as a ‘revolutionary Jewish mystic,’²⁸⁹ riding contrary to the biblical justification for anti-Semitism typically confounded in the epistles. Critchley intimates that it is perhaps this anti-Semitic undertone that causes Agamben to be less forthright about owing his thought more to Heidegger’s reading of Paul than to that of Benjamin. It is through Critchley’s reading of Heidegger, however, that Agamben’s notion of ‘faith as proclamation’ receives its coherent structure.

Heidegger and Proclamation

Critchley’s relationship with Heidegger’s work is intimate. On the one hand, his early work required him to outline a clear description of the break in Deconstruction with

²⁸⁶ Simon Critchley, *The Faith of the Faithless: Experiments in Political Theology* (London: Verso, 2012), 164.

²⁸⁷ *Ibid*, 164.

²⁸⁸ *Ibid*, 164.

²⁸⁹ Giorgio Agamben, Patricia Daily (trans.) *The Time That Remains: A Commentary On The Letter To The Romans* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005), 144.

Heidegger's ontology, and on the other, to show the sustained influence that Heidegger's philosophy had on Deconstruction. This is the problem of metaphysical closure that Critchley articulates in *Ethics of Deconstruction*, a tension captured in the following manner;

“Levinas's ethical rupture with the ontological and phenomenological tradition can only be through renunciation of the linguistic resources of that tradition. The contradiction that is at work in Levinas (and which applies to the work of any philosopher, Derrida included) is that he can only accomplish such a rupture by employing the very resources of the tradition that he wishes to overcome: that is, the language of metaphysics (even an ethical metaphysics) and the discourse of ethics itself.”²⁹⁰

Heidegger pervades Critchley's subsequent work²⁹¹ and his interest in Heidegger goes further than just the relationship with Deconstruction. Notably, Critchley along with Reiner Schürmann also wrote, *On Heidegger's Being and Time* (2008),²⁹² followed by an eight-part online column series in *The Guardian* on *Being and Time* (2009).²⁹³ Reading Critchley with his ability to perform rigorous textual exegesis in German (and French for that matter) while at the same time drawing nuanced hermeneutical conclusions is a gift that enchants, but also deserves, therefore, its own careful reading.

Critchley's reading of Heidegger in *Faith of the Faithless* begins with Heidegger's early work during the crisis years after World War I. The latter, coupled with Heidegger's estrangement from the Catholic Church, prompted interest into so-called *Urchristentum*, or primordial Christianity, which in turn led Heidegger to Paul and the Pauline Moment in his 1920-21 lectures - published as *The Phenomenology of Religious Life*.²⁹⁴ Apart from the insightful analysis that Heidegger's reading of Paul recommends for Critchley's description of faith as 'enactment,' it also contains themes that would later become decisive for Heidegger's later project of 'fundamental ontology' in *Being and Time* (1927).

²⁹⁰ Simon Critchley, *The Ethics of Deconstruction: Derrida and Levinas* (3rd ed. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2014), 69.

²⁹¹ See for example Simon Critchley, *The Ethics of Deconstruction: Derrida and Levinas* (3rd ed. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2014), Heidegger is referenced throughout. *Very Little ... Almost Nothing: Death, Philosophy and Literature* (2nd ed. London: Routledge, 2004), 15-21. *Ethics-Politics-Subjectivity: Essays on Derrida, Levinas & Contemporary French Thought* (London: Verso, 2009), 51-82.

²⁹² See Simon Critchley and Reiner Schürmann, Steven Levine (ed.) *On Heidegger's Being and Time* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2008).

²⁹³ See Simon Critchley, 'Being and Time, part 1: Why Heidegger Matters,' in *The Guardian* (8 June 2009), accessed at: <http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/belief/2009/jun/05/heidegger-philosophy>.

²⁹⁴ Martin Heidegger, Matthias Fritsch and Jenna Anna Gosetti-Ferencei (trans.) *The Phenomenology of Religious Life* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004).

On this basis, then, Critchley will also offer a re-interpretation of *Being and Time* that looks to the notion of ‘call of conscience’ and its double function that culminates in what Critchley describes as a ‘double nullity.’ What is presented in *The Phenomenology of Religious Life* is an approach to Christianity that has its reservations. For Heidegger, Christianity has been penetrated by the ontological tradition of philosophy that stems as far back as Plato and Aristotle; he writes, “In today’s philosophy, too, the Christian concept-formations are hidden behind a Greek view.”²⁹⁵ This begins to presuppose Heidegger’s phenomenological interpretation of the Christian experience, one that is not reliant on history or the tradition, but is concentrated on the originary *experience* of faith. In the introduction to the “Phenomenological Interpretation of the Letters to the Galatians” he defines this approach; “Characteristic of the phenomenological-religious understanding is gaining an advance understanding for an *original* way of access”²⁹⁶ and “All concepts are to be understood from out of the context of Christian consciousness.”²⁹⁷ Heidegger’s skepticism towards the tradition – specifically the Catholic tradition – directs him toward a reading of Paul that defines the Christian experience in terms of temporality and proclamation. The temporal experience of Christian faith for Heidegger is seen in his particular Messianic reading of Paul that emphasizes an urgency with respect to the sense of time, which is activated through an *enactment* of life in proclamation. Following Critchley’s line of thought let us unpack this schema.

In the Pauline gospel for Heidegger, contrary to the synoptic gospels where the Kingdom of God was pronounced, it is rather the *proclamation* of Jesus the Messiah that is important; “In Pauline gospel, the proper *object of the proclamation is already Jesus himself as Messiah.*”²⁹⁸ In the experience of the proclamation of Jesus as Messiah resides the experience of faith. In Critchley’s interpretation, it is not in the constancy of biological life that life is enacted, but it is in the proclamation of the *euaggelion* that a ‘decision’ is made to *enact* life. What is crucial here is the epistolary component of this proclamation for Heidegger; “The proclamation is what enacts life. And the proclamation doesn’t occur in a treatise, but in a letter. This is because time is short and the situation is critical.”²⁹⁹ The manner or content of the way in which life is enacted through the proclamation ‘Jesus

²⁹⁵ *Ibid*, 73.

²⁹⁶ *Ibid*, 47. Emphasis added.

²⁹⁷ *Ibid*, 48.

²⁹⁸ *Ibid*, 83. Original Emphasis.

²⁹⁹ Simon Critchley, *The Faith of the Faithless: Experiments in Political Theology* (London: Verso, 2012), 170.

Messiah,' Critchley describes as 'Paul's Meontology.' We shall come back to this caveat of Critchley's faith of the faithless in a moment, but first it is the aspect of temporality that highlights the 'messianic' moment in Heidegger's reading. The notion of temporality that he develops in his readings of Paul turns on the interpretation of *parousia*. Critchley illustrates that Heidegger resists a Christian sense of time as 'objective' or 'ordinary' - what Heidegger calls 'vulgar' time. What Heidegger rather wants to suggest is that in life as *enactment*, "what gets enacted in the proclamation of faith is a certain relation to temporality" a "*parousia* as a futurity that induces a sense of urgency and anguish in the present."³⁰⁰ But what makes this insight all the more suggestive for Critchley, is that if seen in light of Heidegger's concept of time as finite in *Being and Time*, *parousia* functions in a similar fashion as 'being-toward-death.' Critchley says, "If, in Heidegger's magnum opus, time is finite because it comes to an end with death, then the end of time in Paul turns on the concept of *parousia* as the *eschaton*, understood as the uttermost, furthestmost, or ultimate."³⁰¹ Thus, faith as a proclamation that enacts life does so in a way that factual life is conceived in a relation to temporality that is marked by a sense of urgency within the present, a 'quasi-Messianic' moment Critchley says. This life that is enacted, however, lives not only within a sense of urgency but also is insecure.

The latter is heightened when Heidegger introduces Paul's Anti-Christ in his reading of 'The Second Letter to the Thessalonians.'³⁰² What the Anti-Christ incites for this community of waiting believers is not only the urgency already spoken of but also a sense of distress or 'anguish.' Heidegger describes, "The appearance of the Antichrist is no mere passing occurrence, but rather something upon which each one's fate is decided – even that of the already-believing."³⁰³ Critchley indicates that Heidegger connects this appearance of the Anti-Christ with his later theme of 'Falleness' (*Verfallen*) - the obscure term that Heidegger insists is not related to original sin or the fall of man from an original state of purity, but rather speaks of the ontological structure of Dasein itself as "absorption in, losing oneself in, the world of one's concerns."³⁰⁴ For Heidegger, indeed, this Anti-Christ

³⁰⁰ *Ibid*, 174,175.

³⁰¹ *Ibid*, 175.

³⁰² See Martin Heidegger, Matthias Fritsch and Jenna Anna Gosetti-Ferencei (trans.) *The Phenomenology of Religious Life* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004), 75-82.

³⁰³ *Ibid*, 80.

³⁰⁴ Paul Gerner, *Heidegger's Being and Time: An Introduction* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 110, 111.

“facilitates the falling-tendency of life.”³⁰⁵ The sense of anguish, distress, and urgency that the falling-tendency of life in the world evokes through the *parousia* and the Anti-Christ reveals a crucial dialectic in the understanding of the proclamation of faith. While the proclamation ‘Jesus Messiah’ enacts life in so far as it is a decision to *enact*, what the relation to temporality demonstrates - which is activated by the *parousia* and heightened by the Anti-Christ - is that there is a simultaneous sense in which the world is falling. The world, as Critchley notes, is *abfallend*, “in the sense of both falling, dropping, or melting away, but also becoming *Abfall*, waste, rubbish, or trash.”³⁰⁶ Thus, paradoxically, “in proclaiming faith and enacting life, the world becomes trash and we become the trash of the world.”³⁰⁷ In proclaiming life, we become a part of the world’s wasting away. This duality in Heidegger’s reading of Paul leads to the central feature of the faith of the faithless, namely the essential weakness, or impotence of the subject, what Taubes calls “a profound powerlessness.”³⁰⁸

Living ‘As If Not’

“I mean, brothers and sisters, the appointed time has grown short; from now on, let even those who have wives be as though they had none, and those who mourn as though they were not mourning, and those who rejoice as though they were not rejoicing, and those who buy as though they had no possessions, and those who deal with the world as though they had no dealings with it. For the present form of this world is passing away.” (1 Cor 7:29-32, NRSV)

For those engaged in the ‘return to religion’ through a ‘return to Paul,’ the above passage from the Corinthians is seen as essential. The reason for this appears to be the commonly underwritten motivation within the interpretations of Badiou, Agamben, Taubes and Žižek, namely, the text’s ability to “aid radical thinking in keeping politics radical in an age of post-politics.”³⁰⁹ The ‘radical’ element of this passage is in the repetition of the *hos me* (ὥς μὴ) clause, that can be rendered ‘as not.’ For Critchley, the theme protruding this text is a

³⁰⁵ See Martin Heidegger, Matthias Fritsch and Jenna Anna Gosetti-Ferencei (trans.) *The Phenomenology of Religious Life* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004), 80.

³⁰⁶ Simon Critchley, *The Faith of the Faithless: Experiments in Political Theology* (London: Verso, 2012), 176.

³⁰⁷ *Ibid*, 176.

³⁰⁸ Jacob Taubes, Dana Hollander (trans.) *The Political Theology of Paul* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004), 83.

³⁰⁹ See Ola Sigurdson, ‘Beyond Secularism? Towards a Post-Secular Political Theology,’ in *Modern Theology* 26.2 (April 2010), 184, whom we will refer to later.

nihilistic political theology, on the one hand, the falling away of the world into nothing, and on the other; that which replaces this nothing, *is* nothing, in the sense that the waiting community must live ‘as if not.’³¹⁰ How is this to be understood? Critchley describes that what is being accounted for here is what he calls a ‘double meontology’ in Paul. Where an account of ontology reflects on the notion of ‘being,’ meontology by contrast reflects on ‘not being.’ Thus, Paul’s injunction to the community is to live as if the Roman Imperium is passing away, but importantly, that this way of living is also a ‘non-living’ or ‘non-being’ in a certain sense. To further help understand what is being conceived here, Critchley points to Badiou’s interpretation where he says “Paul is announcing something that, in Badiou’s terms, breaks with the order of being in the name of an event which is *not*.”³¹¹ What is being imagined is a world that is falling away (*hos me*), and a subsequent living, *hos me*, in order to bring about the *parousia*. The event ‘which is not’ is an ‘indiscernibility’ for Badiou which “breaks the order of being.”³¹² The latter points to an implied impotence or weakness in the subject that can be compressed into the double meontology, summarized by Critchley as; “God *has chosen the things that are not in order to bring to nothing the things that are*.”³¹³

For Heidegger’s 1920-21 lectures, contrary to Agamben’s accusation that Heidegger only ‘briefly comments’ on the passage above, Critchley shows that the meontology of the *hos me* clause becomes, in fact, the culmination of the lecture. Heidegger asks the question, how, after “Christians have been called and have enacted their faith and indeed life in the proclamation ‘Jesus himself as Messiah,’”³¹⁴ should they comport themselves in the midst of this falling world? For Heidegger, as for Paul, “the indeed existing (*daseienden*)

³¹⁰ Within the South African context, the theme of the ‘waiting community’ that lives ‘as if not,’ is picked up by the late Prof. Russel Botman, former Rector and Vice-Chancellor of Stellenbosch University. In the first memorial lecture given in his name by Dirkie Smit on 19 October, 2015 entitled, “*Making History for the Coming Generation*” - *On the Theological Logic of Russel Botman’s Commitment to Transformation*, Smit shows how Botman was drawn naturally to this language of Pauline ethics, but recast it into his own project of transformation. Smit writes, “Pauline ethics is eschatological ethics, explained Botman, the form of this world is passing away, it is being *transformed*.” Cf. pg.5. The central role that the terminology of transformation, understood as ‘living as if not,’ played in Botman’s ‘theological logic’ is perhaps nowhere better evinced than in the title of his *Festschrift* “Om te leef asof nie,” (To live as if not) which was written by Smit and published just after his death in 2014. See Dirkie Smit, *Om te leef asof nie: Meditasies opgedra aan Russel Botman* (Wellington: Bybelkor, 2014).

³¹¹ Simon Critchley, *The Faith of the Faithless: Experiments in Political Theology* (London: Verso, 2012), 178.

³¹² *Ibid*, 179.

³¹³ *Ibid*, 179. Original emphasis.

³¹⁴ *Ibid*, 179.

significances of real life are lived *hos me*, as if not.”³¹⁵ But this remains ambiguous with respect to *how* one should live as if not (*hos me*). Thus, Critchley sees Heidegger’s treatment of the infinitive *genesthai* (to become) a little earlier in 1 Corinthians 7:21, as understood in the same sense of Heidegger’s ‘becoming’ (*Werden*). The implication for this verbal association is that Christians should remain in the state in which they have *become*, that is, to look at the world “from the standpoint of what one has become through the proclamation of faith.”³¹⁶ This is to look at the world *hos me*, as if not, in the Messianic light of redemption.

Now, crucially, Critchley argues along with Heidegger that in our becoming, the object of the proclamation of faith ‘Jesus Messiah’ – seen as that toward which we orientate ourselves in a falling world – is a work of grace that *exceeds* our strength. This is as Critchley says, “the infinite demand or calling.”³¹⁷ In Heidegger’s words, “The Christian is conscious that this facticity cannot be won out of his own strength, but originates from God – the phenomenon of the effects of grace.”³¹⁸ The reader should be reminded at this juncture; that what is being pointed toward here is not the good news of grace for Christian believers, but it is rather the structure and logic of this grace - as that which exceeds the strength of the subject - which is important for Critchley. It is perhaps synonymous with the move in Badiou’s interpretation, which elevates eventual-primacy in the Christ-event of Paul, allowing the extraction of “a formal, wholly secularized conception of grace from the mythological core.”³¹⁹ Keeping the structure of Heidegger’s logic in mind, Critchley interprets Heidegger’s later work within the framework of the ‘authentic’ and ‘inauthentic life.’ Enforcing these categories, one could say that the later Heideggerian terminology determines that authenticity is constituted by observing inauthenticity “under a new Messianic aspect: as if it were not.”³²⁰ Granted, as Critchley shows, Heidegger’s project in *Being and Time* consists in the attainment of complete autarchy of Dasein, which appears contrary to the ‘phenomenon of grace’ in his reading of Paul as we have seen above. Dasein however, he shows, is defined in terms of its potentiality ‘to be,’ which is being-

³¹⁵ *Ibid*, 179.

³¹⁶ *Ibid*, 180.

³¹⁷ *Ibid*, 180.

³¹⁸ See Martin Heidegger, Matthias Fritsch and Jenna Anna Gosetti-Ferencei (trans.) *The Phenomenology of Religious Life* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004), 87.

³¹⁹ Alain Badiou, Ray Brassier (trans.) *Saint Paul: The Foundation of Universalism*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003), 66.

³²⁰ Simon Critchley, *The Faith of the Faithless: Experiments in Political Theology* (London: Verso, 2012), 181.

towards-death. Thus, Dasein must come to terms with its finitude “in an act of potentialization – or what we could call, in a more vulgar register, an act of will.”³²¹ Therefore, what Critchley is interested in, is not so much the content as the form of Heidegger’s logical structure, which, in the logic of grace, has imposed a *limit* on human potency. In other words, the enactment of human life *exceeds* our power and the “human being is essentially impotentialized in its relation to the Messiah.” Critchley indicates, as we would have assumed, that the latter is the call of the infinite demand. The problem of motivation figuring in Critchley’s theory of ethical subjectivity was reconciled in the first chapter we recall, by the hetro-affectivity of an asymmetrical infinite demand. This asymmetrical structure is mirrored here in Heidegger’s reading of Paul, for it is in the recognition of weakness, that the self can be intelligible to itself in relation to that which exceeds itself. One of the claims made in this project, namely, that the theory of ethical subjectivity is a central feature in the description of Critchley’s faith of the faithless is upheld here in his reading of Heidegger. It has been shown that faith involves a proclamation that *enacts* life, corresponding to Badiou’s ‘fidelity’ - as ‘a lived subjective commitment’ to a demand. Also, with respect to Levinas’s asymmetry and Løgstrup’s one-sidedness, faith in Heidegger’s structure is the embracing of the logic of grace that renders the ‘self’ impotent in relation to the demand or call of the Messiah.

Dasein’s Impotence

In Critchley’s parlance, what this reading of Heidegger’s 1920-21 lectures has accomplished, is an interpretation that identifies an essential weakness in the ontological structure of Dasein. Ontological weakness, or inauthenticity, is opposed to the “heroic logic of autarchy that threatens to dominate the way in which human existence is conceived in *Being and Time*.”³²² Thus, Critchley sees the possibility of a re-reading of *Being and Time* that roots itself in this ‘hermeneutic of impotence.’ So central is this hermeneutic, that not only does it allow a re-reading of *Being and Time*, but it also imposes its structure on Critchley’s faith of the faithless. In fact, as we will observe below, the hermeneutic of impotence is a thought that Critchley has developed as a direct result of his earlier philosophical thinking. What this means in light of the *Faith of the Faithless*, is

³²¹ *Ibid*, 182.

³²² *Ibid*, 183.

that in the interpretation of Heidegger's Paul that climax's in the impotence of Dasein, Critchley is applying an already existing set of philosophical conclusions anew. A brief investigation of how Critchley has already gestured toward and formulated these conclusions in his earlier work will be invaluable for placing in context the outcomes he has for a faith of the faithless.

A good place to begin in this regard would be to recall from the first chapter that Critchley's theory of ethical subjectivity found in *Infinitely Demanding* is rooted in Levinasian ethics. In the latter, it is in the face of 'the Other' that the ethical relation is constituted. Critchley described this relation as that which 'hetero-affectively' constitutes the subject, and therefore 'splits' the subject. Where the subject is no longer seen as an individual, but as a 'dividual.' He says, "Ethical experience is heteronomous, my autonomy is called into question by the fact of the other's demand, by the appeal that comes from their face."³²³ This is no less than the rejection of the so-called, 'autonomy orthodoxy' that deconstructive ethics seeks to overcome. Indeed, Levinasian ethics and moreover, the theory of ethical subjectivity, stem from Critchley's earliest work. In his first publication, *The Ethics of Deconstruction* (1992), already Critchley saw Derrida and Levinas constructing their theories against the grain of modern continental philosophy, specifically the tradition that culminates with Heidegger, he says of Levinas; "as he does elsewhere in his work...[he] posits fecundity as the access to an account of existence that breaks with the Parmenidean unity of Being. The implicit claim here is that the Western philosophical tradition, from Parmenides to Heidegger, has always conceived of Being as a unitary 'concept' as the One."³²⁴ And in Derrida, the treatment of ethics was seen "as a polemic not so much against Heidegger as against 'the 'primacy of Heideggerian ontology.'"³²⁵ Although Critchley's task in *The Ethics of Deconstruction* was to illustrate the ethical turn in deconstruction and its implications for politics and ethics, he also clearly rejects by implication the autonomy orthodoxy in its most recent Heideggerian form. As we have seen, Critchley carries this rejection forward in his systematic description of ethical experience in *Infinitely Demanding*. There, he 'counter-intuitively' casts Heidegger as an inheritor of the Kantian problem of the fact of reason; he says of Heidegger's analysis of conscience, "the structure of ethical experience...is an existential deepening of

³²³ *Infinitely Demanding: Ethics of Commitment, Politics of Resistance*, (London: Verso, 2013), 56.

³²⁴ Simon Critchley, *The Ethics of Deconstruction: Derrida and Levinas* (3rd ed. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2014), 131.

³²⁵ *Ibid*, 19.

Kantian autonomy.”³²⁶ What is interesting however, is that Critchley does not develop or present his challenge of limitation that could be read into the autarchy of Heidegger’s Dasein in *Infinitely Demanding*, there he only references it in a discussion of the problem of the ‘heroic paradigm’ in subjectivity, which in the context of the discussion, becomes an attempt to develop a response to the split subjectivity of Lacanian ‘dividualism.’ He says, “For me, authenticity is not something to be salvaged from the wreckage of Heidegger’s existential analytic...On the contrary, I want to argue for a notion of *originary inauthenticity* at the core of subjective experience.”³²⁷ The response that follows is the proposal of ‘*humour*,’ that is, a form of sublimation that is able to counter the ‘tragic-heroic’ paradigm. In Freudian terms, the super-ego does not mock and berate the ego, but rather sarcastically and *humorously* finds the ego hilarious. In other words, the self looks at itself and finds itself humorous, which is a feeling of liberation and not self-pity. In Critchley’s *On Humour* (2002) he says, “humour recalls us to the modesty and limitedness of the human condition, a limitedness that calls not for tragic-heroic affirmation but comic *acknowledgement*, not Promethean authenticity but laughable inauthenticity.”³²⁸ But the counter-action of humour to a tragically split subject, says little about the structure of Dasein that is essential for the way faith is understood in *Faith of the Faithless*. How does Critchley come to his ‘originary inauthenticity’ of Dasein? And why has he not presented it in *Infinitely Demanding*? While we can only speculate about the latter, an investigation should be attempted into Critchley’s ‘originary inauthenticity’ and Dasein’s impotence.

To recap briefly; what is illustrated above is that Critchley has always, for very good deconstructivist reasons, been sceptical of the ‘autonomy orthodoxy’ dominating philosophy until Heidegger. This scepticism is most obviously apparent in his work with the counter-tradition of Derrida and Levinas. The subsequent theory of ethical subjectivity, wherein Levinasian ethics was the prominent feature, led to a Freudian proposal that sublimates the ‘traumatic ethical separation’ of the split subject through humour. But there we saw that Heidegger never quite received the attention that Critchley affords him in *Faith of the Faithless*. Indeed, just as Critchley quips that the impotence of Dasein is a thorn in the flesh for Heidegger, perhaps Heidegger is Critchley’s thorn in the flesh, in the sense that he never goes away but only comes back with ever more potency.

³²⁶ *Infinitely Demanding: Ethics of Commitment, Politics of Resistance*, (London: Verso, 2013), 36.

³²⁷ *Ibid*, 78. Original emphasis.

³²⁸ See Simon Critchley, *On Humour* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2002), 102.

As far as can be ascertained, the first time that Critchley gives a formal account of his re-reading of Heidegger is in his book with Reiner Schürmann *On Heidegger's Being and Time* (2008).³²⁹ This re-reading contends that Heidegger's *Being and Time* can be read in a way that is contrary to the autonomous heroics of authenticity. Two notes should be made at the outset however; firstly, Critchley admits that his interpretation is not explicitly available, but is rather latently present in *Being and Time*. Secondly, the reason for which Critchley pursues this interpretation turns on his belief that despite Heidegger's relationship with Nazism, he remains a great philosopher and therefore one of the tasks of philosophers like Critchley, is to "try to defuse the systematic link between Heidegger's philosophy and his politics."³³⁰ For Critchley, Heidegger's political commitments are a direct result of his philosophical understanding of authenticity that culminates in *das Volk*, he says "the only way in which Heidegger can conceive of an authentic mode of human being-together or community is in terms of the unity of a specific people, a particular nation, and it is the political expression of this possibility that Heidegger saw in National Socialism in 1933. The subversion of Heidegger's politics that Critchley's re-reading of authenticity will imply, is not merely an exercise in philosophical intellectualism, but has crucial implications that serve Critchley's own broader political outcomes. Let us now consider this 'aspect change' as Critchley calls it with respect to authenticity, before tracking its effects on the way in which faith is construed in *Faith of the Faithless*.

Critchley begins his essay in *On Heidegger's Being and Time*, by describing Dasein's existential problem, namely, that it is disposed in a mood (*Stimmung*) that bears the load of its being. This burdensome load is the sheer weight of the that-it-is (*Das es ist*) of its existence, and it is this that-it-is that Dasein seeks to evade. This experience of the that-it-is, is of course the experience of being-in-the-world, but paradoxically it is revealed in Dasein's efforts of evasion; "I find myself as I flee myself and I flee myself because I find myself."³³¹ This paradoxical movement reveals the facticity of Dasein's thrown nature in its turning away from itself. Critchley shows that crucially, this idea of thrownness is later contrasted with the idea of *Verstehen*, which is understood as Dasein's ability-to-be. Linked with the notions of *Entwurf* (projection) and *Möglichkeit* (possibility), Dasein is

³²⁹ See Simon Critchley and Reiner Schürmann, Steven Levine (ed.) *On Heidegger's Being and Time* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2008), 132-151.

³³⁰ *Ibid*, 141.

³³¹ *Ibid*, 141.

urged to throw off the thrownness of its being-in-the-world, and to ‘seize hold of its possibilities-to-be.’ This is the movement of projection and freedom that Heidegger wants to emphasize, and which characterizes the existential analytic of Dasein. In this progression, the trajectory of Dasein moves closer toward authenticity. But here Critchley breaks against this idea and proposes his notion of ‘originary inauthenticity.’

As the notion suggests, Critchley’s existential claim is that being is always originally ‘inauthentic.’ Referring back to the original experience of thrownness, he says existential projection cannot master factual existence, for authenticity always slips back into prior inauthenticity that Dasein seeks to evade; “it is in the movement of evasion, or the self’s turning away from itself, that Dasein’s embeddedness in factual existence is disclosed...human existence is something that is first and foremost experienced as a burden.”³³² Critchley intimates that Heidegger is perhaps not so far from accepting this notion, for what Critchley calls ‘irreducible and intractable *thatness*’ of inauthentic existence, Heidegger also calls ‘*das Daß seines Da,*’ or “I feel myself bound to ‘the that of my there.’”³³³ This is the beginning of Critchley’s claim for the ultimate impotency of Dasein. He furthers this argument by considering Heidegger’s pages on conscience and the experience of guilt in *Being and Time*. Heidegger calls Dasein a ‘thrown basis’ (*ein geworfene Grund*), and as a thrown basis Dasein consistently ‘lags behind its possibilities.’³³⁴ The experience of guilt for Heidegger exposes this lagging or existential lack in Dasein’s being to be – the essential impotence of Dasein. Seen from the perspective of this re-reading, the contrast is stark compared to Heidegger’s ultimate existential analytic; namely a trajectory in the tradition of the autonomy orthodoxy that culminates in the “ecstasy of a heroic leap towards authenticity energized by the experience of anxiety and being-towards-death.”³³⁵ Therefore, instead of the self-sufficiency and self-mastery of Dasein, Critchley’s view is that “the self’s fundamental self-relation is to an unmasterable thrownness, the burden of facticity that weighs me down without my ever being able to fully pick it up.”³³⁶

³³² *Ibid*, 142.

³³³ *Ibid*, 142.

³³⁴ *Ibid*, 142.

³³⁵ *Ibid*, 142.

³³⁶ *Ibid*, 143.

In Critchley's early work with Deconstruction a dialectical opposition between his and Heidegger's reading of the Self emerged. Thanks to this impetus, in later work as we have seen, this tension was developed further into a re-reading of Heidegger's *Being and Time*. The latter demonstrated an 'originary inauthenticity' of Dasein and its subsequent ontological impotence. Returning to his argument in *Faith of the Faithless*, Critchley's interpretation of impotence in Heidegger's 1920-21 lectures now becomes clearer. We saw above that the Christian was impotentialized in relation to the object of its proclamation, Jesus Messiah. The reason for this was that that to which we orientate ourselves, Jesus Messiah – the infinite demand – comes to us in the logic of grace, and therefore exceeds our strength. What we have is a falling world that is passing away against which we are to live *hos me*, as if not. In living *hos me*, however, we are impotentialized. This structure then, in fact implies a 'double impotence' or 'double nullity,' which Critchley goes to great lengths to unfold. Deepening the notion of ontological indebtedness that he wants to inscribe into a faith of the faithless, his basic argument follows; that through the experience of guilt, Dasein is constituted by a 'thrown projection' – "it always has its being to be. That is, Dasein's being is a lack."³³⁷ This is why Heidegger refers to Dasein as being a 'null basis.' In being a 'null basis,' Dasein is always lagging behind its possibilities-to-be rendering its power of projection – the potentiality for being-a-whole – impotentialized. Thus, Dasein is caught in an experience of double impotence. Critchley writes, "Dasein is a being suspended between two nothings, two nullities: the nullity of thrownness and the nullity of projection."³³⁸ Counter-intuitively, in the midst of these two tensions, is the experience of freedom – the choice to choose one's possibility of being over and against others. However, "what one is choosing in such a choice is the nullity of a projection that projects on the nullity of a thrown basis, over which one has no power."³³⁹

Through Critchley's reading of Heidegger, the ontological claim is that we are guilty. We are guilty as an ontological state, not because of something we did, but because of something we *are*. We are doubly impotent and are always already marked by inauthenticity no matter how hard we try to overcome this with heroic acts of autarchy. But how do we proceed from this state? Critchley says, "What might potentiality for being

³³⁷ Simon Critchley, *The Faith of the Faithless: Experiments in Political Theology* (London: Verso, 2012), 188.

³³⁸ *Ibid*, 191.

³³⁹ *Ibid*, 192.

mean when its condition of possibility and impossibility is a double impotentialization?”³⁴⁰ His answer is that we are to accept or acknowledge our weakness, and that such weakness is not cause for despair, but rather is our strength as human beings. This notion finds descriptive force in Heidegger’s account of conscience. According to Critchley, conscience is a *Ruf*, a call that discloses Dasein’s potentiality-to-be to itself. The call of conscience calls Dasein to itself away from the they-self. This implies that the content of the call is empty, “The call contains no information, nor is it a soliloquy...It is the summoning of Dasein to itself that occurs silently.”³⁴¹ So Dasein functions as both the caller and the called, and calls silently to itself. This structure of the call of conscience mimics the structure of authenticity and inauthenticity we have seen above; the called is a thrown project anxious for its potentiality-for-Being being called by the caller, who is Dasein itself in its ‘uncanniness’: “‘primordial, thrown Being-in-the-world as the “not-at-home” – bare “that-it-is” in the nothing of the world.’”³⁴² The uncanniness will pursue Dasein in its lostness in the-they by ‘repetition’ (*Wiederholung*), “only in the self’s repetition to itself of itself that it can momentarily pull clear of the downward plunge of *das Man*.”³⁴³ Such is the powerless power of the call of conscience.

For Critchley, to accept and acknowledge the weakness or powerlessness of our finite existence as human beings is by means of humour. In the conclusion to his book *On Humour*, Critchley gives the last words to Samuel Beckett, the writer known for his tragicomic moribund. He quotes Beckett, who reflects in a non-fictional piece written after the end of the Second World War while working at the Irish Red Cross in France, in the devastated town of St-Lô. At the time, the latter was in the process of exchanging hands from the Germans back to French, he writes,

“What was important was not our having penicillin when they had none...but the occasional glimpse obtained, by us in them and, who knows, by them in us...of that smile at the human conditions as little to be extinguished by bombs as to be broadened by the elixirs of Burroughs and Welcome, - the smile deriding, among other things, the having and the not having, the giving and the taking, sickness and health.”³⁴⁴

³⁴⁰ *Ibid*, 194.

³⁴¹ *Ibid*, 185.

³⁴² *Ibid*, 187. Critchley quoting Heidegger.

³⁴³ *Ibid*, 188.

³⁴⁴ Samuel Beckett, ‘The capital of the ruins’ in *As the Story was Told: Uncollected and Late Prose* (London: Calder, 1990), 17-28. Quoted from Simon Critchley, *On Humour* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2002), 111.

For Critchley it is the deriding smile in the ‘giving and the taking, sickness and health,’ that is the essence of humour; “This is the *risus purus*, the highest laugh, the laugh that laughs at the laugh, that laughs at that which is unhappy...Yet, this smile does not bring unhappiness, but rather elevation and liberation, the lucidity of consolation.”³⁴⁵

The Necessity of Law

The theme of finitude and defectiveness continues in Critchley’s experiments in political theology, which conclude with a reading of Paul and the nature of faith. He makes the hermeneutical connection between our ontological defectiveness and sin, with the latter effectuated through the role of law. Referring to Agamben and Heidegger, Critchley sees in their interpretations a crypto-Marcionism or crypto-Harnackianism. That is, a radical antinomianism that conceives of faith without relation to the law. This is a devastating oversight in Critchley’s view, for both these versions of antinomian thinking, ultimately descend into a politics of secession that results from a rejection of the world. On Critchley’s account, what must be accented is our ontological defectiveness. With a flurry of references to Romans 7 and 8, Critchley elicits the fundamental dialectic that is well known in Paul, his quagmire of Christian self-consciousness; “For I know that nothing good dwells within me, that is, in my flesh. I can will what is right, but I cannot do it. For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I do” (Rom 7:18-19, NRSV). In Critchley’s parlance as we might expect, this is nothing short of a description of the ‘dividualized’ self, a self divided between itself, pulled by the desire to uphold the law on the one hand and to commit sin on the other. Karl Barth, in his famous *Epistle to the Romans* (1922), captures this sense with poetic lucidity, “Who then am I? for I stand betwixt and between, dragged hither by my desires and by my hates, and thither by my inability to do what I desire and by my ability to practice what I hate.”³⁴⁶ What can reconcile this dialectic? Only salvation through grace, that which is incapable of being willed by the self. Thus, the very redemption required to free the self from the ‘law of sin,’ renders the self impotent because as Critchley remarks, “Redemption exceeds the limit of

³⁴⁵ Simon Critchley, *On Humour* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2002), 111.

³⁴⁶ See Karl Barth, Edwyn C. Hoskyns (trans.) *The Epistle to the Romans* (6th Edition, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1968), 261.

human potentiality.”³⁴⁷ The logic of hope is also bound to this existential claim of impotency. Critchley points to the subjunctive mood in Paul; that if we suffer with Christ we ‘may’ also be glorified. Hope for Critchley is not certain here, for then it would not be hope – we remain in a state of uncertainty living in a falling world, postured against it, looking at it *hos me*, toward the Messianic expectation of redemption. Faith for Critchley, then, in its Pauline garb consists in a fundamental ontological defectiveness. The latter is poised between the dialectic of the law of the Spirit and sin, and only in recognizing our inability to love the law of the Spirit – our impotence – are we able, through grace, to receive that which exceeds our capability, namely, love.

Critchley is emphatic; we *must* affirm our defectiveness, “There is no absolute beginning and the idea of life without relation to law is a pursuit and slightly puerile dream.”³⁴⁸ He even calls the modern interpretations of Paul that infer an antinomian crypto-Marcionism, as a ‘seduction’ and ‘are pernicious.’ We *must* see, finally, that “the self is broken, impotent and wretched, but its wretchedness is its greatness: we *know* that we are broken.”³⁴⁹ We saw above, that coming to terms with this wretchedness and finitude could be conceived through humour and poetry. But, in a self-admitted shift in his work, this notion now appears inadequate. Indeed, Critchley’s previous work could be summoned up by an attempt to respond to the limits of human existence. *The Book of Dead Philosophers* (2008),³⁵⁰ which traces 190 deaths of the world’s greatest philosophers and thinkers, is a novel attempt in this regard. Referring to an oft-quoted phrase taken originally from Cicero “To philosophize is to learn how to die,” Critchley writes “philosophy, in this view, is to prepare us for death, to provide a kind of training for death, the cultivation of an attitude towards our finitude.”³⁵¹ Critchley is therefore concerned with the question, ‘how does one live?’ This also explains the regular featuring of Samuel Beckett and Michel de Montaigne in his earlier work. But what transpires in *Faith of the Faithless*, however, “for reasons that are slightly obscure to me”³⁵² is that philosophy’s task to answer the question of ‘how to live?’ has now been overtaken by the question, ‘how to love?’

³⁴⁷ Simon Critchley, *The Faith of the Faithless: Experiments in Political Theology* (London: Verso, 2012), 205.

³⁴⁸ *Ibid*, 203.

³⁴⁹ *Ibid*, 206. Original emphasis.

³⁵⁰ Simon Critchley, *The Book of Dead Philosophers* (New York: Vintage Books, 2009).

³⁵¹ *Ibid*, xv.

³⁵² Simon Critchley, *The Faith of the Faithless: Experiments in Political Theology* (London: Verso, 2012), 20.

Faith: Rigorous and Insecure

In 1847, Søren Kierkegaard, the Danish philosopher and theologian wrote a classic text on Christian ethics called *Works of Love*. At first glance, it may appear outlandish that a ‘secularist’ such as Critchley would find appropriation in such a work. So decidedly ‘Christian’ or even Christocentric is the text, that in his motivation for writing it, Kierkegaard refers to himself in one of his pseudonymous works, as a “missionary within Christendom itself, aiming to introduce Christianity into Christendom.”³⁵³ Kierkegaard was, of course, writing with a polemical attitude toward the state Church of Denmark. The two pertinent questions that this final investigation will attempt to answer then is, simply, *how* Critchley appropriates *Works of Love*, and *why* he has chosen to do so for a faith of the faithless?

Critchley approaches *Works of Love* as ‘a kind of parable,’ where he succumbs to tendering distinctly Christian content for the infinite demand. This is the infinite demand of ‘love.’ Love is understood here within the limits of the parable, and thus it is the implication of a potentially ubiquitous Christian conception of love that he pursues. There are two main points lodged within this conception of love that Critchley punctuates, namely, that faith or love is *rigorous* and that faith is *insecure*. Distinguished from the former, Critchley sees an endemic form of Christian love that is ‘coddling,’ requiring little effort and rendering faith infantile. Contrary to a weak and pathological-altruistic version of Christian love, Kierkegaard introduces the concept of the ‘Christian-like-for-like.’ Echoing the ethical demand in Løgstrup, the Christian-like-for-like is asymmetrical and renders reciprocity within the ethical relation null; Critchley writes, “The Christian like-for-like engages in a kind of transcendental *epoche* of what others owe to me.”³⁵⁴ What moves into view for Kierkegaard, is that the Christian relationship to the world is mediated by God, and thus is a relationship that begins ‘inwardly’ and follows the schema of ‘man-God-man.’ What is then ‘rigorous’ in this conception of love is the characterization not of a love that is equitable or egalitarian, but rather a love that is radically *unequal*. The latter is conceived from a posture of inwardness that views the world through its relationship

³⁵³ Søren Kierkegaard, Walter Lowrie (trans.) *The Point of View of My Work as an Author* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1939), 138.

³⁵⁴ Simon Critchley, *The Faith of the Faithless: Experiments in Political Theology* (London: Verso, 2012), 248.

with God. Thus, it is both strenuous and rigorous to maintain. By contrast, to consider our relationships from externality, that is, “that love is a relationship between man and man,”³⁵⁵ amounts to the reciprocal problem in Jesus’s sermon on the mount; “Why do you see the speck in your neighbour’s eye, but do not notice the log in your own eye?” (Matt 7:3, NRSV). ‘Worldly’ love that defines relationships of human beings vis-à-vis human beings, and not between human beings and God, licenses the language of *lex talionis*, the principle of retaliation derived from a reduced version of the Jewish like-for-like or eye-for-an-eye. Such reciprocity as Critchley and Kierkegaard would say, renders faith infantile. Real Christian faith then, is undergirded by a rigorous, vigorous and strenuous love, which is marked by a radical inequality, “the absolute difference between the human and the divine.”³⁵⁶ It is in the radically unequal relationship between human beings and the divine that here constitutes Critchley’s appropriation of Kierkegaard. But as we saw in chapter one, there is a mark of a motivational deficit in a secularist conception of the infinite demand. The question to be raised in this regard then would be; how precisely is the *rigour* of faith maintained and sustained? If ultimately Critchley is after a secular faith, the implication of theistic denial will erode the asymmetrical relationship and thus bring into question the claim for rigorous faith. In the political vein a similar series of questions could be pressed toward Critchley’s conception of the supreme fiction; how we are to accept a fictional force in politics that we construct out of our imaginations, and in which we necessarily believe?

The second punctuation is the essential *insecurity* of faith. Recounting the story of the centurion who displayed remarkable faith in Matthew 8, Critchley points to Kierkegaard’s interest in the final lines of verse 13, “And to the centurion Jesus said, ‘Go; let it be done for you according to your faith.’ And the servant was healed in that hour”³⁵⁷ (Matt 8:13, NRSV). For Kierkegaard, there is a sense in which the faith displayed by the centurion induces a profound vulnerability. The centurion was an ‘unbaptized’ Roman official, and yet it was *his* faith that Jesus recognized. In this regard, faith is insecure because it is not maintained within the boundaries of dogmas, creeds and ordinances but “It is the *decision* that brings the inward subject of faith into being over and against an external

³⁵⁵ *Ibid*, 248.

³⁵⁶ *Ibid*, 248.

³⁵⁷ Emphasis added.

everydayness.”³⁵⁸ It is here where the avowed ‘purity’ of Critchley’s Faith in contrast to ‘traditional’ faith is advanced, for the former is not reliant on the latter’s structures of guarantee. Indeed, if faith were based on an externalized assurance found in doctrinal security, then its rigour and strenuity are dissolved. In the terms of the pseudo-Christianity of the Danish Church, there is no certainty in faith, for Kierkegaard what must be realized is that faith is to be won “at every moment with God’s help, consequently not in some external way.”³⁵⁹ Whatever certainty there is, it involves first the dynamic of the human-divine relation, and secondly in Critchley’s language, a decision to enact life ‘at every moment.’ It is this rigour and strenuousness that Critchley had in mind with Porete’s conception of love. We recall that in Marguerite Porete’s conception of love, a disciplined *act* of self-evisceration deconstructed and annihilated the self. The external self was obliterated in order for divine love to occupy the inward self, “a process of decreation and impoverishment.”³⁶⁰

Most importantly, Critchley sees in *Works of Love* a connection to his theory of ethical subjectivity and the subject’s response to an infinite demand. He quotes Kierkegaard by saying, “When a man is gripped by love, he feels that this is like being in infinite debt.”³⁶¹ Love for Critchley comes to us as an infinite demand of debt. In Heidegger, it is through the existential experience of guilt that Dasein was constituted as a thrown project, always having its being-to-be. Dasein’s being-in-the-world is always already inauthentic; to be in debt is our ontologically defective state of being. Critchley’s appropriation here is remarkable;

“To be is to be in debt – I owe therefore I am. If original sin is the theological name for the essential ontological indebtedness of the self, then love is the experience of a counter-movement to sin that is orientated around an infinite demand that exceeds the projective potentiality of the self.”

Such is the logic of grace – ‘a counter-movement’ that exceeds the ability of the self.

Conclusion: Learning How to Love?

³⁵⁸ *Ibid*, 249. Emphasis added.

³⁵⁹ *Ibid*, 250.

³⁶⁰ *Ibid*, 250.

³⁶¹ *Ibid*, 250.

Through the appropriation of the parable, Critchley's faith of the faithless is closely associated with Kierkegaard's conception of Christian love. Faith is a *rigorous* and *strenuous* act that is not observed as a relation among equal parties. Further, real faith destabilizes and is *insecure*, requiring a decision in every moment to enact it. Therefore, this kind of faith is not sealed in church structures, "no pastor or priest has the right to say that one has faith or not according to doctrines like baptism and the like."³⁶² Faith is, therefore, a renouncing of the self to make room for the infinite demand of love, and an acknowledgement of one's own indebtedness. The final question that arises for this chapter, then, is *why* Critchley has made the move to appropriate Kierkegaard, or perhaps more broadly, why has Critchley turned to love as the defining characteristic for a faith of the faithless?

Throughout these evaluations we have pointed to what has been called 'aporetic sensibility' toward the transcendent. This was first introduced in chapter one where we showed Critchley's reliance on the transcendent for the structure of the infinite demand illustrated in the appropriation of Knud Løgstrup. Secondly, in the proposal of a supreme fiction in politics, an appeal was made to fictional transcendence to serve as the binding force for political association. For reasons we have already shown, this requirement in political formation assumes a paradoxical and imaginative self-creation of reality. At worst, this condition would be almost inconceivable for the 'faithless' to accept, considering its implied epistemic self-deception. At best, it would have to accommodate a poetic transcendence that would embrace this rational inconsistency. Thirdly, in the previous chapter the 'theological' condition for politics seen in Critchley's interpretation of Porete's 'politics of love,' revealed questions with respect to motivation and divine agency. What was argued on the latter was that under Critchley's horizon of faith that rejects the divine, a conception of autochthonous self-de/creation undermines motivation in politics, for it slips back into passivity and lacks an account of agency. Despite this objection, Critchley nonetheless gestures toward a radical politics that is based on a radical understanding of love, which has as its source, the love of the divine. Finally, while Critchley has stated that his use of Kierkegaard's *Works of Love* should be interpreted as 'a kind of parable,' and thus viewed for its structural expediency, one cannot help but marvel at the extraordinary manner in which it has been appropriated.

³⁶² *Ibid*, 250.

In light of these evaluations, it could be suggested that in Critchley's vision for a faith of the faithless, he is wrestling 'for reasons that are slightly obscure,' for a 'secularist' conception of faith that comes up short if followed to its rational conclusions. To counter this shortfall, Critchley makes indelible gestures toward the Christian theological tradition, specifically its rich language of love. What Critchley recognizes in *Faith of the Faithless*, is that faith without love, in Paul's words, is "a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal" (1 Cor 13:1, NRSV). Or in a more amplified tone as Dostoyevsky writes, "'what is hell?' I maintain that it is the suffering of being unable to love."³⁶³ Love, for Critchley, is that which underwrites faith, a performative - that which gives faith its motivation and substance. However, his experiments are just that, experiments, and thus they have their limitations and questions. However, Critchley is not claiming to be a theologian with a balanced and nuanced understanding of the Christian Church nor its doctrines. Indeed, a point of critique could be leveled against his version of Christianity, for example; the understanding of the church as both reductionist and to his mind, espouses a 'coddling' conception of faith. Much could be said to rebut these claims but in an important footnote in the introduction to *Faith of the Faithless*, Critchley makes clear his own consciousness of these limitations. He says, "Allow me a final, but necessary, confession: although I have had a longstanding fascination with (and an occasional aversion to) religion and questions of theology, I have no expert competence in this domain. I write, then, as an enthusiastic – albeit not en-thused – amateur."³⁶⁴ The introduction of love into his work then, also falls within these limits, particularly what is described in mystical anarchism. In this regard, we could say that Critchley's attempt is still '*learning how to love.*'

Curiously, we find that in one of his more recent publications written with his wife Jamieson Webster, *The Hamlet Doctrine* (2013), the fascination with love continues. In a series of 48 varieties of interpretations from psychoanalysis to politics, the book takes the reader through short erratic conversations with 'privileged interlocutors' – including Carl Schmitt, Walter Benjamin, Lacan, Hegel, Freud and Nietzsche, to name a few. Apart from the poetically obvious, namely, that *Hamlet* is one of literature's most infamous for his *inability* to love, Critchley writes in the concluding chapter; "Those, it is said, that love

³⁶³ Fyodor Dostoyevsky, Constance Garnett (trans.), *The Brothers Karamazov* (Hertfordshire: Wordsworth Editions, 2009), 356.

³⁶⁴ Simon Critchley, *The Faith of the Faithless: Experiments in Political Theology* (London: Verso, 2012), 248.

well, can say very little about it. Is this not what makes writing about love so hazardous? Hamlet, lest we remind you, cannot love but can speak very well about a world depleted of it.”³⁶⁵ Perhaps this is the reason Critchley is skeptical of offering his readers more concrete claims, to write about love is simply a hazardous endeavor! Nonetheless, what his experiments in political theology and the possible retrieval of a faith of the faithless entail is a notable shift in Critchley’s thinking, revealing a powerful conception of secular faith that indulges in the theological tradition, but with clear boundaries. What the latter signals, is a re/turn to ‘the theological’ that does not only find tremendous explanatory power in its categories of speech but more broadly, that theology and politics perhaps belong to one another in more extraordinary and complex ways. A final note in this regard. While Critchley’s faith of the faithless generates pertinent questions for the way in which we view our personal and daily human existence in the world, his ultimate goal resides in politics. We began these experiments with the expression of disappointment in the political situation in which we find ourselves. In a world marked by violence and war, a faith of the faithless is an attempt to think through this contemporary situation. Critchley’s Faith is first and foremost a *political* faith, thus, we return to where we began, politics.

³⁶⁵ Simon Critchley and Jamieson Webster, *The Hamlet Doctrine* (London, Verso: 2013), 235.

Conclusion: Politics and the Demand of the Infinite?

Introduction:

After our ethical-theological evaluations of Simon Critchley's experiments, vistas have appeared that are at moments strikingly similar with what we might risk to call the faith of 'traditional religion.' We also saw, however, that Critchley's faith of the faithless is discordant and nothing like daily devotional piety neatly presented in conventional forms of Christian practice. On the contrary, a faith of the faithless is a profoundly existential awareness of oneself in the world and points to one's responsibility as a faithful participant at particular moments in its history. Indeed, this amounts to the political dimension of Critchley's faith of the faithless, which is, in fact, Critchley's 'end-game' as it were. This leaves the concluding chapter with two tasks.

First, we track the transition from ethics to politics and unpack the latter with reference to Critchley's theory of ethical subjectivity and a faith of the faithless. If it is accepted, as we have tried to show, that the theory of ethical subjectivity and the infinite demand constitute Critchley's vision of faith, then the move from ethics to politics is by necessity also a move for the faith of the faithless into bold political action. The political 'end' of this move is narrated with respect to Critchley's proposal of 'anarchic meta-politics' in *Infinitely Demanding* and the implications of a 'non-violent violence' for political resistance in *Faith of the Faithless*. Again, these publications are noteworthy for their systematization of Critchley's thought. Therefore, a conversation concerning politics is best served under these conditions but also reflects on earlier developments in *Ethics of Deconstruction*, providing the context for some of his later theoretical insights.

The second and final task of this concluding chapter is then to address directly the broad question of whether a faith of the *faithless* could or should lend itself to a faith of the *faithful*. At this point, a theological inventory is introduced, and subsequent suggestions for further study are offered. However, to be clear, this will not be an attempt at a theological ‘re-appropriation’ of secular faith, or a kind of ‘re-theologization’ of the faith of the faithless for theological purposes. Rather, Critchley’s faith of the faithless offers a modest critique and an affirmation of the ethical-political practices of public theological life, where the latter is motivated not by a commitment to an infinite ethical demand, but rather an *ethical demand of the infinite*. This inventory, therefore, gestures toward the *points of contact* made with theology and encourages theological reflection in these areas in light of the philosophical ‘return to religion.’ The theologizing tendency to reappropriate a ‘faith of the faithless’ for theological purposes, however, remains a threat to this process. This danger has been noted of the Radical Orthodoxy movement, for example, which endeavours among other things to reorientate theology back into the centre of public discourse, through an extensive and imaginative (re)theologization of secular theories of modernity and rationality. As Walker comments, this tendency oftentimes “proceeds by way of a historical retrieval of certain theologians and theological ideas deemed to be distinctly ‘Christian’ and thus assisting in *bulwarking* the *sui generis* gloss of Christianity’s theological claims and doctrine.”³⁶⁶ To ensure that the risk of surrendering to the impulse of injecting transcendence into a faith of the faithless is circumvented, an important question needs to be answered. How precisely is Critchley’s work to be situated, and in what respect will this affect how it is appreciated by the faith of the faithful?

Specifically then, we show that Critchley’s faith of the faithless is situated in a similar category with the work of Alain Badiou and more recently Mark Lewis Taylor. Through Taylor’s publication, *The Theological and The Political* (2011), a unique understanding of Theology (with a capital ‘T’) and ‘the theological’ comes into view. Within Taylor’s paradigm, we show that Critchley’s work is situated with ‘the theological’ - “a discourse that discerns and critically reflects upon the motions of power” an “agonistic dimension of human thought,”³⁶⁷ and is conceived out of the so-called ‘transimmanental.’ This ‘situatedness’ renders itself as distinct from the ‘Theological,’ what Taylor refers to as

³⁶⁶ Corey Walker, ‘Theology and Democratic Futures,’ in *Political Theology* 10.2 (2009), 201. Emphasis added.

³⁶⁷ Mark Lewis Taylor, *The Theological and The Political: On The Weight of the World*, (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2011), 9.

‘guild theology.’ As we unpack this distinction, it will hopefully become clear that Theology, which operates out of the assumption of a transcendent ‘Other,’ and which encounters ‘the theological’ (lowercase ‘t’), can learn from an ever-growing albeit complex relationship, stimulated by mutual goals of emancipatory politics. Indeed, there are many accounts of this rising complexity, posing under a plethora of ‘post-’ world terms; post-structural, post-modern, post-colonial, post-secular, post-democratic, post-theological, and even post-Christian. These terms, for all their explanatory deficiency, nonetheless, characterize and inform the theological moment of our time through which theology will have to navigate if it is to remain relevant and purposeful.

Interstitial Distance

Critchley’s philosophy begins in disappointment. A disappointment harboured in the disingenuous nature of our political institutions and in the apparent failure of secular liberal democracy having not lived up to our expectations. In response to a ‘motivational deficit’ caused by this contemporary reality, we respond with various forms and degrees of ‘active’ and ‘passive’ nihilisms. The paradigmatic examples of these nihilisms we may call respectively, militant forms of utopianism (Christian fundamentalisms and Jihadism) and what Nietzsche called, ‘European Buddhism.’ Unsatisfied with these responses Critchley presented an argument for a ‘motivating ethics,’ one that would be able to ‘face and face down’ the current lack. This argument consisted of a theory of ethical experience and subjectivity, where through a demand that demands approval, a subject binds itself to a version of the good. Ethical subjectivity, then, became a self that binds itself in fidelity to a radical asymmetrical demand that inevitably divides the subject. It is in this divided-self that we are constituted by our own inauthenticity and inability to master ourselves. The latter returns us to the question of how an *ethics of commitment* becomes a *politics of resistance*, which is also to say, how do we trace the move from ethics to politics and what form does this politics take? For Critchley, his theory of ethical subjectivity – ‘an ethics of infinitely demanding commitment’ – is able to present a ‘re-motivation’ of ethics that can inspire a radical political commitment.

Before Critchley deploys his ethics he first accounts for his understanding of the political.³⁶⁸ Critchley begins by defending a conception of subjectivity that has at its roots Gramsci's conception of hegemony, namely, "the activity of the formation of 'collective will' out of divergent groups that make up civil society."³⁶⁹ This view, which cultivates "the construction of chains of equivalence, of political alliances between often quite disparate groups, based on consent and local, situated forms of commonality," is to be understood in contradistinction to the corollary of a Marxist understanding of hegemony. Marx, Critchley points out, critiqued capitalism in light of the hegemonic bourgeoisie and the reduction of socio-economic life into commoditized terms. For Marx, this socio-economic analysis contracts the binary between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat. However, there is an over-simplification in Marx that Critchley resists. Despite Marx's reading of capitalism, out of which "one is simply persuaded of the massive prescience and truth" of capitalism's dislocatory power, Critchley is not convinced of the *simplification* of class positions. Critchley sees capitalism's dislocation leading not simply to the creation of a revolutionary class that will overthrow the bourgeoisie. But rather, a *multiplication* "of class actors in society, of society being made up by an increasingly complex fabric of class identifications, rendered even more intricate by other sets of identification, whether gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation or whatever."³⁷⁰ Here the multiplication of actors ties in with Gramsci's theory of hegemony, viz. of collective will formation out of divergent groupings. The political task for Critchley then becomes the activation of new political subjectivities by aggregating – the moment of hegemony – potentially diverse class actors in particular *situations*. This logic of 'activation' turns for Critchley on the problem of nomination, a naming of particularity in the midst of generality, in his words "identifying a determinate particularity in society and then hegemonically constructing that particularity into a generality that exerts a universal claim."³⁷¹ Critchley refers to the examples of Mexican and Australian indigenous peoples; identified as an oppressed particularity that rises against the state, and hegemonically forms into a new subjectivity that exerts the universal claim, which is the *name*, 'indigenous.' The oppressive situation of the political subject is crucial here, and should be noted for our conversation with Taylor below; "That is, beginning from a position of *emptiness*, a particular group posits the fullness of the

³⁶⁸ This systematic account of Critchley's political ideas is found in his chapter 'Anarchic Metapolitics,' see *Infinitely Demanding: Ethics of Commitment, Politics of Resistance* (London: Verso, 2007), 88-132.

³⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 101.

³⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 97.

³⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 91.

universal and hegemonically articulates that universality in political action, thereby becoming a political subject.”³⁷² Emptiness here is synonymous with injustice; it is out of an ethical motivation, in a situation of injustice, that hegemonic articulation occurs.

Critchley’s argument then turns to the relationship between the political subject and the state. As we have seen, Critchley is skeptical of the revolutionary political subject that emerges from the reduced binary of bourgeoisie-proletariat. Under these conditions, the rise of the revolutionary class would lead to the “Leninist withering away of the state.” But since this has not been the story of 20th century politics, the current democratic state remains the political form of the West, and it is here to stay at least for the conceivable future. Therefore, the Critchlean strategy is to deploy the political subject *within* the state (on the state’s territory), but at a *distance* from the state (in opposition to the state). To avoid the paradoxical conclusion, this seems to draw, Critchley terms this deployment as an ‘*interstitial distance*’ from the state – “an internal distance that has to be opened from the inside.”³⁷³

Critchley cites the political activism in Paris, the *sans-papiers*, which defends so-called illegal immigrants on the basis of a call for equality (an ethical demand, we could say) – one of the great French republican virtues.³⁷⁴ Based on the formula that *interstitial distance* prescribes, it is possible to evaluate the example of the recent #FeesMustFall movement. Here, diverse particularities (indeed, the protests included staff, students, public intellectuals, and other members of the public), formed in a situation of oppression (discrimination based on economic exclusion), hegemonically articulated themselves under the nomination of the hashtag ‘FeesMustFall,’ coupled with the universal claim of a right to education. Protest action takes place *within* state territory (the locus of the university) but at a *distance* (opposition toward the institution) from the state in the demand for free education; “One works within the state against the state in a political articulation that attempts to open a space of opposition.”³⁷⁵ The interesting point in this movement links to the central wager of Critchley’s theory of ethical subjectivity. That is to say, the diverse political subject convenes remarkably around the universality of the claim against exclusion and the right to education; is this ethical motivation not the articulation of ethical

³⁷² *Ibid*, 104. Emphasis added.

³⁷³ *Ibid*, 113.

³⁷⁴ *Ibid*, 114.

³⁷⁵ *Ibid*, 114.

experience? The self binds itself to a conception of the good, and responds in *responsibility* to the call of the infinite demand. The universality of the demand in this case provides the ‘hegemonic glue’ that binds and allows the formation of a new political subjectivity. Although we are profoundly aware of the multi-layered complexity this subject demands alongside the series of diverse economic and political factors in the South African context, it nonetheless offers content to the form of Critchley’s politics.

Radical Anarchic Politics

In a short addendum, Critchley sees in this conception of politics – namely, “a praxis in a situation that articulates an interstitial distance from the state, and which allows for the emergence of new political subjectivities”³⁷⁶ – the remnants of an early Marx, particularly the conceptualization of ‘*wahre Demokratie*’ or ‘true democracy.’ Critchley shows that in Marx’s critique of Hegel’s conception of the state, the state is ‘mystified.’ In Marx’s view sovereignty is located in the ‘*mass of individuals*’ and not in the person of the monarch. In short, what this amounts to is a democracy understood in a very particular sense. Critchley makes clear that democracy is not the state form of liberal constitutional democracy or any other contemporary form. What he is after in Marx is the ‘truth’ of democracy, “dialectically expressed – the truth of the state, a truth that no state incarnates.”³⁷⁷ This particular sense of democracy is understood in the early Marx as a ‘democratic self-determination of the people,’ the ‘*Selbstbestimmung des Volks*.’ Thus, in Critchley’s retention of Marx’s understanding of democracy as ‘self-determination,’ he aims to preserve the ‘material drive of social being,’ ‘the formless mass’ of what Merleau-Ponty calls ‘wild democracy,’ which ‘*questions* the state.’ This ‘questioning’ of the state contributes to the pathos of the radical democratic vision Critchley has in mind. He says as an alternative to the Hegelian ‘incarnation of the *universal*,’ a kind of fantasy of the world-state, that “democracy as democratization is the movement of *disincarnation* that challenges the borders and questions the legitimacy of the state.”³⁷⁸ It is this democratization, Critchley argues, that arises out of the ethical demand, or what he will go on to describe as a ‘meta-political ethical moment,’ and which also initiates the passage from ethics to politics.

³⁷⁶ *Ibid*, 115.

³⁷⁷ *Ibid*, 115.

³⁷⁸ *Ibid*, 119.

To complete the transition from ethics to politics, Critchley points to two meanings of anarchism, one ethical and the other political. In an effort to foreground his ‘anarchic meta-politics,’ it will be important to trace the genesis of this anarchic move from ethics to politics undertaken in *Ethics of Deconstruction*. In the general argument of the latter, Critchley claimed that Derridian deconstruction is not merely the endless deferring of meaning, but that there is an indelible moment of ethical responsibility, provided that this moment in deconstruction is seen through the lens of Levinasian ethics. In his chapter ‘A Question of Politics: The Future of Deconstruction,’³⁷⁹ Critchley faces up to the critique of the political moment in Derridian deconstruction that is characterized by undecidability; he asks rhetorically, “If politics is the moment of the decision – of judgement, of justice, of action, of antagonism, of beginning, of commitment, of conflict, of crisis – then how does one take a decision in an undecidable terrain?”³⁸⁰ Critchley is not interested in the banality of populist criticisms that accused Derrida of withdrawing from the political. On the contrary, in the late Derrida, political questions dominated his thought; one has only to look at his writings on democracy, identity, Heidegger’s political engagement, friendship, apartheid and Nelson Mandela.³⁸¹ Unable to recount the full argument here, what Critchley concludes, is that through a diagnostic reading of Lacoue-Labarthe and Jean-Luc Nancy, Derridian deconstruction is *unable* to navigate the passage from ethics to politics because of an *impasse* of the political. Summarizing this conclusion Critchley says, “Lacoue-Labarthe’s and Nancy’s diagnosis of the withdrawal of the political and the reduction of *la politique* to *le politique* leads to an *exclusion* of politics, understood as a field of antagonism, struggle, dissension, contestation, critique, and questioning.”³⁸²

It is the political pathos of the latter that Critchley locates once again in Levinas, through the passage from responsibility to *questioning*. In Levinasian ethics, “the passage from ethics to politics is synonymous with the move from responsibility to questioning, from the proximity of the one-for-the-other to a relation with all the others whereby I feel myself to be an other like the others and where the question of justice can be raised.”³⁸³ What Levinas envisages is the introduction of transcendence into the political – an ethical

³⁷⁹ Simon Critchley, *The Ethics of Deconstruction* (2nd ed. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1999), 188-247.

³⁸⁰ *Ibid*, 188.

³⁸¹ *Ibid*, 189.

³⁸² *Ibid*, 216. Emphasis added.

³⁸³ *Ibid*, 220.

transcendence in the relation to the singular other. The latter is seen in opposition to Derridian deconstruction that is not respectful of difference, where for Levinas difference is the foundation of community. Thus, for Levinas when transcendence is reintroduced through the relation to the other, “the community remains an open community in so far as it is based on the recognition of difference, of the Other to the Same.”³⁸⁴ The community is opened, and the possibility of questioning takes place because of what the transcendent ethic implies, namely, the priority of ethical responsibility in my non-totalizing relation to the other. As Critchley notes, this *ethics is ethical for the sake of politics*, a politics that “will repeatedly interrupt all attempts at totalisation.”³⁸⁵

One can sense the anarchic politics that Critchley will go on to develop in a radical democracy that we will attend to below. To be emphasized here is the ‘anarchic-ethical moment,’ which arises in one’s relation to the other. Returning to *Infinitely Demanding*, Critchley makes clear that the Levinasian anarchic ethical moment, which occurs as a result of the heteronomous experience to the other, is a direct function of the fundamental experience of ethical subjectivity. This fundamental experience, to remind the reader, is what precedes consciousness. In other words, that which is primary is not the autarchy of self-origination that we saw in Critchley’s ‘autonomy orthodoxy’ evinced in Heidegger, but the experience of being affected by the other, which precedes and destabilizes this autarchy. In the self-undermining that results from our ‘self-other’ posture, the meta-political ethical moment is conceived. To quote Critchley at length;

“In grief and mourning we undergo an experience of affective self-dispossession or self-undoing that can provide the motivational force to enter into a political sequence. It is this meta-political moment that propels one into facing and facing down a wrong or confronting a situation of injustice, not through legal norms backed up with the threat of violence, but through an ethical responsiveness to the sheer precariousness of the other’s face.”³⁸⁶

To complete the transition from ethics to politics, the question that now is raised is how Critchley configures the ‘anarchic political’ in radical democracy? If ethical anarchism is marked by its inherent nature as that which undermines the ‘archic’ structure of sovereignty, then anarchic politics, which follows this principle, is politics that undermines any vision of totality. To state this positively, anarchic politics is “radical disturbance of the

³⁸⁴ *Ibid*, 219.

³⁸⁵ *Ibid*, 223.

³⁸⁶ *Infinitely Demanding: Ethics of Commitment, Politics of Resistance* (London: Verso, 2007), 120.

state, a disruption of the state's attempt to set itself up or erect itself into a whole."³⁸⁷ Giving explicit content to this idea of radical disturbance, Critchley comments on some of the novel contemporary anarchist practices that describe his radical politics, like the 'Rebel Clown Army' that deploys 'carnavalesque' humour as a political strategy, 'Pink Bloc' and 'Billionaires for Bush' to name a few. The distinctive feature of these forms of anarchism, unlike the anarchism of the 1960s, is that they inspire *responsibility*, not freedom; "it flows from an experience of conscience about the manifold ways in which the West ravages the rest; it is an ethical outrage at the yawning inequality, impoverishment and disenfranchisement that is so palpable locally and globally."³⁸⁸ In *Ethics of Deconstruction*, Critchley already points to 'democracy' as the political form that could foster the site of this antagonistic struggle and anarchic practice, indeed, this site we have seen is located at an *interstitial distance* from the state. Such democracy is not the proceduralism of consensus democratic politics. On the contrary, Critchley's conception of democracy follows as a *dissensus* that "disturbs the order by which government wishes to depoliticize society."³⁸⁹ On this view democracy, in fact, does not exist. Critchley is clear that this form of democracy is something that one must strive for every day. In the conclusion to *Ethics of Deconstruction*, he emphasizes as a last note the effort and futurity of democracy, "Democracy is an infinite task and an infinite responsibility directed towards the future."³⁹⁰

Critchley, Žižek, Violence

The concluding chapter of *Faith of the Faithless* consists of a popularized polemical debate between Critchley and the Slovenian philosopher, Slavoj Žižek.³⁹¹ Critchley uses this debate as the argumentative foil for a conception of politics that is 'dirty-handed.'

³⁸⁷ *Ibid*, 122.

³⁸⁸ *Ibid*, 125-126.

³⁸⁹ *Ibid*, 129.

³⁹⁰ *Ibid*, 240.

³⁹¹ Due to the limitations of this project we do not follow the entire debate. It can be traced here however; Critchley first writes *Infinitely Demanding* (2007) where he argues for a politics of resistance. Žižek responds with "Resistance is Surrender," in *London Review of Books* 29.22. (12 Nov, 2007), 7. T.J. Clark responds in 'Letters' in *London Review of Books* 29.24 (13 Dec, 2004), and David Graeber responds in 'Letters' in *London Review of Books* 30.1 (3 Jan, 2008). Žižek responds to these critics in 'Letters' in *London Review of Books* 30.2 (24 Jan, 2008), and expands this critique in chapter 7 of his book *In Defense of Lost Causes* (London: Verso, 2007). Critchley responds in 'Violent Thoughts about Slavoj Žižek' in *Naked Punch, Free Supplement* 11 (2008), 3-6. Žižek responded again in an afterword to the paperback edition of *In Defense of Lost Causes*, (London: Verso, 2007), 463-488. Critchley's final response here is a slightly more developed version of his original article in *Naked Punch*.

From the outset, the politics described in this section is both a variation and an extension of the anarchic themes we saw above, with the conversation having now moved to the notion of violence. Critchley began his experiments, we recall, by articulating the triangulation of religion, politics and violence, where the latter has become the means to achieve political ends. In the final chapter of, *Nonviolent Violence*, a formulation he borrows from Judith Butler, Critchley reflects on the plausibility and nature of a politics of nonviolence. Critchley's essential structure, viz., the responsibility to the infinite demand that arises in a situation of injustice, remains intact. But a politics of 'dissensus' that arises out of a situation of state totality and the depoliticization of society now becomes a politics of non/violence. The latter is connected to the cyclic violence into which we are inserted; violence that is a part of the history of human civilization. This discussion further accentuates Critchley's politics as a politics that is guided by the notion of an infinite demand.

In a sharply sarcastic tone, Critchley presents Žižek's position on violence, which is informed by his understanding of 'ideology' and the notion of the 'parallax,' culminating in an apology of 'divine violence' found in Walter Benjamin's famous essay, 'Critique of Violence.'³⁹² According to Žižek's well-known diagnostic insight, which he expounds in his first book in English, *The Sublime Object of Ideology* (1989), we are not living in a post-ideological world, but, in fact, the entire structure of our reality is ideological. Importantly, the 'ideological' is not illusory, we know it is a fantasy but we believe in it nonetheless; "'Ideological' is not 'false consciousness' of a (social) being but this being itself in so far as it is supported by 'false consciousness.'"³⁹³ Critchley's question to Žižek is 'what does this mean precisely for action?' On the basis of a fantasy-filled reality, he asks rhetorically, "Are we not eternally doomed to an unending plague of more fantasies that can in turn be criticized by Žižek and by generations of future Žižeks? Sometimes I wonder."³⁹⁴ On Critchley's view, this notion of ideology is what informs Žižek's counsel for a response to violence, namely, that it should not be reactive, for such a response will just be a 'false reactive urgency,' but rather one should be *patient*.

³⁹² Walter Benjamin, Marcus Bullock and Michael Jennings (eds.) 'Critique of Violence' in *Walter Benjamin: Selected Writings Volume 1, 1913-1926* (Cambridge MA: Belknap Press, 2002), 236-252.

³⁹³ Slavoj Žižek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology* (London: Verso, 1989), 16. Original Emphasis.

³⁹⁴ Simon Critchley, *Faith of the Faithless: Experiments in political theology* (London: Verso, 2014), 210.

To illuminate this perplexing position, Critchley points to Žižek's notion of the *parallax*, presented in *The Parallax View* (2006). The parallax describes a gap in existence, where there is a radical 'non-coincidence of thinking and being.' That is, in Heideggerian terminology, a break 'between the ontological and the ontic.' The latter requires a dialectical articulation which is negative "a denial, privation, or failure: a *not* that expresses the *knot* at the core of that which *is* – its traumatic kernel."³⁹⁵ Crucially, what this gap in existence amounts to is a subtractive politics for Žižek, which is expressed in the figure of Melville's Bartleby, specifically his passive and static nature. Žižek's counselled response to the systemic violence - the violence that we know exists in Capitalism, for example, and in which we nonetheless partake - that forms part of the 'ideological' world in which we live, is to assume the Bartleby position, "do nothing." This leads to his second response to violence, which should answer the question, 'what precisely are we waiting *for* while we do nothing?' In another of Žižek's books, *Violence* (2008),³⁹⁶ he defends 'divine violence' in Walter Benjamin. Quoting Žižek, Critchley writes, "Divine violence is understood theoretically as 'the heroic assumption of the solitude of the sovereign decision.'"³⁹⁷ We will return to the political implications of this momentarily, but for now we point to the heart of Žižek's critique of Critchley, namely, to 'resist' the state is, in fact, to surrender to the state. What the 'sovereign decision' implies is a "sudden piercing of the finite by the infinite, of the phenomenal by the noumenal."³⁹⁸ The answer to the question, then, of what we do while we wait for nothing, is that we wait for "an act of cataclysmic, redeeming violence that does not emanate from us – we are but passive, Bartlebian spectators – but which transforms the situation without the intervention of the will."³⁹⁹

Critchley wants to move away from this (mis)interpretation of violence in Žižek's account of Benjamin's essay. Contrary to Žižek, who "ridicules others' attempts at thinking about commitment, resistance, and action while doing nothing himself," and dreaming of "divine violence, cruelty, and force," Critchley, we have seen, wants to cultivate a theoretical approach that can induce us to action. Directing our attention to the title of the essay, *Critique of Violence*, Critchley reminds us that Benjamin is *critiquing* violence. With this

³⁹⁵ *Ibid*, 211-212.

³⁹⁶ Slavoj Žižek, *Violence* (London: Profile Books, 2008).

³⁹⁷ Simon Critchley, *Faith of the Faithless: Experiments in political theology* (London: Verso, 2014), 210.

³⁹⁸ *Ibid*, 242.

³⁹⁹ *Ibid*, 242.

orientation to violence in mind, Benjamin distinguishes between two forms of violence, law-making and law-preserving, after which Critchley points out, there is indeed an alternative that Žižek appears to suppress, namely, a subjective space for *nonviolence* that Benjamin affirms. It is with the possibility of the notion of *nonviolence* in the background that Benjamin introduces ‘divine violence’ - distinguished from ‘mythic violence,’ (which Žižek would refer to as systemic or objective violence of the state). For Benjamin, divine violence interjects into mythic law-making (power-making) violence, by destroying the logic of the law altogether. Critchley writes, “The only thing that can put a halt to the logic of mythic violence, Benjamin thinks, is divine violence, which is not law-making, but law-destroying, *rechtsvernichtend*.”⁴⁰⁰ Divine violence is thus, ‘violence against violence,’ which expiates the guilt of the subject under the law by releasing the subject from its ‘(de)formation.’ The question then becomes, how is such divine violence realized in praxis?

To answer this question, Critchley turns to Benjamin’s analysis of the commandment ‘Thou shalt not kill,’ - the discourse of *nonviolence*. In Critchley’s interpretation what becomes evident is that the command is not a categorical imperative, but rather a guideline “given for those who have ‘to wrestle with it in solitude (*in ihrer Einsamkeit sich auseinandersetzen*), and, in exceptional cases, to take on themselves the responsibility for ignoring it.”⁴⁰¹ The command for nonviolence, therefore, also entails the subjective possibility for violence as the performative force to ensure nonviolence. Thus, the shape of this commitment to nonviolence includes subjective violence against the objective, or mythic violence of the state, which is conceived as the anarchic moment for Critchley. What is important to note is the struggle that such a double bind entails; “we find ourselves in a concrete socio-political-legal situation of violence, and all we have is a plumb line of nonviolence, of life’s sacredness. There are no transcendental guarantees and no clean hands. We act, we invent.”⁴⁰² The continuity with Critchley’s argument for anarchic politics in *Infinitely Demanding* is accounted for here in the tension of a nonviolence that must ‘wrestle’ with subjective situations of violence in which we find ourselves; “Anarchic political resistance should not seek to mimic and mirror the ‘archic’ violent sovereignty it opposes. It is rather a question of the cultivation of *pacifist* activism...But –

⁴⁰⁰ *Ibid*, 216.

⁴⁰¹ *Ibid*, 218.

⁴⁰² *Ibid*, 220.

to adapt a phrase from Levinas this is a *difficult pacifism that constantly has to negotiate the limits of violence.*”⁴⁰³

In Critchley’s reflection on the anarchic moment in Levinasian ethics, which we have already seen in *Ethics of Deconstruction* and *Infinitely Demanding*, an interesting addition is made in the connection between Levinas and Benjamin and their description of ‘the Messianic.’ In the ‘nonviolent violence’ being articulated here, there is ‘something beyond;’ Critchley says, “Both of them identify it with an experience of nonviolence, with the placelessness of a commandment, an infinite ethical demand, and both of them describe it as the Messianic.”⁴⁰⁴ The Messianic is understood here as that which breaks the order of the objective experience of time, the Messianic *interrupts* as it were. For Levinas, this relates to the subjective experience of the infinite ethical relation to the other, a relation that is anarchic, placing in question the self with respect to its autarchic and autonomous structure. In this regard, we could say that anarchy is the infinite demand of a ‘subjective Messianism of nonviolence.’

Finally, returning to Žižek, Critchley casts the terms of their debate as an essential conflict between authoritarianism and anarchism. Žižek interprets Critchley’s anarchic resistance as nothing but a “moralizing supplement to a Third Way Left”⁴⁰⁵ that negotiates in the terms of the state, and as such in fact contributes to the state’s retention of power. For Žižek, the state must be seized and ruthlessly taken over. Poetically, the debate between Žižek and Critchley reflects the Marxist-Leninist and Bakunin-Anarchist polemic. While both desire the ‘abolition of the state’ as the final goal of the revolution, Lenin would disagree with the anti-authoritarian tactics of the anarchists. For Lenin, violent takeover was needed to establish the ‘dictatorship of the proletariat.’ But, as Critchley indicates, Bakunin understands the inherent contradiction in this form of revolutionary politics; “‘any State, their ‘people’s State’ included, is a yoke, which means that, on the one hand, it fosters despotism and, on the other, slavery.”⁴⁰⁶ To Critchley’s mind, Žižek’s political configuration is little different to the Marxist-Leninist authoritarianism that evolves from the dictatorship of the proletariat to the iron-fisted dictatorship of the one communist party.

⁴⁰³ Simon Critchley, *Infinitely Demanding: Ethics of Commitment, Politics of Resistance* (London: Verso, 2007), 124-125. Emphasis added.

⁴⁰⁴ Simon Critchley, *Faith of the Faithless: Experiments in political theology* (London: Verso, 2014), 223.

⁴⁰⁵ Slavoj Žižek, ‘Resistance is Surrender,’ in *London Review of Books* 29.22. (12 Nov, 2007), 7.

⁴⁰⁶ Simon Critchley, *Faith of the Faithless: Experiments in political theology* (London: Verso, 2014), 230.

Hence, the Žižekian binary between no power and state power is the space within which Critchley's anarchic 'interstitial distance' attempts to manoeuvre and disrupt. Critchley clarifies that interstitial distance is not given, but must be *created* through political articulation and that anarchic tactics are not driven by disorder but rather a 'pure' conception of order, namely; "free organization, self-determination, collaboration, cooperation, or, to use Rousseau's word, association."⁴⁰⁷ It is in this sense that Critchley's infinite demand of anarchic nonviolence – wherein this guideline may have to be transgressed in particular situations of injustice – is to be understood as a 'politics of nonviolence' that works within the state and against the state. Critchley's politics, therefore, punctuates his faith of the faithless as a *political faith* in so far as it commends not a rule, but an open-ended gauge for political action. Critchley's political faith, seen in this way, offers a nuanced attempt for thinking through the political situation governing contemporary politics, as well as a manner in which to approach and practice this political faith.

The Theological Inventory

The road walked up to this point has sought to engage the dual task of evaluating Simon Critchley's theological experiments in *Faith of the Faithless*, while situating these evaluations within the context of Critchley's central ethical-philosophical claim, namely, the infinite ethical demand. In this process, which broadly resembled the structure of his experiments in political theology, various accentuations of a 'faith for the faithless' were foregrounded. At different moments, these accentuations were problematized or questioned from a theological point of reference, viz. the reference of *the demand of the infinite* – a reference that Critchley acquiescently disavows. The goal of this methodological approach, as stated above, was not to *inscribe* 'the theological' into what has become a precise and multi-faceted formulation of faith, but rather to keep the possibility of the transcendent within the discourse in order to point toward potential opportunities for further theological engagement. In traversing these accentuations of faith, it is not possible to propose a systematic formulation of a 'faith for the faithless,' for to do so would be erroneous and disserving with respect to Critchley's project. Indeed, we recall that Critchley is only 'experimenting' with this idea while at the same time using it as a

⁴⁰⁷ *Ibid*, 232.

means for poignant philosophical and historical investigations. As such, he confesses that while there are connecting features and dominant themes, there is no single argument binding together a ‘faith of the faithless;’⁴⁰⁸ he remarks rather, “I see the chapters as a series of essays in the sense of an ‘essay’ or experiment.”⁴⁰⁹ While effort has been taken to situate the concerns of Critchley’s *Faith of the Faithless* into the larger corpus of his work, his ‘contained-essay’ form guides the methodological approach to our evaluations and also omits any expectation that a faith of faithless can or should be systematized.

In the concluding chapter of Adam Kotsko’s book *Žižek and Theology* (2008),⁴¹⁰ a section entitled “An Inventory of Theological Themes” is produced. After an in-depth and wide-ranging consideration of the development of Žižek’s philosophy and theology, Kotsko attempts to bring together the prominent features of Žižek’s theology. Critchley’s work does not nearly resemble the theological breadth and detail that Žižek confidently recasts into his materialist project. Nonetheless, we would like to adapt Kotsko’s idea here in a much reduced but imitative effort; namely, to ‘take stock’ of two prominent ‘theological’ themes in Critchley’s experiments and offer some suggestions for further investigation before turning to some final remarks.

Human finitude: The theme of finitude is one that has remained a constant in most of Critchley’s early work.⁴¹¹ Its configuration emerges out of the simple question of how we are to come terms with finitude in a manner that does not capitulate to what he has called the ‘tragic-heroic paradigm’ of the ‘autonomy orthodoxy.’ The latter, for Critchley, in

⁴⁰⁸ As Critchley states in *Faith of the Faithless* (2014), 20, “Although the four main chapters of this book constitute a developing and interrelated set of concerns that seek to respond to the above-mentioned triangulation of politics, religion, and violence, each of them is relatively self-contained.”

⁴⁰⁹ *Ibid*, 20.

⁴¹⁰ Adam Kotsko, *Žižek and Theology* (London: T&T Clark, 2008)

⁴¹¹ The six books published between *Ethics of Deconstruction* (1992) and *Infinitely Demanding* (2007), excluding the latter, all include this theme. See *Very Little ... Almost Nothing: Death, Philosophy and Literature* (2nd ed. London: Routledge, 2004 [1997]), which was birthed out of the experience of his father’s death with cancer. “Comedy and Finitude: Displacing the Tragic-Heroic Paradigm in Philosophy and Psychoanalysis” in *Ethics-Politics-Subjectivity: Essays on Derrida, Levinas & Contemporary French Thought* (London: Verso, 2009 [1999]), 217-238. In *Continental Philosophy: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), it is Continental Philosophy, specifically in the post-Kantian tradition, that is concerned with the finitude of human experience and how we can become ‘emancipated’ from such an experience. Humour for Critchley, is the way in which we can respond to the finitude of our own existence, as such this theme permeates his book *On Humour* (London: Routledge, 2002). An interesting section in this regard, however, is the connection he makes with humour and Christianity, cf. ‘Laughter’s Messianic Power,’ 12-18. See also *The Book of Dead Philosophers* (New York: Vintage, 2008) and *How to Stop Living and Start Worrying* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2010), 37-59, which reads as an interview with Critchley and Carl Cederström on Critchley’s life and work.

reference to Heidegger and much of Western Philosophy, describes a bombastic view of our finitude that is ‘too heroic,’ and as such generates catastrophic political implications, again concerning Heidegger and Nationalist Socialism. In our evaluations we have seen this theme recurringly; in the introductory notion of ‘Wilde’s Christianity,’ out of his destitution and utter subjugation in prison he articulates his atheistic fidelity, and in the notion of original sin in Schmitt and its naturalization in John Gray, where the undesirable political implications became the motivation for Critchley’s theorization of *overcoming* original sin through Porete’s ‘mystical anarchism.’ The major theoretical and philosophical foundation for the theme of human finitude or ontological defectiveness, however, is located in Critchley’s readings of Heidegger and Levinas. As we have noted, through Levinas, Critchley reverses Heidegger’s notion that ‘Death is the possibility of impossibility.’ The latter refers to Dasein, whose being is always to be, its ‘possibility,’ which is limited and thus made ‘impossible’ by death. For Heidegger, accepting this limit, and ‘mastering’ it, is how one must act in the world. But for Levinas and Critchley, death is the reverse, the ‘impossibility of possibility.’ As we saw, Levinas develops this out of the constitutive relationality that defines what it means to be human, we *cannot* master our autonomy because what constitutes subjectivity is first and foremost the infinite ethical relation to the other, *heteronomously* splitting the subject. In other words our ability-to-be is always placed in question, we are thus defined by our ontological defectiveness, our *inauthenticity*. This, Critchley says, is the theological equivalent of original sin, which can be traced back from St. Paul, Augustine and Luther. We saw in the previous chapter the necessity of the law for St. Paul and that if conceived in a type of ‘crypto-Marcionism,’ (the accusation against Agamben) then this leads to a secessionist politics. Thus in a theological register along with St. Paul, and this is the point we wish to highlight, we are to accept our sinful nature as human beings in the world and humbly come to terms with our finitude. But, this is only the first part of what it means to accept our sinful nature, what should follow this is a *proclamation* of faith in Jesus Messiah. The proclamation is a declarative *act* that *enacts* the Messianic posture toward the world; the world is falling away, and we are to live *hos me* (as if not). The Messianic subtext that Critchley employs, following his reading of Heidegger is a powerful message from a faith of the faithless, one that inspires neither melancholia nor passivity despite our fundamental lack. Theologically, this is not distant from the Messianic prophetic tradition within Christian faith. Indeed, with its cue from the post-exilic prophets to what we find here in St. Paul, there is a vision of a messianic community that can critically contend with the dominant powers and offer instructive ways

of living ‘as if not.’ There is no need to engage the extensive literature on this point. What is important for us is that Critchley’s faith of the faithless is a faith that is radically concerned with how one structures one’s life in the world, particularly from a position of weakness, what Taylor will call ‘the weight of the world.’ This is a symbolic reminder for the faith of the faithful, whom often revel in a spiritual superiority complex that abandons a commonly shared ontological inadequacy. In the same way that a faith of the faithful would benefit from deeper reflection on this aspect of sin and the Messianic posture, a faith of the faithless would also find further resources for what is essentially a politics of emancipation in the Messianic prophetic tradition of the Christian faith itself.

Love: In Critchley’s corpus ‘love’ is a vividly innovative feature that has entered his work. The taxonomy of love he describes concerns particularly the ideas of ‘mystical love’ and ‘rigorous love.’ Where the former is understood as “that act of spiritual daring that attempts to eviscerate the old self in order that something new might come into being,” and the latter as the “rigorous activity of the subject that proclaims itself into being at each instance.”⁴¹² We focus here on the former, where we saw in chapter three that loves’ mystical evisceration of the self, creates a new moment of freedom; through the poverty of the self, communities of love are created, which open up new categories to think of radical anarchic politics. However, it was also noted that given his atheism, together with an immensely individualistic notion of self-negation, the question of agency and motivation become problematic to sustain. More directly, what this analysis evinces is that Critchley’s view of mystical love appears somewhat underdeveloped. It is uncertain how it is accounted for when seen oscillating between the divine source on the one hand and the autochthonous self on the other. If we are to assume the latter, in order to remain consistent with Critchley’s avowed atheistic stance, then love configures itself into an abstracted political lever for community formation.

In a conversation with Cornel West to discuss Critchley’s book *Faith of the Faithless*,⁴¹³ which furthers this points, West poses a question to Critchley, noting the intellectual passion he sees in Critchley’s attempt to undergird radical politics. He asks how he accounts for the shift in his work from the Socratic question of ‘how to live’ to the

⁴¹² *Ibid*, 18.

⁴¹³ This conversation was held by the Brooklyn Academy of Music, and can be viewed online: “Simon Critchley and Cornel West in Conversation at BAM,” YouTube video, 1:03, posted by “BAMorg,” April 13, 2012, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3oB2eQmVFLY>.

prophetic question of ‘how to love?’ His response is that there is something unique and distinct in Christianity that he does not find in philosophy. He explains that in contrast to Socrates, in whom he sees a kind of philosophical selfishness, figures like St. Paul who set up and define the early Christian movement as ‘insurgent egalitarian’ communities of love, do so on the basis of a self-impoverishment, a lowliness and weakness. As we have seen, in Porete’s process of deification through utter self-annihilation, Critchley finds this self-impoverishment entangled with a self-negating mysticism. At the political level, Christian theology that is kept keenly aware of its ‘anti-philosophical’ tradition is indubitable and goes without saying, however, Critchley’s ruminations with love, while novel and provoking, remain inadequate.

It is well known the desire (*eros*) that Socrates had in his pursuit of wisdom, but Socrates, like Hamlet, remain incorrigible in their ability to *love others*. Critchley’s wrestling with a faith for the faithless that is undergirded by love does not seem to fully exonerate itself from the political plane, and in a certain sense, remains Socratic in its discourse. But Christian faith and love move beyond the plane of political formation. Indeed, as Critchley says, the political formation of communities he has in mind are marked by communal sharing of love and are postured in a manner that resists the imposition of empire, but what he overlooks is that they are also communities that *‘love thy enemies.’* It is this intractable position of the Christian faith that is lacking in Critchley and the philosophical tradition, and from which a faith of the faithless is deprived. A faith of the faithless that is to be advanced amidst the violent triangulation of politics, violence and religion, and conterminous with the continued fracturing of society into dichotomous categories of ‘us’ and ‘they,’ will need to develop further the implications of a faith that revolves around *the infinite ethical demand of ‘loving thy enemies.’*

Conclusion: The Demand of the Infinite?

We come then to the question with which we began, namely, in what way if any, can the nature and structure of the faith of the faithless be ‘useful’ for a faith of the faithful? Another way of phrasing this question would be to ask rhetorically, could the *infinite demand* be conceived as the *demand of the Infinite?*

While we have noted that to produce a systematization of a faith of the faithless is not advantageous, and that a faith of the faithful that mirrors a faith of the faithless is equally disingenuous, it is hoped, that through our evaluations, it has become possible to conceive of a faith of the faithful that is orientated around the *demand of Infinite*. At a theoretical level, this was already articulated through Knud Løgstrup's *The Ethical Demand*, which is based on the radical one-sidedness of the ethical demand, provided that one understands one's life as a gift from God. At other moments in Critchley's experiments the *demand of the Infinite* could also be invoked; the experience of faith in the subject which binds itself to the infinite demand of the supreme fiction is conceived as a binding to a *demand of the Infinite*, which does not require a pseudo-religious poetic vision of the transcendent. Additionally, in chapter three we saw that the infinite demand of love resulted in a question concerning agency and motivation, in a demand of love based on the *demand of the Infinite*, rather, the question of agency takes on new shape and potency for political formation. In the last chapter, we concluded that Critchley's faith of the faithless is undergirded by love, and that such a move reveals the limits of a faithless faith in being drawn ineluctably to Christian sources. Above we saw that the infinite demand of love is also inadequate, for it does not imply the demand of the Infinite, that is to say, a demand that *demand*s the love toward one's enemies. These formulations do not represent a formal theory of a *demand of the Infinite*, to be sure, but there is certainly room here for further investigation into the shape and structure of what a demand from the *Infinite* might look like that takes its cue from the *Infinite Demand*.

In what we see as a more important task, and in a somewhat counter-intuitive final consideration, we would like to problematize an underlying methodological approach that might be inferred from the gestures outlined above, and at the same impose an implicit critique. This has to do with the 'aporetic sensibility toward transcendence,' to which we have referred throughout this project, namely, that Critchley's faith of the faithless is positioned ambivalently between an imminent conception of faith and a porous debarring of transcendence. To make sense of this ambivalent position, we turn to a paradigm developed by Mark Lewis Taylor⁴¹⁴ in his most recent book *The Theological and the*

⁴¹⁴ Taylor is currently the Maxwell M. Upson Professor of Theology and Culture at Princeton Theological Seminary. Some of his major publications include: *Religion, Politics, and the Christian Right: Post-9/11 Politics and American Empire* (Fortress Press, 2005), *The Executed God: The Way of the Cross in Lockdown America* (2nd ed. Fortress Press, 2015 [2001]), *Remembering Esperanza: A Cultural Political Theology for North American Praxis* (Orbis 1990/Fortress 1995).

Political (2011).⁴¹⁵ Taylor's book results, on the one hand, out of the rising complexity between politics and theology, as we have seen evinced in the 'return to religion' in thinkers like Žižek, Agamben and Badiou, as well as on the other hand, a composite deployment of the 'religious' or 'spiritual' in modern societies. For Taylor, the dominant feature of 'post-secular' Western society is a syncretistic vitality of both religious and political sensibilities in the contextual systems of respective communities. According to Taylor, this situation requires an engagement that desires a rethinking of what theology could mean for our time, from specifically the perspective of emancipatory politics. *The Theological and the Political* is a book of high theory, and engages a host of interlocutors, most prominently, Jean-Luc Nancy, Theodore Schatzki, Pierre Bourdieu, Chantal Mouffe, Michel Foucault and others. For our purposes, there are three categories he distinguishes that we would like to highlight and draw upon; 'the theological,' 'the Theological' and 'transimmanence.' The Theological (with a capital 'T') represents the theology of 'the guild,' practiced in universities and prescribed by traditional Christianity. Accordingly, Taylor says, these "Christian theological institutions of the West, tend to focus on doctrinal loci, traditional topics of God, creation, sin, Christology...which provide an ordering function...structur[ing] a sense of 'orthodoxy.'"⁴¹⁶ What this implies is that Theology traffics in a 'web of symbols' that ultimately lead to a direct or indirect defence of a transcendent 'Other,' and a "slighting of the popular art-forms of emancipatory politics." Further, "when the guild's over-riding concern is to safeguard a transcendent referent, 'God; or some 'Beyond Other,' it usually has a deleterious effect upon emancipatory politics."⁴¹⁷ With some minimal overlap, Taylor proposes 'the theological' (lowercase 't') in contrast to this critique of 'Theology.' The theological for Taylor is closely exemplified in the work of Badiou,⁴¹⁸ not as a 'political theology' as such, but rather a "political theorization of the theological."⁴¹⁹ This political theorization begins from the dimension of agonistic political thought and practice, that is, in the midst of imposed social suffering – whatever form that might take. Crucially, the people that experience the 'weight of the world,' as he says in his subtitle, are not *only* oppressed victims, they are *also* creative

⁴¹⁵ Mark Lewis Taylor, *The Theological and the Political: On the Weight of the World* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2011).

⁴¹⁶ *Ibid*, 12.

⁴¹⁷ Charles Gelman, *The Theological and the Political*, (2011), The Immanent Frame.

<http://blogs.ssrc.org/tif/2011/07/05/the-theological-and-the-political/> (accessed November 18, 2015), 9.

⁴¹⁸ Mark Lewis Taylor, *The Theological and the Political: On the Weight of the World* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2011), 20-21.

⁴¹⁹ *Ibid*, xiv.

crucibles and ‘spectral humans’ (borrowed from Judith Butler) that can be powerful agents of artful practice against the weight of oppression. It is out of this dimension that the theological breaks with the transcendent/imminent binary, into what Nancy calls ‘transimmanence.’ Taylor’s language to describe transimmanence is somewhat verbose. I quote here at length from an interview to help understand this concept in more condensed terms;

“Let me try to break this notion of ‘transimmanence’ down into its simplest terms. It is that deep place of agony in ourselves, personally and collectively, where we know fear, dread, melancholy, rage, which can take us into despair but often break forth in rebellion and hope. It is a zone of turbulent liminality, a betwixt-and-between zone in which life is always moving, portentously, constituting a spectre of both threat and promise for the present and future. It is an agonistic place whereby life is always on the move. One philosopher calls it a place where existence is always opening unto itself.”

Notice the similarity in the Taylor’s description to what we have seen in Critchley. The sense of weakness, ‘despair,’ ‘melancholy,’ and the ‘place of agony,’ and out of which this collectivity ‘breaks forth in rebellion and hope,’ sounds very much like the faith of the faithless. In Critchley’s reading of Paul we saw the ‘scourged-off communities’ that are to live *as if not*, we saw that out of our ‘weakness we are strongest,’ and we saw that only in acceptance of our ontological defectiveness can *anarchic politics* emerge. There is much more in Taylor’s theorization of ‘transimmanence,’ and in the nature of ‘the prodigious art force’ wielded out of positions of oppression, which relate to Critchley’s poetic sensibility in faith of the faithless, but important here is the explanatory power of this notion. It locates Critchley’s faith of the faithless by cutting through the transcendent/immanent binary and positioning it in between, where the latter now becomes the locus for which Critchley can propose a faith of the faithless that is provoked by agonistic politics. Indeed, understood in these categories, namely, that a faith of the faithless is ‘theological’ with respect to its transimmanent dimension – the dimension of ‘turbulent liminality’ where “transformative arts often break forth and catalyze powerful political movements for change”⁴²⁰ – we see that not only does it resist the transcendent/immanent binary, but also ‘haunts’ Theology, keeping it in check for its discourse of power.⁴²¹ A theology that wants

⁴²⁰ Charles Gelman, *The Theological and the Political*, (2011), The Immanent Frame.

<http://blogs.ssrc.org/tif/2011/07/05/the-theological-and-the-political/> (accessed November 18, 2015), 6.

⁴²¹ Cf. Mark Lewis Taylor’s, *The Theological and the Political: On the Weight of the World* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2011), 49-66, for his full critique on what he calls Theology’s ‘imperio-colonial sense.’ There

to theorize with a *demand of the infinite*, a faith of the faithless or any political-theological philosophizing emerging from the so-called ‘return to religion,’ will have to be aware of the implications of the transcendent/immanent binary. Further, theology and religious communities in general that are going to wrestle with an ever-complicating politico-religious landscape, need to be open to versions of ‘the theological’ that issue an emancipatory politics which does not relegate, but embraces “the emancipatory function of art,”⁴²² in its tactile, literary, philosophical and theological forms.

he also addresses the anticipated question of liberation theologies. Even these theologies, he says, remain subject to the dominant ‘European white male theologies,’ and therefore have failed to meet the “intellectual responsibility of what Pierre Bourdieu has termed ‘reflexivity.’” p. 59.

⁴²² Charles Gelman, *The Theological and the Political*, (2011), The Immanent Frame.

<http://blogs.ssrc.org/tif/2011/07/05/the-theological-and-the-political/> (accessed November 18, 2015), 5.

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