

STASIS

BEYOND POLITICAL THEOLOGY?

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POLITICAL THEOLOGY AND THE UNWORKING OF MEANING

Political theology refers to the impossibility of both to completely separate and to completely conflate politics and religion. As Kenneth Reinhard describes political theology, “the political order is sustained by theological concepts that it cannot completely assimilate.”¹ It remains a point of contention, however, what the repercussions of the trespassing of theological concepts into the political are. For Carl Schmitt, this indicated the centrality of the sovereign power to decide.² It led Walter Benjamin to diagnose religion as a symptom of capitalism.³ Claude Lefort emphasized that the Enlightenment both rejected the possibility of such a trespassing and could not do without it.⁴ Jan Assmann has shown how political theology can lead to fruitful historical investigations.⁵ Ernesto Laclau’s “empty signifier” articulated the disjunctions and conjunctions of the political and the theological, insisting that the “recognition of the constitutive nature of this gap and its political institutionalization is the starting point of modern democracy.”⁶ Despite the differences between these thinkers, there is one abiding characteristic. There is a constitutive disjunction between politics and the political, between law and justice.⁷ As a result, political theology forecloses meaning in politics—that is, no political party or representative can be thought to represent the political ideal. More emphatically, there is no end of history.

I will explore here whether it is possible to understand the foreclosure of meaning not as the conclusion, but rather as the condition of the possibility of the political. Can the meaningless or the irrational function as the basis of the intertwining and imbrication of the secular

and the sacred? I hasten to note the oxymoron of seeking to establish a *basis* for a non-teleological politics. Is not the proclamation of a state *beyond* already a tacit re-introduction of a teleology? A metaphysical politics of foundations and essences is perfectly capable of establishing itself upon a basis that dissimulates its own presence. A simple negation of teleology can be nothing but teleological. What is needed instead, as I will argue at the end, is the operative presence of an interruption that marks both the relation between the theological and the political, as well as the possibility of judgment.

How can one bypass a complete negation of meaning or of the rational? How can one avoid a negative (political) theology?⁸ I will demonstrate here that “stasis” has the capacity to function as the starting point of the relation between the theological and the political because it neither negates the terms by positing them as exclusionary nor conflates them. Far from simply negating a metaphysical basis for the political, the historical roots of the word “stasis” go deep into both politics and religion. I will explore those roots in detail shortly, merely indicating here that stasis is linked to politics, since its primary meaning is political change, revolution, or civil war, as well as to the theological, since it denotes immobility or immutability, both of which were attributes of God. Stasis, then, presents the simultaneous presence and absence that exemplifies the unassimilable relation of the sacred and the secular in political theology.

Nicole Loraux elaborates on this simultaneous presence and absence in the most important work on stasis, *The Divided City*.⁹ Loraux starts with the amnesty granted in 403 BC to mark the end of the stasis or civil war that ravaged the city of Athens. The amnesty was not merely a protection from prosecution, but also a proscription against remembering the events of the civil war. Stasis was an injunction to forget. Simultaneously, however, this injunction was based precisely on that which it proscribed, namely the past. That which is repressed and unutterable organizes memory. Thus the proscription does not have the merely negative function of prohibiting certain functions or memories. It also plays the role of creating an imaginary past of a utopian democracy, an idealized *politeia*, whose unretrievability is the present’s condemnation to a lack of redemption.

Loraux further asserts that “we need to invent a language that is not Roman in order to speak of *stasis*.”¹⁰ Stasis, according to Loraux,

exemplifies the uniqueness of the Greek *polis*, that is, the political prior to the advent of Christianity and the invention of a metaphysics of presence. The uniqueness of the Greek paradigm has to be acknowledged. But Loraux shies away from the challenge to bring the political import of the Greek *polis*—and of stasis—to bear upon contemporary notions of the political. Stasis has the ability to destabilize the relation between religion and politics precisely because it introduces a pre-metaphysical heritage. In addition, as a multivalent word, stasis has the capacity to disturb the mutual support of presence and absence. Thus, it has the capacity to unwork meaning. Because of this unworking, which is beyond the opposition of presence and absence, stasis has the potential to allow for the differential relation between the political and the theological.

Through a philological analysis in the next section, I will show how such an unworking of meaning necessitates a politics of reading. Stasis is a single word that incorporates the impossibility to either conflate or separate the political from the theological. But this impossibility needs to be gleaned from the way language operates. Stasis gives rise to the responsibility to interpret its co-implication of presence and absence. It necessitates the work of interpretation in order to unwork meaning. As I will argue at the end of this article, this notion of the work is crucial in understanding political theology.

THE PHILOLOGICAL APPROACH

Stasis is derived from the verb *istamai* or *istemi* in ancient Greek. The verb can mean either to stand up, or to be standing, to be waiting. It can be either the movement upward or the state in which one finds oneself after the movement is completed. The verb can denote either an active or a middle voice. This ambiguity of the verbal form is carried over to the nounal form of stasis.

Stasis branches out into two clusters of meaning derived from the literal and figurative image of movement or lack thereof. In the first cluster, stasis refers to lack of movement, in the second, excessive movement. Both these clusters extend into present-day linguistic use in such a way as to attest to a notion of political theology.

The combination of movement and immobility rendered within the word *stasis* recalls the late classical definition of the divine. According

to Aristotle, the god, or *theos*, is the *kinoun akinetos*, the “unmoved mover”—literally, that which moves while remaining static or unchanging.¹¹ Because such a god is understood as unchanging or as not subject to external influence, it belongs to the first cluster of meaning. The verbal form was translated into the Latin *stare*, which privileges the sense of a lack of movement; it denotes a rest, a standstill. For this reason, modern usage of derivatives of stasis is aligned to the first cluster of meaning. *Stare* is the root of expressions such as “statute,” “status quo,” or “static.” More significantly, it is the root of the word for body politic, “state,” and not only in English, but also in most modern European languages.¹² A notion of a political theology is already discernible in the linguistic deployment of stasis as immobility to designate first the divine and then the body politic.

Judging by the use of the word “stasis” and its cognates in Solon and Plato, and in Aristotle and Thucydides, the second cluster of signification was the predominant one in ancient Greece. Stasis as movement means either civil war or revolution. Plato contrasts in *Republic* 470b stasis to *polemos* (war). While *polemos* is conducted against people of a different race, those summarily designated as the barbarians, stasis is an *emfyllos polemos*, a war between people of the same race, namely the Greeks. This distinction conceives of the body politic strictly in terms of racial connection, like an extended family, which is Plato’s argument. Stasis in Aristotle becomes synonymous with a series of terms, *μεταβολή*, *νεωτερισμός*, *κίνησις*, and so forth, that characterize not merely a racial upheaval, but rather a polis whose laws and institutions are unsettled. Book V of *Politics* describes stasis as revolution, even though it is a moot point whether stasis denotes primarily a class struggle. The meaning of stasis as “movement” of the body politic can be discerned today in the word “sedition.” In his translation of Thucydides’ history of the Peloponnesian War, Hobbes consistently rendered stasis as sedition. Sedition is that activity that undermines the legal and political authority of the sovereign who, according to Carl Schmitt, is analogous to God. In this second cluster, again, is present the idea of a political theology.

Stasis, then, indicates two contradictory clusters of signification that start from ancient Greece and inform linguistic usage up to the present. Because these contradictory clusters share a notion of political theology, it is possible to start conceiving of a point where they will

converge or even merge. In order for this merging to be conceptualized, however, both those meanings that denote immobility and initially refer to the theological, and those that denote movement and initially refer to the political *need the other, their opposite, in order to start to congeal into the construct commonly called political theology*. The term “political theology” designates here the presupposition of the separability of its constitutive elements. The political and the theological must be able to negate each other before they can form an analogical relation. The philosophical implications of this will be examined later with reference to Carl Schmitt. The philological analysis, however, has more to offer.

There is a third category of meanings in which stasis and its derivatives denote simultaneously and equally mobility and immobility, thereby undermining their opposition or mutual negation. This both distinguishes the third category of meanings from the two previous clusters of meaning and forces a reconsideration of the neat separability of the political and the theological. The earliest example is a poem by Alcaeus, the seventh-century Mytilenian poet:

I fail to understand the direction [stasis] of the winds: one wave rolls in from this side, another from that, and we in the middle are carried along in company with our great black ship, much distressed in the great storm.¹³

The stasis of the winds denotes not only their direction but also the place where their contradictory directions clash and cancel each other out, creating a restless repose. The relation between restless repose, on the one hand, and mobility and immobility, on the other, can be understood in two different ways. Either restless repose is a dissemblance of mobility and immobility and in this sense is a metaleptic presentation of their merge in political theology, or restless repose can decisively disrupt the foundational separation between mobility and immobility and hence undermine the very idea of a political theology. In other words, the space where the counter-directional winds cancel each other out can be viewed either as a dialectical overcoming, a station toward the anticipated result that legitimates it in advance, or as the sidestepping of any dialectical progression, a reversal of the dialectic or a “dialectic at a standstill” that eschews all attempts at legitimacy. To choose between the two alternatives, closer attention needs to be paid to the third category of meaning.

This third category exhibits two main linguistic usages that at first glance seem unrelated to each other. First, stasis in argumentation is the presentation of the contradictory positions within the course of a philosophical argument. It belongs to the rhetorical tradition of *antilogoi*, or *dissoi logoi*. This received a technical definition in forensic rhetoric. As Hermogenes explains, stasis was that part of the argumentation at the beginning of court proceedings that, having settled on the correctness of certain facts, disputed under which laws they were to be ruled.¹⁴ The standard example is the murder of the adulterous eunuch. A husband comes back home early and finds his wife in bed with a eunuch. In a rage, he kills the eunuch. These facts are beyond dispute. The issue or stasis is whether the deed should be classified under the right of the husband to kill an adulterer or whether it should be classified as a murder, given that the eunuch could not, properly speaking, be an adulterer. The stasis here is between a lawful killing and an unlawful murder.¹⁵ Or, viewed more broadly, stasis is the procedure whereby an act is placed within a particular jurisdiction so that the application of a law can be carried out. What is at stake, then, is the lawfulness of hermeneutics, no less, perhaps, than a hermeneutics of the lawful.

Second, stasis also means infection or disease. This meaning is very old. It can be found in Solon's *Eunomia*, the poem about rectifying the political situation in Athens after the factional strife that threatened its existence. In this context, stasis as disease might be taken as a simple metonymy—faction is a “disease” that destroys or negates the city—and hence assimilated to the second cluster of meaning. This is the assumption of every researcher on stasis, from Loraux and Gehrke, to Manolopoulos and Kalimtzis.¹⁶ This does not explain, however, how Plato could use stasis in *Timaeus* in order to describe precisely diseases of the body. In *Timaeus* (81e–82a), the meaning of stasis as faction is used as the figurative presentation of the disease in the body, thereby reversing the metonymical relation between disease and faction: here, disease is primary. In addition, the medical meaning of stasis is still used today in expressions such as the “stasis of the blood” (a symptom infection) or the “status of a disease” (the height or acme of the disease). Therefore, disease cannot be treated as a simple metonymy of faction and hence assimilated to it. Rather, stasis as infection is that which disturbs the equilibrium of a body, be it physical or

political. This is the reason that that which is understood as diseased has to be expunged. Conversely, the desire to expunge is the symptom of understanding that which is opposed as diseased. In other words, disease occupies in rhetoric an equivalent position to that of negation in the logic of the political.

It is a small step, and at the same time a great leap, to talk about this body also as a body of work, a corpus of writing. Body, then, can be conceived as any organized system of discourse and stasis as that force that disturbs or even destroys the system, the impulse toward asystematicity. Making this leap also necessitates that the two meanings in the third category of signification of stasis, argument and disease, are taken as working together, and in such a way as to unsettle the relation between the two main clusters of meaning. Indeed, the hypothesis of this project on stasis is that there is a close connection between interpretation and disease and, moreover, that this connection designates a different relating, one that disrupts the separation between politics and theology presupposed by political theology. *A lawful hermeneutics becomes imbued with disease.* No systematic meaning, no organic whole is to be achieved.

Simultaneously, *disease, also, becomes imbued with rhetoric*; it becomes part of an expressive strategy. The designation of something as unclean, impure, or inauthentic, as diseased, identifies the political motives of the enunciator and is part of his symptomatology. Stasis either as immobility or as mobility incorporates a notion of disease that is used to designate an opponent, an adversary to be suppressed. The disease must be expunged; it is the cure through expunction that indicates the presence of disease. Conversely, to adhere to the restless repose of stasis means to resist separation, to resist a politics of adversity, and to advance instead a politics of friendship.

The relation between stasis and friendship is central in Aristotle, as will be shown later. One final point needs to be made about the third category of meaning. It demonstrates that a philological analysis of lexical *Gegensinn* necessarily trespasses into other fields of inquiry. The idea that the *Gegensinn* of words can become a medium that links polysemy and human action found an influential articulation in Freud's review of Karl Abel's *Über den Gegensinn der Urworte*. Abel, a philologist, had noticed how in Egyptian language, but also language in general, "in the 'oldest roots' . . . antithetical double meanings are

found to occur.”¹⁷ Such words elude a simple notion of negation, which is precisely one of the characteristic ways a repressed content is articulated either in analysis or in dreams. Thus Freud concludes that psychoanalysts “should be better at understanding and translating the language of dreams” with the assistance of a philological understanding of the *Gegensinn* of words.¹⁸

Freud’s paper prompted two significant responses. The first is to be found in William Empson’s *Seven Types of Ambiguity*. According to Empson, the seventh and “most ambiguous” type “occurs when the two meanings of the word . . . are the two opposite meanings.” Such a contradiction, Empson observes, “may be meaningless but it can never be blank” and thus it is used in high literature with the effect that the reader is “drawn taut between the two similar impulses into the stasis of appreciation.”¹⁹ The “stasis of appreciation” recalls Alcaeus’ boat at a standstill from the stasis of the winds. Empson is highlighting here an experience of restless repose as the acme of the reading experience. The validity of Freud’s reliance on philology is put to the test by Benveniste in “Remarks on the Function of Language in Freudian Theory.” Benveniste’s main objection is about Freud’s assumption of a strict symmetry between language and dreams. “Far from language reproducing the appearance of a dream, it is the dream which is brought to the categories of language.”²⁰ Benveniste indicates, however, that Freud argued for the asymmetry between language and the unconscious in the later paper “On Negation,” which rectifies the earlier mistake.²¹ Significantly, the main addition in Freud’s paper “On Negation” is a theory of judgment. Here semantic values are not reduced to an individual’s repressed content, but rather extended to the social sphere. Indeed, Freud explains the very possibility of participating in the social—the power of judgment—through the impossibility of absolute negation or denial of a certain content.

At this point, the polysemy of words such as stasis does not merely extend from the linguistic and philological spheres to include interpretation and understanding in a variety of cultural fields, but is also intertwined with the effective presence of the political. There is a politics of reading. This conclusion designates the limit of the philological approach to stasis. A further elaboration of stasis will have to interrogate the understanding of the political. What has the philological analysis disclosed about the nature of the political? How is the political

related to stasis's differential meaning? These questions require a closer look at political theology. The next section will show how stasis functions in Carl Schmitt.

STASIS IN CARL SCHMITT: THE POWER OF THE SOVEREIGN

The cornerstone of Carl Schmitt's political theology is the analogy between God and the sovereign. The political and the theological are first separated through the difference between the sovereign and God and then made analogous through the similarity between their respective actions. Although stasis does not figure often in Schmitt's writings, it appears at strategic junctures. Schmitt uses stasis to structure the crucial analogy between God and the sovereign. The possibility of de-structuring Schmitt's analogy will indicate an alternative figuration of political theology, one that is not premised on a separation of religion and politics, but rather one that embraces the working and unworking, the systematizing and a-systematizing, the structuring and de-structuring potential of stasis.

Schmitt's political theology rests on a strong emphasis on the sovereign. Schmitt defined the sovereign in *Political Theology* as the one "who decides on the exception."²² The concept of the exception denotes an active intervention on the part of the sovereign. The sovereign's decision is an act. Moreover, it is the defining act of the sovereign. So long as the possibility of a decision is pending, the identification of the sovereign is also pending. The nature of this active decision is further elaborated in *The Concept of the Political*. Schmitt states that "the specific political distinction to which political actions and motives can be reduced is that between friend and enemy."²³ The enemy plays a more important role than the friend in the sovereign's active decision.²⁴ For this reason, Schmitt specifies the exact nature of the enemy: "The enemy is solely the public enemy . . . πολέμιος, not ἐχθρός."²⁵ With reference to Plato's famous discussion of stasis in *Republic* 470, Schmitt notes that only an external enemy is a real enemy; "[c]ivil war (στάσις) . . . is only a self-laceration" destroying the political. The action of a sovereign strictly excludes the identification of an internal enemy. Following a long tradition of political theory going back to Solon, Schmitt identifies stasis as a "self-laceration" of the political,

as a self-inflicted disease that should be expunged from the state. Disease is treated merely as a metonymy of stasis. A decision to engage in stasis is indicative not of a lack of action, but rather of the wrong action, the wrong decision, that confounds the state, sovereignty, and the political. Stasis as civil war is “the dissolution of the state as an organized political entity, internally peaceful, territorially enclosed, and impenetrable to aliens.”²⁶

Schmitt’s argument about the active engagement of the sovereign is amplified by the argument in *Political Theology* that “all significant concepts of the modern theory of the state are secularized theological concepts. . . . A continuous thread runs through the metaphysical, political and sociological conceptions that postulate the sovereign as a personal unit and primeval creator.”²⁷ Thus there is an analogy between the god and sovereign upon which the claim of a political theology rests.²⁸ Schmitt shows in *Politische Theologie II* that stasis also figures in the theological and in such a way as to elucidate the analogy between the sovereign and the god. The theological, however, requires stasis for its determination. Schmitt cites from Gregory of Nazianzus’ theological treatise *De Filio*, where the Trinity is described in terms of stasis: “ἔστι γὰρ καὶ τὸ ἐν στασιάζον πρὸς ἑαυτὸ.” Schmitt translates: “The One is always in revolt against itself.”²⁹ The possibility of stasis safeguards the unity of the divine and consequently all theological concepts consequent upon it. Stasis describes the divine in active terms as the self-referential stasis of the Trinity. For the political, stasis is a disease because the sovereign’s decision must be directed to an enemy outside the body politic. Conversely, the theological stasis guarantees the activity of the Trinity and hence its connection to sovereignty, while also asserting that disease is never a metonymy of the divine; the stasis of the Trinity is a description of the activity of the divine that is omnipresent. Just like the sovereign, the Trinity is also active. But this activity or self-revolt cannot be directed against something outside the divine. Schmitt cites approvingly the motto from Goethe’s fourth book of *Dichtung und Wahrheit*: “nemo contra deum nisi deus ipse.”³⁰ Only the divine can be an enemy to itself.

From this perspective, stasis becomes a pivotal term in Schmitt’s political theology. Schmitt’s position is that the political and the theological must be separated in order to become analogous.³¹ *Politische*

Theologie II is primarily concerned to show that all attempts to depoliticize the theological or to detheologize the political fail because they separate the theological and the political without grasping their analogical connection. According to Schmitt, such attempts have in common the presupposition of an existential dualism. This dualism is manifest in religion through the distinction between a god as creator and as redeemer, while in politics through the distinction between the holder of power and the reformer.³² These two elements are always antagonistic. This undermines the unity of both the divine and the sovereign. "So long as every unity," observes Schmitt, "is a duality, it has within itself the possibility of a revolt, a stasis, and then theology appears to turn to 'stasiology.'"³³ Although both the divine and the sovereign are active principles, the stasis in each case is different because their unities are different. The theological concept of unity requires the internal unrest denoted by stasis to demonstrate that there is nothing outside god. Conversely, the sovereign's decision is by definition never self-legitimated, it is never guaranteed by statute or norm. "Looked at normatively," Schmitt writes, "the decision emanates from nothingness."³⁴ All attempts at separating the theological from the political—all depoliticizations and detheologizations—forget that stasis is a positive articulation only of divine unity. Their postulate becomes "nemo contra hominem nisi homo ipse."³⁵ Only the human can be an enemy to itself. Unity is transferred to the human. This universal humanity, however, requires a permanent state of revolt, a perpetual stasis, for its self-definition. Such a humanized stasis is nothing but a flawed attempt to decide upon the enemy. The decision between friend and enemy flutters when all are unified under the banner of a universal humanity. Political romanticism, as Schmitt terms this humanism, cancels out discord, lapsing instead in an endless and inconsequential conversation. In political romanticism, activity cedes to a pervading passivity.

Stasis allows Schmitt to develop a typology of action. This is a crucial aspect of his political theology, given that action first leads to the separation and then to the analogy between the god and the sovereign. Stasis denotes the all-inclusivity or completeness of divine activity. But, when applied to human affairs, stasis propels a political movement infected by self-destruction. Only the sovereign's decision

is a proper human action precisely because it excludes the infectious stasis or civil war. In addition, it is through his theory of action that Schmitt identifies and rejects the *bête noire* of his political theology, namely the political romanticism that, in all its manifestations, remains solipsistic and hence passive—nothing but play, a mere game.

The predominance of action indicates an insistence on immanence. Not only is the political understood as a decision immanent to the situation the sovereign finds himself in, but also the divine as *stasis* is described in terms of the immanent struggle of its constitutive elements. Through the overarching operation of immanence, action becomes the binding term for the two different unities, the sovereign and the divine. The difficulty with this approach, however, is to sustain the analogy between the god and sovereign while retaining immanence. The sovereign's immanence has to be enclosed within the borders of the political, just as the stasis of the divine is an activity only of the Trinity. This means that the sovereign's decision—that is, his designation of an enemy—can only be made against another sovereign. To paraphrase Schmitt, *nemo contra majesta nisi majestas ipse*. Only sovereignty can be an enemy to sovereignty. Then the political becomes nothing but a chess game between sovereigns whose decisions—that is, the moves they make—are not effected by the pawns, the real people or peoples their moves effect. But if that is the case, then the reputed immanence of Schmitt's actative understanding of the political evaporates. Either the chess game is nothing but a *game*, which is precisely Schmitt's accusation against political romanticism, or the sovereign game re-inscribes transcendence. Transcendence can only be re-inscribed, precisely, in and through the decision to *exclude* stasis, to expunge the disease. For whose is that decision? It cannot be the sovereign's, since the sovereign only decides upon the "real" enemy, the *polemio*. Therefore, it is a decision beyond the decision, a decision beyond the analogy of sovereign and the god. It is through this "beyond" that immanent action is transfigured into transcendence.³⁶ And yet, at the same time, it is also this "beyond" that marks and is marked by stasis without which the analogy itself would no longer be operative. Stasis, then, de-structures, deconstructs, Schmitt's political theology, showing that the very element of transcendence that it seeks to exclude is that which founds its purported immanence.

STASIS, JUSTICE, AND FRIENDSHIP: ON THE LIMIT

The separation of the political and the theological collapses so long as the analogy between sovereign and the god unravels. This undercuts the strong notion of sovereignty Schmitt sought to defend. Nothing seems more obvious today in a globalized world. The increasing power of international corporations suggests a reduction in the power of the state. Globalization curtails sovereignty. And yet this is not to suggest a simple overcoming of political theology. Globalization's justification and legitimacy is accomplished through theological categories. The appeal to a universalized individual whose *right* it is to act freely—indeed, as freed from the hold of the state—is a re-inscription of the religious sphere of the private at the very core of the most emphatically, or presumptuously, secular. In today's post-secular world, the diminished power of the sovereign shows that political theology's forces of power and mastery seem more than ever before omnipresent and omnipotent.

This raises the question about the limits of political theology, the reach of its power to negate. A depoliticized theology may be just as impossible as a detheologized politics; yet universalizing this structure assumes the erasure of limits in the essential relation between theology and the political. There is no beyond political theology that does not reproduce a structure without limits, that is, the essential structure of political theology itself. Conversely, to speak of a "beyond" political theology, where the "beyond" is not involved in a structure of transcendence, is to assert the necessity of limits. To distinguish this approach, it will be called here the theologico-political. The emphasis placed on the limit here indicates the nexus between ontology, politics, and religion. Spinoza emphasized such a nexus in the *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus* (1670). Organized religion and sovereignty are expedient means whereby sociality or the being-with of humans is organized. There is no being outside this being-with. Such an ontological assertion makes even more pressing the need to locate the limits, if any exist, organizing the theologico-political. In Jean-Luc Nancy's words, "What is at stake above all in being-with is the relation to the limit."³⁷

From the perspective of a being-with that requires limits, the distinction between states or nations is mere expediency and hence a

notion of war is a symptom of the unfolding of power. The question about the *limit* of power, about how to delimit power and hence to make judgments about it, attempts to organize power in such a way as to be neither purely immanent nor reliant on transcendence. In other words, power no longer presupposes the separation of the political and the theological. This is a power of power, that is, a power that is always singular while also allowing for singularity and repetition. Spinoza referred to such a power as the state of nature. As a result, the political becomes aligned with potentiality. In Deleuze's formulation, Spinozan ontology is concerned with what a body can do.³⁸ Potentiality sets limits to power while insisting on the singularity of the body, a body that is never alone but always a being-with. Viewing the question of the limit in this manner entails that war between sovereign entities is an after-effect of contestation. Primary is the contestation that takes place as potentiality unfolds and also as a condition of that potentiality itself. Contestation is inscribed within potentiality. There is a generalized civil war. Such a civil war, such a stasis, becomes the ontological condition of the possibility of the political.

What is the name of this condition and how is it related to stasis? A provisional answer has already been given by Loraux, who has shown that stasis is justice. Two statements by Aristotle, however, complement Loraux's insight. These rarely noticed statements affront the usual interpretation of an Aristotelian politics that purportedly privileges concord and friendship as a preamble to the Christian politics of universalized love. Aristotle's conjunction of stasis, friendship, and justice allows for a theory of judgment as the condition of the possibility of the political.

The first statement comes from the beginning of Book VIII of the *Nicomachean Ethics*. In introducing friendship (*philia*), Aristotle juxtaposes it to justice and stasis. In H. Rackham's translation in the Loeb edition the meaning seems straightforward: while friendship and concord are the highest ideals of the polis, stasis is the "self-laceration" that must be cured.³⁹ This is the usual understanding of stasis.

Such a reading, however, is not as self-evident when the Greek text itself is examined. To start with, the mood of the verbs is optative, expressing a wish, one could say a wish-fulfillment or a fantasy, rather than a reality. Further, the crucial participle construction, "if men are

friends, . . . ” is not self-evidently conditional. It could equally well be causative. This would change the translation:

Moreover, friendship appears to be the bond of the state; and lawgivers seem to set more store by it than they do by justice, for to promote concord, which seems akin to friendship, is their chief aim, while stasis, which is enmity, is what they are most anxious to banish. Because people are friends they must have no justice, given that they lack justice [i.e., by virtue of being friends]. Conversely, the just people need friendship more than anything.⁴⁰

This is an extraordinary statement. It invites the use of the privative whenever friendship and justice are juxtaposed.⁴¹ Friends are unjust, while the just are unfriendly. This is not a simple negation or exclusion. Aristotle indicates a rupture or interruption between friendship and justice. The nature of this rupture is not the same for those who are just and those who are friends. Even though both friendship and justice can be thought without recourse to the other, still the friends can do without justice while the just cannot do without friendship. Aristotle was perfectly aware of the wishful nature of such an assertion, hence the use of the optative mood. Such a notion of the friend is nothing but an ideal, the fantasy of the “lawgivers” about the perfect citizen.⁴²

There is a constellation of four terms: friendship, justice, stasis, and the political. The following statement from *Politics* delineates the configuration of this constellation:

The citizens who stand out because of their virtue would, with the utmost justice, cause a stasis or rebellion. Nevertheless, they are practically the least inclined to do so. The reason [they would cause, with the utmost justice, a stasis] is that according to the proper use of logos, only they suffer inequality universally.⁴³

The relation between justice and stasis is impossible. On the one hand, the bearers of justice should be revolutionaries, since their virtue makes them stand out from the majority, who nevertheless control the polis. Their justness makes them unfriendly. On the other hand, however, they are the least likely to practically lead a revolution. Given that one of the highest political virtues is friendship, then this means that their friendliness makes them unjust. Caught in this double bind, the just rebels must but cannot be rebels in praxis. The *Nicomachean Ethics*

described a rupture between friendship and justice from the perspective of politics. *Politics* describes a chiasmus between friendship and justice. This chiasmus traverses the terrain of stasis. Friendship and justice interrupt each other about stasis. The unfolding of this interruption, however, continues at the very moment it is suspended. This is, then, also an interruption of stasis. The limits of friendship and justice share a common ground, and that ground is, precisely, stasis.

The relation between justice and stasis is impossible. Yet the fact that the two remain chiastically related announces an arrangement pregnant with potential. The interruption of the relation between the universality of justice and the practicality of leading a revolution is identical with the virtuous man's decision to renounce, in practical terms, that which is, theoretically, just. This decision opens up a space outside any straightforward separation of law and justice. The possibility of justice highlights the political virtue of the just man. And yet the laws of the state are not to be contravened even in most of the cases when it would have been just to do so. It is this halting of action, this putting the breaks on a decision, that configures the role of stasis as central to the political. Stasis allows for the enactment of the impossible act of the political, namely the act of violence against a fellow citizen. The special feature of stasis is that it is no longer actualized as an act of physical violence, it is not a war. It is, rather, the violent act against physical violence and hence an inauguration of a space of being-with. The state of being-with is a more profound instance of friendship than the ideal friendship of the lawgivers. The friendship of the lawgivers presupposes a community while a friendship linked to stasis inaugurates a community. The danger of stasis creates a productive friendship as being-with.

The opening up of the being-with of friendship is predicated upon a double limit. The first limit has already been encountered as the rupture in the relation between friendship and justice. The impossibility of stasis resulting in the just person's decision to abstain from raising a revolution entails that the separation between friendship and justice is not absolute. Instead, the two are set in a dynamic relation. Their respective limits overlap. Thus friendship and justice enter in an inexhaustible relation. There is, however, a second sense of the limit here. It has to do with the just man's restraint, or self-limitation, despite the inequality he faces. The just man's decision to refrain from action is

an act of judgment. This political act, which is linked to the creation of the community, is fundamentally different from the sovereign decision demanded in Schmitt's theory of the sovereign. Nascent within Aristotle's thought about stasis is a theory of political judgment not confined to those who have *kyriarchia* (sovereignty or power); rather, it belongs to those who can restrain power, even abstain from it. The just person can potentially interrupt power in an act of judgment.

It would be, however, wrong to view the decision of the just person as the act of a subject. Judgment here is not subjective. The just man is compelled by the logic of the relation between justice and friendship, which unfolds as it traverses the site of stasis. There is nothing idiosyncratic or personal about such an exigency. In addition, it would be equally wrong to view this judgment as objective. Aristotle makes no mention of an environment or external circumstance compelling a subject. Moreover, to the extent that this judgment creates a being-with, then this judgment moves outside an opposition between subject and object.

At this point, a conception of the theologico-political has already been arrived at. The theologico-political is the creative power of the being-with. This force allows for the confrontation between friendship and justice. Friendship is the force that binds people together. Its reach extends to the particular, but there is always an ineliminable excess. This excess both distinguishes friendship from, and puts it in relation with, justice. Justice breaks the hold of the law. It allows for a perspective beyond the mere here and now. At the same time, its confrontation with friendship curtails its power to act. This complex relation between friendship and justice has been shown to be an interruption about and on stasis. This interruption leads to a theory of political judgment that neither privileges enmity nor presupposes a subjectivity opposed to objectivity. From the perspective of the theologico-political, stasis is that interruption. The privative in the relation between friendship and justice, the friend is unjust and the just is unfriendly, is the element of disease in their relation. Unlike Schmitt's conception, disease is not identified as the stasis that has to be excluded from the political. Rather, stasis is the regulative principle that sets in motion, while it also halts, the relation between friendship and justice. Stasis represents the point where friendship and justice, the theological and the political, intersect. It is an unstable point because the relation

between friendship and justice is unstable, never determined in advance. But this also means that stasis is a site of possibility and creation, the creation of the being-with. Stasis, as this creative power, is the limitless limit of the theologico-political.

WORKING WITH STASIS

It was argued at the beginning that stasis has the potential to avoid absolute negation, and hence to lead to a politics that is non-teleological. The philological approach to stasis showed that reading practice, the interpretation of negation, is intricately linked to the possibility of judgment and hence to the possibility of the political. Carl Schmitt reduced judgment to the power of the sovereign's decision upon the exception, which required an absolute exclusion or negation of stasis from the political. But Schmitt's own political category of immanent action required that which it had excluded, namely transcendence. Aristotle's interplay between friendship and justice in relation to stasis allowed for interruption instead of negation. None of the terms is absolute and none completely excludes the other, they are consupponible in the chiasmus. This interplay, it was suggested, opens the way for the theologico-political, that is, for a notion of judgment that allows for commonality without recourse to absolute negation. But does this mean that the theologico-political is beyond political theology? More emphatically, is there a beyond political theology?

The question about the "beyond" is a question about time. What is the temporality of stasis when it is related to the theologico-political? What is the temporality of stasis when its third category of meaning, interpretation and disease, functions as the regulative principle of the two main clusters of signification, mobility and immobility? An answer to this question has three aspects.

First, the temporality of stasis in relation to the theologico-political is intimately linked to the impossibility of fixing stasis to a particular locus. As already intimated, stasis is the interruption of friendship and justice and as such it is a creative process. Stasis continuously creates being-with. Commonality is produced by stasis. This alludes to the future. Stasis, in its creative aspect, partakes of the future. Creation is ongoing. The question whether and when this process might

stop, in other words, whether there is from this perspective a beyond political theology or an end of history, is not one that can be answered without a (prophetic) knowledge of the future. At this point, the second aspect becomes crucial. Stasis indicates a process that is also always singular and hence a process that is localized. The theologico-political is the confrontation between religion and politics, but it is a confrontation which is not produced *ex nihilo*. It requires work. The relation between the two main terms—understood either as the theological and the political, or as immobility and mobility, or as friendship and justice—is interrupted through the effort of interpretation. And this effort includes the work of identifying those elements in the discourse designated as infectious or diseased in order to be expunged. In other words, even if stasis unworks meaningfulness, still it requires an effort or work. It is this work that allows for a different sense of meaning to be reinscribed in stasis, a meaning that is unstable because it is yet to come. Third, labor or work is indispensable. Stasis cannot lead to the theologico-political without work. This is an affirmation of the primacy of materiality, of actuality. But this notion of the material and the actual should not be confused with a notion of particularity such as it can be counterpoised to universality. Rather, actuality here is to be understood as the labor of stasis that allows it to be the regulative principle of the relation between mobility and immobility. This incessant interplay is the condition of the possibility of the political. To recall the imagery from Alcaeus' poem, it is the labor of the boat brought to a standstill between counter-directional winds. The fact that the winds have stopped the boat does not mean that the crew can rest. The waves are coming from both sides and, if anything, even more effort is required at this place of restless repose.

In the question—is there a beyond political theology?—the emphasis, then, should not be placed on the “beyond.” Rather, the emphasis should be placed on the possibility contained within the question mark. How is such a beyond possible? By insisting on the question that the theologico-political itself makes possible, it is the effort to answer this question that is put into work. There are interruptions of the work of this questioning, there are political judgments. And yet no single judgment can make a final decision but can only lead to further work, to yet another question mark.

Notes

1. Kenneth Reinhard, "Toward a Political Theology of the Neighbor," in *The Neighbour: Three Inquiries in Political Theology*, ed. S. Žižek, E. L. Santer, and K. Reinhard, 11 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005).

2. Carl Schmitt, *Political Theology: Four Chapters on the Concept of Sovereignty*, trans. George D. Schwab (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1985).

3. See Walter Benjamin's essay "Kapitalismus als Religion," as well as the other essays collected in Dirk Baecker, ed., *Kapitalismus als Religion* (Berlin: Kadmos, 2004).

4. Claude Lefort, "The Permanence of Political Theology," in *Democracy and Political Theory*, trans. David Macey, 213–55 (Cambridge, UK: Polity, 1988).

5. Jan Assmann, *Ägypten: Theologie und Frömmigkeit einer frühen Hochkultur* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1984), and *Herrschaft und Heil: Politische Theologie in Ägypten, Israel und Europa* (München: Carl Hanser, 2000).

6. Ernesto Laclau, *Emancipation(s)*, 46 (London: Verso, 1996).

7. As Carl Schmitt puts it, "The concept of the state presupposes the concept of the political." *The Concept of the Political*, trans. George D. Schwab, 19 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996).

8. I have investigated Agamben's negative (political) theology in my "The Ends of Stasis: Spinoza, Reader of Agamben," *Culture, Theory and Critique* (forthcoming in 2010).

9. Nicole Loraux, *The Divided City: On Memory and Forgetting in Ancient Athens*, trans. Corinne Pache and Jeff Fort (New York: Zone, 2006).

10. Loraux, *The Divided City*, 107.

11. The two main references for the "Unmoved Mover" in Aristotle are *Metaphysics* Book Λ and *Physics* Book Θ. For an examination of the relation between these two sources in terms of the chronology of Aristotle's writings, as well as for a review of different interpretations, see Bernd Manuwald, *Studien zum Unbewegten Beweger in der Naturphilosophie des Aristoteles* (Mainz: Akademie der Wissenschaften und der Literatur, 1989).

12. See the entries for "state" and for "stand" in the *OED* (2nd ed., 1989). Incidentally, an exception is modern Greek, in which "kratos" means state.

13. Alcaeus, Fr. 208, in *Greek Lyric*, vol. 1, trans. D. A. Campbell (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1982). According to Loraux, Alcaeus was the first poet to "pronounce in his verses the word stasis" (*Divided City*, 156).

14. For a translation of Hermogenes treatise, titled "On Issues" in English, see Malcolm Heath, *Hermogenes, On Issues: Strategies of Argument in Later Greek Rhetoric*, 28–60 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995). Heath's book also represents the best scholarly discussion of the treatise.

15. Perhaps, then, stasis already introduces a notion of the *homo sacer*, if such a being exists. For a discussion of the *homo sacer* and its relation to stasis in Agamben's project, see my article, "The Ends of Stasis: Spinoza."

16. Hans-Joachim Gehrke, *Stasis: Untersuchungen zu den inneren Kriegen in den*

griechischen Staaten des 5. und 4. Jahrhunderts v. Chr. (München: Beck, 1985). Leonidas Manolopoulos, *Λ. Στάσις – Επανάστασις Νεωτερισμού—Κίνησις* (Θεσσαλονίκη: Βάνιας, 1991); and, *Πόλις Φλεγμαινονσα και Πόλις Υγιής* (Θεσσαλονίκη: Βάνιας, 1995). Kostas Kalimtzis, *Aristotle on Political Enmity and Disease: An Inquiry into Stasis* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2000).

17. Sigmund Freud, “The Antithetical Meaning of Primal Words,” in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychoanalytical Works of Sigmund Freud*, ed. James Strachey, 11:158 (London: Hogarth, 1968).

18. Freud, “The Antithetical Meaning of Primal Words,” 161.

19. Willam Empson, *Seven Types of Ambiguity*, 192–93 (New York: New Directions, 1966 [rev. 1947 ed.]).

20. Emile Benveniste, “Remarks on the Function of Language in Freudian Theory,” in *Problems in General Linguistics*, trans. Mary Elizabeth Meek, 72 (Coral Gables, Fla.: University of Miami Press, 1971). Benveniste also notes that Freud’s reliance on Abel is unfortunate, since Abel’s method does not follow established linguistic practice and hence his findings and conclusions are questionable. The reference, though, to Freud’s paper is intended to show that Freud’s argument as a whole is not invalid, but rather in need of some modification.

21. Freud “Negation” [1925], *Penguin Freud Library*, 11: 437–42 (Harmondsworth, U.K.: Penguin, 1991).

22. Schmitt, *Political Theology*, 5.

23. Schmitt, *The Concept of the Political*, 26.

24. The predominance of the enemy over the friend has been remarked by numerous commentators. See, for instance, Jacques Derrida’s discussion of Schmitt in *Politics of Friendship*, trans. George Collins (Verso: London, 1997).

25. Schmitt, *The Concept of the Political*, 28.

26. Schmitt, *The Concept of the Political*, 47.

27. Schmitt, *Political Theology*, 36 and 47.

28. It is this analogy, precisely, that is highlighted in Schmitt’s famous assertion that “The state of exception in jurisprudence is analogous to the miracle in theology” (*Political Theology*, 36).

29. Gregory of Nazianzus, “Oratio 29,” in *Patrologia Graeca*, vol. 36, §2. Schmitt, *Politische Theologie II: Die Legende von der Erledigung jeder Politischen Theologie*, 90 (Berlin: Dunker & Humblot, 1996 [1970]).

30. Schmitt, *Politische Theologie II*, 95.

31. As Heinrich Meier argues, Schmitt is intent in *Politische Theologie II* to delineate their distinction. See *The Lesson of Carl Schmitt: Four Chapters on the Distinction between Political Theology and Political Philosophy*, trans. Marcus Brainard, 77–78 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998). There has been much debate about the nature of the analogy between the god and the sovereign, and in particular whether the analogy suggests a historical genealogy of political theology or merely a descriptive equivalence of terms. Cf. Jean-François Courtine, *Nature et empire de la loi: Études suarréziennes*, 163–75 (Paris: Vrin, 1999). Although this is a serious exegetical issue, it is more important to concentrate on the way that the structuring

of the analogy in Schmitt effects the definition of both the theological and the political. Thus, Meyer's observation that "the theological *is* ubiquitous, the political *can* be. The theological is the total *tout court*, the political *conditionally*" (ibid.) helpfully emphasizes the structure of the analogy. Meyer leaves unanswered what term or concept structures the analogy. The suggestion here is that that term is action. And it is through stasis that ubiquity is distinguished from potential.

32. Schmitt, *Politische Theologie II*, 92–94.

33. Schmitt, *Politische Theologie II*, 95.

34. Schmitt, *Political Theology*, 31–32.

35. Schmitt, *Politische Theologie II*, 98.

36. For the function of transcendence in Schmitt, see Jürgen Fohrmann's "Enmity and Culture: The Rhetoric of Political Theology and the Exception in Carl Schmitt," trans. Dimitris Vardoulakis, forthcoming in *Culture, Theory and Critique*, 2010.

37. Jean-Luc Nancy, "Church, State, Resistance," in *Political Theologies: Public Religions in a Post-secular World*, trans. Veronique Voruz, ed. Hent de Vries and Lawrence E. Sullivan, 111 (New York: Fordham University Press, 2006). In the incredibly interesting introduction to the same volume, Hent de Vries draws attention to a series of questions—three pages in total—that encapsulate the problems and aporias involved in the notion of political theology. This series concludes with the following question, "If not everything has a theologico-political significance, what, exactly, remains exterior to its concept and the very diversity of its reception?" (29). It appears, then, that the question of the limit of political theology is the question about its own existence and validity. The limit is the final question of the theologico-political.

38. Gilles Deleuze, *Expressionism in Philosophy: Spinoza*, trans. Martin Joughin (New York: Zone Books, 1992).

39. "Moreover, friendship appears to be the bond of the state; and lawgivers seem to set more store by it than they do by justice, for to promote concord, which seems akin to friendship, is their chief aim, while faction, which is enmity, is what they are most anxious to banish. And if men are friends, there is no need of justice between them; whereas merely to be just is not enough—a feeling of friendship is also necessary." Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. H. Rackham, 453 (1155a23–7) (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1938).

40. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1155a23–7. "ἕτοικε δὲ καὶ τὰς πόλεις συνέχειν ἢ φιλίαν, καὶ οἰονομεῖται μᾶλλον περὶ αὐτὴν σπουδάζειν ἢ τὴν δικαιοσύνην· ἢ γὰρ ὁμόνοια ὁμοίον τι τῇ φιλίᾳ ἕτοικεν εἶναι, ταύτης δὲ μάλιστα ἐφίενται καὶ τὴν στάσιν ἔχθραν οὕσαν μάλιστα ἐξελαύνουσιν. καὶ φίλων μὲν ὄντων οὐδὲν δεῖ δικαιοσύνης, δίκαιοι δ' ὄντες προσδέονται φιλίας· καὶ τῶν δικαίων τὸ μάλιστα φιλικὸν εἶναι δοκεῖ."

41. This is a view explicitly rejected by most researchers on the connection between stasis and Aristotle's politics. See esp. Kalimtzis's *Aristotle on Political Enmity and Disease*.

42. It is important to note that Aristotle preempts here the distinction between politics and the political that he will draw at the end of *Nicomachean Ethics* as he forges the transition to the *Politics*. This point is too complex to be taken up here in any detail.

43. Aristotle, *Politics*, 1301a39-b1, my translation. “πάντων δὲ δικαιοτάτα μὲν ἂν στασιάζοιεν, ἥμισυ δὲ τοῦτο πράττουσιν, οἱ κατ’ ἀρετὴν διαφέροντες· μάλιστα γὰρ εὐλόγον ἀνίσους ἀπλῶς εἶναι τούτους μόνον.” Rackham translates this passage as follows: “And from all men those who excel in virtue would most justifiably stir up stasis, although they are the least given to doing so; for they alone can with the fullest reason be deemed absolutely unequal.” Aristotle, *Politics*, trans. H. Rackham, 373 (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1998).