

The Politics of Love and Its Enemies

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Theology and the Political, the latest volume in Slavoj Žižek's series SIC, comes with an introduction by the Archbishop of Canterbury, Rowan Williams. Within its brief compass, the archbishop's introduction outlines two views of meaningful action. The first understands meaningful action as assertion, existing only where "a particular will has imprinted its agenda on the 'external' world"; the second insists that "meaningful action is action that is capable of contributing to a system of communication, to symbolic exchange." The first "pervades so much of modernity and . . . postmodernity," including "popular liberal and pluralist thought," and "raises the specter of the purest fascism." The second relates intelligible action to "divine action whose gratuitousness (or love) motivates and activates an unlimited process of representation without simple repetition (and thus posits irreducible human and other diversities)." This second view, Williams concludes, this patterning of human communicative action after divine love, is urgently necessary in the midst of our "late capitalist . . . countdown to social dissolution and the triumph of infinite exchangeability and timeless, atomized desire."¹

This article was inspired by Galit Hasan-Rokem's love of neighbor, disciplined by Harvey Yunis's love of wisdom, and written within a community of critical friends: Harry Platanakis (whom I have never met, but who guided me most generously through commensurability in Aristotle), Ricardo Nirenberg, Daniel Heller-Roazen, David Bell, Ken Moss, Sean Greenberg, Peter Jelavitch, and at the very end, Hent de Vries and Gabriel Richardson-Lear.

1. Rowan Williams, introduction to *Theology and the Political: The New Debate*, ed. Creston Davis, John Milbank, and Slavoj Žižek (Durham, N.C., 2005), p. 3. The last pages of this essay will touch upon some of the Hegelian roots of the archbishop's view. Žižek is becoming a leading impresario of a contemporary political theology of love; see, for example, his exposition of "true" and "authentic" Christian love in Žižek, *The Fragile Absolute—or, Why Is the Christian Legacy Worth Fighting For?*

Pope Benedict XVI chose a similar theme for his first encyclical *Deus caritas est* (“God Is Love,” 25 January 2006), dedicated to the argument that it is neither justice nor economics but only love, patterned after God’s gratuitous love manifest in the Incarnation, that can cross the gap that separates us from each other and create a truly human community. Both the pope and the archbishop are professors as well as priests, and their treatments of love represent powerful currents in the academic as well as the clerical world. In its many forms (*eros*, *philia*, *agape*, to use just some of the Greek names) and especially in its more religious flavors *love* has once again become a key term in phenomenology, ethics, political philosophy, and critical theory.²

With notable exceptions (Derrida’s *Politics of Friendship*, for instance), many who invoke love are optimistic about its powers. Writing of Adorno and Lévinas, for example, Hent de Vries has observed that they turned to the “domain of the erotic” in order to represent experiences (such as the metaphysical) and relations that they believed could not “be translated in terms of economic exchange or even relationships of possession.”³ The erotic, in other words, provided them with a world of metaphors imagined as free of the sphere of circulation. But the freedom ascribed to love and its servants extended far beyond the creation of a specialized vocabulary of non-economic representation. Lévinas put plainly the sweeping pretensions—political, ethical, and ontological—of the loving relation: “This deposition of sovereignty by the *ego* is the social relationship with the Other, the dis-inter-ested relation. I write it in three words to underline the escape from being it signifies. I distrust the compromised word ‘love,’ but the responsibility for the Other, being-for-the-other, seemed to me . . . to stop the anonymous and senseless rumbling of being.”⁴ Similar claims are made

(London, 2000), pp. 120–60, and, most recently, the essays collected in Žižek, Eric Santner, and Kenneth Reinhardt, *The Neighbor: Three Inquiries in Political Theology* (Chicago, 2006).

2. On the growing importance of theology in contemporary philosophy more generally, see Hent de Vries, *Philosophy and the Turn to Religion* (Baltimore, 1999).

3. De Vries, *Minimal Theologies: Critiques of Secular Reason in Adorno and Lévinas* (Baltimore, 2005), p. 313.

4. Emmanuel Lévinas, *Ethics and Infinity: Conversations with Philippe Nemo* (Pittsburgh, 1985), p. 52. Elsewhere Lévinas does not hesitate to use the word *love* without qualification: “Love must always watch over justice” (Lévinas, *Entre Nous: On Thinking-of-the-Other*, trans. Michael B. Smith and Barbara Harshav [New York, 1998], p. 108). It is a curious fact that contemporary writers on love often begin their discourses by distancing themselves from the word itself. In addition to Lévinas, see Jean-Luc Nancy, “Shattered Love,” *A Finite Thinking*, ed. Simon Sparks (Stanford, Calif., 2003), pp. 245–46, and Jean-Luc Marion, “The Intentionality of Love,” *Prolegomena to Charity*, trans. Stephen Lewis (New York, 2002), p. 71.

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today by those who advocate love as an antidote to the logic of economic exchange, to instrumental reason, even to intentionality.⁵

It is easy to understand why, in the face of stark inequalities produced by global regimes of exchange, this antidote seems so attractive. It is also not too surprising that in the present desecularizing age it should so often take theological forms. What is startling is that those who prescribe love and its politics are untroubled by or unaware of its long history of disappointment. That history is almost as old as thought about the mediated nature of communal and communicative life—that is, almost as old as politics itself.

This “almost” is an important qualification. The dry-farming societies of the ancient Mediterranean world that produced some of our earliest written records were all built out of a vast array of reciprocal relations of varying degrees of formalization and asymmetry, ranging from master-slave at one extreme, through patron-client, lord-vassal, and creditor-debtor relations, to relations of hospitality, friendship, kinship, and marriage on the other. None of these societies had a dedicated vocabulary for such relations; on the contrary, terms of kinship (such as *father* and *son*) and affect (such as *love* and *friendship*) were “promiscuously employed . . . for all manner of social, commercial, and legal relations.”⁶ This promiscuity meant that the many forms of reciprocity and exchange, ranging from the contractual to the emotional, from the most extremely hierarchical to the explicitly egalitarian, could all be incestuously related to one another and encompassed by the terms we translate into English as *friendship* and *love*.

If today love can seem a liberation from possession and exchange, it is because this ancient incest has been repressed. The pages that follow provide an etiology of this repression and its costs. They focus on a few moments of sharp contraction in the meanings of love. Each of these moments produced a heightened awareness of love’s limits, each generated specific figures of exclusion (we might even call them enemies) in order to imagine the overcoming of those limits, and each of these figures in turn constrained the ways in which future loves could be conceived. I will begin this history with Hebrew scripture and Greek philosophy before moving on to the Christian terms that bound the two together in one of love’s most beguiling forms. Throughout, and at its simplest, my claim will be that, far from being an antidote to instrumental reason or to relations of possession

5. See Marion, “The Intentionality of Love,” p. 100.

6. Raymond Westbrook, “Patronage in the Ancient Near East,” *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 48, no. 2 (2005): 213. The quote about promiscuity is specifically about kinship terms deployed outside of the realm of family relations, but as the author makes clear in the sentences that follow the same applies to terms of love and friendship.

and exchange, the fantasy that love can free interaction from interest is itself one of the more dangerous offspring of the marriage of Athens and Jerusalem that we sometimes call the Western tradition.

1

Etymology is not destiny, but it is worth remembering that the most common word for love and friendship in the Hebrew Bible, *ahabah*, is related to the trilateral root *y-h-b*, associated with gifts and giving.⁷ This rooting of biblical love in the language of exchange is entirely in keeping with the ancient Near Eastern context within which these scriptures were produced. The recovery of that context, and the reinterpretation of scripture in its light, is one of the many achievements of modern biblical scholarship. For example, W. L. Moran related the word *ahavta* in the injunction to “love the Lord thy God” (Deut. 6:5) to a legal term (root *'hb*) borrowed from the Assyrian vocabulary of treaties of subjection or alliance and suggested that the Deuteronomist expressed the reciprocal obligations of God and man in terms of legal love drawn from the ancient Near Eastern lexicon of covenant between polities.⁸ Other scholars have compared King David’s political loves (of Jonathan, of his allies, and so on) to Homeric relationships of hospitality, alliance, and dependency (*philia* and *xenia*).⁹ And throughout the Hebrew Bible, from its earliest books to its latest, political relations could be represented through yet other exchanges of love, sexual and uxorious (for example, Sarai before Pharaoh in Genesis, Esther before Ahasuerus in Esther).

In sum, the Hebrew vocabulary of love was rooted in a fertile semantic field extending across the ancient Near East, which encompassed a broad variety of human relations mediated by exchange. But, within the Israelite corner of this common field, the vocabulary of love developed a particular

7. See D. Winton Thomas, “The root אהב ‘love’ in Hebrew,” *Zeitschrift für die Alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 57 (1939): 57–64.

8. The most common word for *friend* in biblical Hebrew is *'ahab* (though *re'a* is also used). The verbal form often conveys the general sense of establishing a relationship of personal dependency. See W. L. Moran, “The Ancient Near Eastern Background of the Love of God in Deuteronomy,” *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 25, no. 1 (1963): 77–87. Similar valences exist in the vocabularies of love and friendship in other ancient language families. For the later example of Latin *amicitia*, see Dieter Timpe, “Herrschaftsidee und Klientelstaatenpolitik in Sallusts *Bellum Jugurthinum*,” *Hermes* 90 (1962): 334–75.

9. On the contractual aspect of David and Jonathan’s love, see 1 Sam. 18:3, and J. A. Thompson, “The Significance of the Verb *Love* in the David-Jonathan Narratives in 1 Samuel,” *Vetus Testamentum* 24 (July 1974): 334–38. See also Jean-Fabrice Nardelli, “Orientalisme et homophilie héroïque: Autour de deux couples d’amis,” *Scripta Classica Israelica* 22 (2003): 1–29, and Patricia K. Tull, “Jonathan’s Gift of Friendship,” *Interpretation* 58 (Apr. 2004): 130–43. On the combination of the political and the emotional in *ahabah*, see Peter R. Ackroyd, “The Verb *Love*: *'ahab* in the David-Jonathan Narratives: A Footnote,” *Vetus Testamentum* 25 (Apr. 1975): 213–14.

strain, one marked by heightened anxiety about love's power in human relations. This anxiety increased the tension between the various forms of reciprocal relation that coexisted within the term *love*, and this tension in turn encouraged the cultivation of unusually hierarchical discriminations between various types of love and their associated politics.

It is often remarked that in Deuteronomy, and in the Pentateuch more generally, the command to love is oriented toward God, not man (the sole but important exception being Leviticus 19:18, "Love your neighbor as yourself"). This orientation had important implications for a political economy. For example, in the Israelite "kingdom of priests" (Exod. 19:16) the power that accrued from asymmetrical relations of exchange between people was meant to be credited not to human givers and patrons but to the sovereign God. Man's own capacity to oblige other men through such exchanges, on the other hand, was dangerous insofar as it might reorient affection away from God¹⁰—hence the ideal of the sabbatical year, designed to reestablish equity between men and return the economic order to God's original distribution. Properly oriented toward God, Israel's love would yield the blessing of wealth gained not by asymmetrical exchange within Israel but with those outside it: "you will be creditor to many nations, but debtor to none" (Deut. 28:12). If, on the other hand, Israel preferred the gifts of man to those of God, she would not only become a debtor nation but suffer terrible curses (Deut. 28:15–28).¹¹

Many ancient Near Eastern polities understood their balance of payments as a leading indicator of divine love. What made the Deuteronomic encoding distinctive was its greater emphasis on the rewards brought by direct relations of dependence ("love") between man and God and its deeper suspicion toward economies and institutions ("loves") that might tend to rival or obscure that dependence. The material condition of Israel became, in that encoding, a diagnostic of the stress at the constitutional foundations of the polity, that is, of the tension between love as the cornerstone of man's relation to God and love as the mortar that binds man to man. In (Christian) retrospect we are too well aware of the potential for

10. Thus, for example, Deuteronomy's stipulation of the proper relationship of gift exchange between man and God: "They shall not appear before the Lord empty handed, but each with his own gift, according to the blessing that the Lord your God has bestowed upon you" (Deut. 16:16–17) is followed by a discussion of corrupting gifts (bribes) between man and man (Deut. 16:19).

11. See Moran, "The Ancient Near Eastern Background of the Love of God in Deuteronomy," p. 84, who links these curses to Assyrian representations of the consequences of broken pledges of political love. Worry about the possibility that asymmetries of wealth might create distracting dependences of man upon man is also evident in Israelite poor law. See J. D. Levenson, "Poverty and the State in Biblical Thought," *Judaism* 25 (1976): 230–41, and Moshe Weinfeld, *Social Justice in Ancient Israel and in the Ancient Near East* (Jerusalem, 1995).

aporia in these treatments of things-in-the-world as signs of divine love. But the political institutions envisioned by our prophetic sources sought to span these “abysses for the profound,” not leap into them, and it is worth asking how they did so.¹²

Monarchy was one of the most important of these institutions. Deuteronomy allows Israel the privilege of interposing a king between itself and the divine sovereign, but only grudgingly and conditionally: “You shall be free to set a king over yourselves, one chosen by the Lord your God,” but “he shall not have many wives, lest his heart go astray” (Deut. 17:15–17). It is not clear to me why too many wives should seem the chief threat to a monarch’s affection for the divine. What is clear, given that royal polygamy was a basic tool of political expansion and incorporation in the ancient Near East, is that this restriction of the Israelite sovereign’s sexual alliances was both distinctive and meaningful. It became a central theme of political and religious critique in Hebrew Scripture, most famously in the story of how King Solomon’s 700 wives and 300 concubines brought him fabulous wealth but estranged him from love of God and led to the destruction of his kingdom. These stories use carnal error in order to confront the constant danger of a greater error, the preference for loving created things rather than the Creator God—that is, idolatry. But they also channel the danger of this error into a specific figure, foreign and female.¹³

This strategy is systematically deployed in the only political manual included in the Hebrew Bible, the Book of Proverbs, which introduces itself as advice addressed by a king to his sons. Proverbs belongs to wisdom literature, a genre of advice books rare in Hebrew Scripture but common in the ancient Near East.¹⁴ The authors of Proverbs, like those of the Penta-

12. Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York, 1966), p. 53.

13. For Solomon’s love of foreign women and their turning of his heart toward foreign gods, see 1 Kings 11. King David’s affair with Bathsheba provides another famous example. Because of it (according to a much later midrash), God’s spirit abandoned David for twenty-two years; see *Yalqut Shimoni* on 2 Sam. 23. Those seeking other examples, as well as a general treatment of the relationship between idolatry and sexual seduction, may turn to Moshe Halberstam and Avishai Margalit, *Idolatry*, trans. Naomi Goldblum (Cambridge, Mass., 1992).

14. The genre of political wisdom addressed from fathers to sons was a venerable one in Egypt (as in, for example, “The Instructions of Ankhsheshonq”), so well worn that it was subject to satire—as when the son in “The Instructions of Any” responds to his father’s wisdom with the words: “It is worthless.” Given the marked Israelite suspicion toward political mediation that I have been describing, it should not be surprising that the genre was a rare one in Hebrew Scripture nor that Proverbs draws heavily on Egyptian antecedents for its material. On the dating of “Ankhsheshonq” and “Instructions of Any,” see *Ancient Egyptian Literature: A Book of Readings*, ed. Miriam Lichtheim, 3 vols. (Berkeley, 1973–80), 3:159, 2:135. For Egyptian influence on Proverbs, see *Proverbs 1–9: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, trans. Michael V. Fox, vol. 18a of *The Anchor Bible* (New York, 1964). On Proverbs as court and wisdom literature, see Patrick W. Skehan, *Studies in Israelite Poetry and Wisdom* (Washington, D.C., 1971), and *Israelite Wisdom:*

teuch, understood many types of exchange as potentially corrupting (for example, Prov. 15:27: “The maker of profits destroys his house [*beyto*], but the hater of the gift will live”).¹⁵ The governing strategy of Proverbs is to contain that danger by giving it a human form:

My son, heed my words; and store up my commandments. . . . From the window of my house, through my lattice, I looked out and saw . . . a woman. She lurks at every corner. She lays hold of him and kisses him. . . . She sways him with her eloquence, turns him aside with her smooth talk. Thoughtlessly he follows her, like an ox going to slaughter. . . . Now my sons, listen to me, pay attention to my words; Let your mind not wander down her ways. . . . Her house is a highway . . . leading down to death’s inner chambers. [Prov. 7:1–27]

The alien woman whose honeyed lips seem pleasant but lead directly to the grave moves throughout Proverbs as a figure of false love.¹⁶ Set against her is the good woman, sometimes depicted as Wisdom personified, leading her lovers along the path of life. But the good woman of Proverbs (like the foreign woman) is not only a figure of thought. She is also one of flesh and blood. Thus the book ends with marital advice (the *Eyshet Chail*, still repeated every Sabbath by the pious): choose a virtuous woman rather than a rich girl for a wife, for the good management of the former will earn you wealth that is greater and more enduring than what the latter would have brought. This test of wealth returns us to the difficulty: even good love cannot transcend the relations of accumulation and exchange that apparently threaten relations with the divine. Proverbs does not confront this danger. Rather, by projecting it onto foreign flesh, it seeks to contain the terms of its own critique.

2

Similar difficulties—and similar solutions—appear in the Greek-speaking Mediterranean. The history of Greek love is very long and deserves, as

Theological and Literary Essays in Honor of Samuel Terrien, ed. John G. Gammie et al. (Missoula, Mt., 1978).

15. On the inegalitarian nature of gift giving, see Prov. 18:16, 19:6, 21:14. Compare, for Greece, Gabriel Herman, *Ritualised Friendship and the Greek City* (Cambridge, 1987), pp. 73–81. It is perhaps also revealing that Proverbs has relatively little to say about friendship, an important theme in its Egyptian antecedents. An exception is Prov. 27:10: “Your friend [*re’a*] and the friend of your father do not abandon. . . . Better a close neighbor than a distant brother.” See R. N. Whybray, *The Book of Proverbs: A Survey of Modern Study* (Leiden, 1995), pp. 112–13.

16. See Prov. 1:20–21, 5:1–23, 6:24–35, 7:1–27, 8:1–9:18, 23:27–28, and 31:3 (addressed to King Lemuel of Massa by his mother: “Do not give your strength to women, your vigor to those who destroy kings”).

Émile Benveniste put it in his essay on the Greek word *philos* (friend/lover), “a full examination.” Benveniste began with Homer in order to “expose a long-standing error, which is probably as old as Homeric exegesis,” that understands *philos* as originally a possessive adjective. Instead, he argued, “we must start from uses and contexts which reveal in this term a complex network of associations, some with institutions of hospitality, others with usages of the home, still others with emotional behavior; we must do this in order to understand plainly the metaphorical applications to which the term lent itself.”¹⁷ I am not in a position to say whether Benveniste was right to dissociate the philological origins of *philos* from possession.¹⁸ I wish only to demonstrate that in a context in which democratic politics had heightened anxiety about the power of “complex networks of association” between citizens to threaten the political community as a whole, some influential Greek thinkers were engaged in a struggle to emancipate political love from certain forms of possession and exchange.

Plato was perhaps the most important of these thinkers on the subjects of mediation, love, and politics, which were as inextricably linked in his thought as they were in that of the Hebrew prophets. For example, like the prophets (though perhaps more systematically), he thought a great deal about the problems caused by the use of language as the means of human communication.¹⁹ The *Seventh Letter* (342b–d) ascribed to Plato makes clear his awareness that whatever knowledge is attainable by souls-in-the-body comes only through the “inadequate” mediation of names, descriptions, and images, sounds or signs that point to things.²⁰ Language always has, for Plato, “two forms, true and false.” Truth “dwells above, among the gods, whereas falsehood dwells among men below.” This gap, which is also the gap between words and the things they represent, cannot be closed without

17. Émile Benveniste, *Indo-European Language and Society*, trans. Elizabeth Palmer (London, 1973), p. 288.

18. What Benveniste calls an error was certainly a long-held opinion of classical philology, one whose influence on Western imaginations of the politics of love is perhaps evident in Nietzsche’s orientation of all loves, even love of neighbor, toward cupidity (*Habsucht*): “Unsere Nächstenliebe—ist sie nicht ein drang nach neuem Eigentum?” (“Our love of our neighbor—is it not a lust for new possessions?” [Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, trans. Kaufmann (New York, 1974), p. 88]). On the meanings of *philos* in Greek, see also A. W. H. Adkins, “Friendship and Self-sufficiency in Homer and Aristotle,” *Classical Quarterly* 13 (1963): 30–45, and Sitta von Reden, *Exchange in Ancient Greece* (London, 1995), pp. 45–57.

19. The prophets spoke often of hypocrisy, duplicity, and misleading speech. We might even see, in the angels’ purification of Isaiah’s lips with burning coal before the throne of God (Isa. 6:6–7), a claim about the essentially impure nature of human speech.

20. See Kenneth M. Sayre, “Plato’s Dialogues in the Light of the *Seventh Letter*,” in *Platonic Writings, Platonic Readings*, ed. Charles L. Griswold, Jr. (New York, 1988), pp. 93–109, and Hans-Georg Gadamer, “Dialectic and Sophism in Plato’s *Seventh Letter*,” *Dialogue and Dialectic: Eight Hermeneutical Studies on Plato*, trans. P. Christopher Smith (New Haven, Conn., 1980), pp. 103–5.

destroying language itself (*Cratylus* 408c, 432b–d). Even the philosopher who ascends from the cave to perception of the intelligible realm in the *Republic* can only apprehend and communicate those truths through analogy with the material (506c–519a). This dependence threatens to make “true” knowledge (if by true we mean independent of the material realm), which is also to say philosophy, impossible. But though Plato describes this potential for aporia, he does not dwell in it. On the contrary, he counters it by positing love as a mediating figure capable of bridging all these gaps.

Eros (desire, love), says Plato in *Symposium* 202a–e, is the *metaxu*, the “between.” Just what kind of a force *eros* is—a goddess? a cosmic binding force? a memory of ordinary hermaphroditism?—is debated in the *Symposium*. Socrates himself subscribes to the view attributed to Diotima of Mantinea, for whom *eros* is the daimonic principle of mediation between higher and lower, divine and material, immortal and mortal. Neither gods nor humans, daimons “are between the two estates, they weld both sides together and merge them into one great whole” (202e).²¹ *Eros* is that daimon who, placed between wisdom and ignorance, beauty and ugliness, is a lover of wisdom and beauty. His longing takes him constantly across the space between particular and universal beauty and finds unity in diversity (210e–12a). It is his ability to carry us through the gap between the sensible and the intelligible that makes the pursuit of knowledge—philosophy—possible. Plato’s optimism on this point varies, but it reaches its apogee in *Phaedrus* 256b–d where love’s power seems almost to guarantee that man’s desire for sensible beauty will lead *toward* knowledge and not *away* from it and where the bonds that *eros* establishes between men on earth are said to persist even in heaven.

Thus far we have seen that love is an important mediator in Plato—indeed, *the* mediator that makes it possible for humans to approach eternal truth despite their dependence on words and things. We have not, however, spoken explicitly about politics. Implicitly, of course, love’s political importance is already evident because, for Plato, true politics requires philosophical knowledge, which in turn depends upon love (as we have just seen). Moreover, since in the *Republic* (368d, 434d–35c) the polis is analogous to the human soul, we should expect that the importance Plato ascribes to love in the management of relations between the parts of the soul (as, for example, in the *Symposium* and the *Phaedrus*) will be matched by an equal importance in the management of human relations in the polity.

21. On the *metaxu*, see William Desmond, *Being and the Between* (Albany, N.Y., 1995). On the daimon, see Marcel Detienne, *De la pensée religieuse à la pensée philosophique: La Notion de daimon dans le pythagorisme ancien* (Paris, 1963).

Whether or not this expectation is fulfilled has long been a matter of debate. On the one hand, Plato's undeniable tendencies toward dualism underwrite pessimism about the possibility of a politics of love in the city. On the other, Plato's emphasis (especially in the dialogues of the middle period: *Phaedrus*, *Symposium*, *Republic*) on the mediating power of love encourages optimism on this score. The difference between Derrida's and Catherine Pickstock's readings of *Lysis*—a dialogue devoted to the description and definition of love/friendship—provides an example of the contrast that is particularly relevant to current debates about the possibility of a politics of love.²²

Like many Platonic dialogues, *Lysis* proceeds by testing descriptions and definitions—in this case of love and friendship.²³ What is love? Is it the attraction of similarity (of like to like: for example, of the good to the good) or of difference (of the older to the younger and vice versa)? What is the purest case of love: mutual love, with its reciprocal exchanges and benefits, or the gratuitous love of a lover whose love is not returned by the beloved? These and many other questions are asked of love and friendship in *Lysis*. To a degree unusual in Plato's dialogues, they yield no answers; every attempt at a conclusion collapses in aporia. One might think, for example, that love should be between people who are alike (both good, for example, or both wealthy, or both beautiful) because difference would tend to induce calculations of utility that would compromise friendship. But if people are alike they have no need of each other and are unlikely to become friends with each other (218d–e). The opposite position, that love binds the unlike, is equally problematic because it leads to the conclusion that the strongest attraction of love will be to one's enemy (216a–b, 220e–f). Socrates himself proposes a third possibility, that we are attracted to those who are neither like nor unlike us, or, as he puts it, “that which is neither evil nor good becomes friendly with good, on account of evil [in itself]” (216c–d). This proposal brings us close to the “betweenness” of the daimon Eros in the

22. On *Lysis*, and on Plato on friendship more generally, see David Bolotin, *Plato's Dialogue on Friendship: An Interpretation of the "Lysis" with a New Translation* (Ithaca, N.Y., 1979); Brian Carr, “Friendship in Plato's *Lysis*,” in *Friendship East and West: Philosophical Perspectives*, ed. Oliver Leaman (Richmond, Surrey, 1996), pp. 13–31; Eugene Garver, “The Rhetoric of Friendship in Plato's *Lysis*,” *Rhetorica* 24 (May 2006): 127–46; Gregory Vlastos, “The Individual as Object of Love in Plato,” *Platonic Studies* (Princeton, N.J., 1973), pp. 3–42; Catherine Osborne, *Eros Unveiled: Plato and the God of Love* (Oxford, 1994); and Mary Margaret Mackenzie, “Impasse and Explanation: From the *Lysis* to the *Phaedo*,” *Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie* 70, no. 1 (1988): 15–45. On the *Phaedrus*, see Harvey Yunis, “Eros in Plato's *Phaedrus* and the Shape of Greek Rhetoric,” *Arion* 13, no. 1 (2005): 101–25, with which my interest in Plato's erotic optimism began.

23. I am to a certain extent conflating here the Platonic terms *eros* and *philia*, but the conflation is noted and occasionally endorsed by Plato himself. See *Laws* 837, and W. Joseph Cummins, “*Eros*, *Epithumia*, and *Philia* in Plato,” *Apeiron* 15, no. 1 (1981): 10–18.

Symposium, and the proximity is interesting but proves inconclusive. The dialogue culminates at an impasse: "If neither those who love or are loved, neither the like nor the unlike, nor the good, nor those who belong to us, nor any other of all the suppositions which we passed in review—they are so numerous that I can remember no more—if, I say, not one of them is the object of friendship, I no longer know what I am to say" (222e).

The collapse seems so total that Derrida takes the highly aporetic structure of the dialogue as symptomatic of some of the abysses he sees beneath any attempt to build democracy on love (for example, does not every choice of friend require the unethical exclusion of the nonfriend?); hence it serves as the starting point for his deconstruction of the politics of friendship. Pickstock, on the other hand, sees in the dialogue a performance of the link between friendship and philosophy. "For our hearers here," says Socrates at the end of the *Symposium*, "will carry away the report that though we conceive ourselves to be friends with each other—you see, I class myself with you—we have not yet been able to discover what we mean by friend." "One senses," Pickstock writes, "that a link between philosophy or dialectics and friendship has been indirectly revealed; that all the time that these interlocutors were engaged in their debate as to the nature of friendship, they were entering into its estate, even without knowing it." For Pickstock, the lesson of the dialogue is not that political friendship leads to aporia but "that friendship does not admit of a definition. . . . It is, like philosophy, a way of life, rather than a static thing to be examined."²⁴

Pickstock's reading seeks to present love in Plato as a political force capable of negotiating all difference (between material and eternal, man and god, self and other). As a leading advocate of a Christian political theology of love, her Platonic project is designed to recuperate Plato for that theology. That project seems to require (judging from her insistence on the point) that Plato's worries about mediation be minimized: "It becomes impossible to sustain any notion that Plato systematically denies mediation, whether inter-personal, mythical, daimonic, linguistic, or even poetic"; or, as she puts it in another essay, "Plato had his own way of valuing and even exalting all such mediations."²⁵

24. Catherine Pickstock, "The Problem of Reported Speech: Friendship and Philosophy in Plato's *Lysis* and *Symposium*," *Telos*, no. 123 (Spring 2002): 46. To this argument one could object that the failure of a given attempt to define *x* (in this case love/friendship) does not allow us to infer that *x* cannot be defined. Nor does the claim that friendship and philosophy are ways of life justify the claim that they therefore cannot be examined. Plato clearly thinks of philosophy as a way of life, but he nevertheless examines it constantly. Socrates's irony in the *Lysis* cannot be so easily pinned down.

25. Pickstock, "The Problem of Reported Speech," p. 48 and "Justice and Prudence: Principles of Order in the Platonic City," *The Heythrop Journal* 42 (2001): 269. A straw man may be lurking

There are voices in Plato that do exalt mediation and advocate a love every bit as promiscuous as the ancient Near Eastern ones with which we began, a love that arbitrates every human activity. Of these voices, Diotima's in *Symposium* 205d is the most powerful:

For "Love, that renowned and all-beguiling power," includes every kind of longing for happiness and for the good. Yet those of us who are subject to this longing in the various fields of business, athletics, philosophy, and so on, are never said to be in love, and are never known as lovers, while the man who devotes himself to what is only one of Love's many activities is given the name that should apply to all the rest as well.

But Diotima's promiscuity should not be confused with Plato's. For although it is true that in his view love makes it possible for some symbolic economies and forms of communicative exchange (such as language) to move toward truth, there are others it cannot redeem. Diotima's "business" is one of these, especially insofar as that business depends on money. In *Laws* 743c–744 Plato formulates his most extreme version of the problem:

Now the fundamental purpose of our laws was this,—that the citizens should be . . . in the highest degree united in mutual friendship. Friendly the citizens will never be where they have frequent legal actions with one another and frequent illegal acts, but rather where these are fewest and least possible. [Hence] we say that in the State there must be neither gold nor silver, nor must there be much money making by means of vulgar trading or usury. . . . Wherefore we have asserted . . . that the pursuit of money is to be honoured last of all: of all the three objects which concern every man, the concern for money, rightly directed, comes third and last; that for the body comes second; and that for the soul, first.²⁶

For Plato in the *Laws*, relations mediated by money and contract are not even classified among those categories of human relations oriented toward body or soul. They point instead toward a third category, in which man seeks only to "sate himself to repletion, like a beast, with all manner of foods and drinks and wenchings" (831a–e; *L*, 2:135). In order to discourage bestial wenchings and encourage human love, Plato bars the citizens of Magnesia

here: not many scholars today would claim that Plato systematically denies mediation or that he does not have his own way of exalting it. For a broader view of her Platonic project, see Pickstock, *After Writing: On the Liturgical Consummation of Philosophy* (Oxford, 1998), pp. 3–46.

26. Plato, *Laws*, trans. R. G. Bury, 2 vols. (Cambridge, Mass., 1926), 1:377; hereafter abbreviated *L*.

from oath, contract, and trade, placing these forms of unfriendly and inhuman exchange entirely in the hands of aliens and noncitizens.

This move is not occasioned by Plato's economics:

The natural purpose for which all retail trading comes into existence in a State is not loss, but precisely the opposite; for how can any man be anything but a benefactor if he renders even and symmetrical the distribution of any kind of good which before was unsymmetrical and uneven? And this is, we must say, the effect produced by the power of money, and we must declare that the merchant was ordained for this purpose. [918b; *L*, 2:405]

This seems to suggest that in a "natural" community of friends, exchange, even monetary exchange, would be symmetrical and benevolent.²⁷ But Plato also seems to think that monetary exchange makes such a community of friends impossible because monetization tends to turn exchanges of goods into relations of hostility, as in the example of innkeepers and guest: "instead of treating them as comrades and providing friendly gifts . . . he holds them . . . as . . . captive foemen in his hands, demanding very high sums of unjust and unclean ransom money" (919a). Hence the need to banish these corrupting forms of exchange into the hands of "non-friends" and noncitizens if the friendliness of the community is to be maintained.

Plato does not blame the need for symbolic mediation (as in the need for money in order to establish value in the exchange of goods) for this corruption. He blames, rather, "the disposition of the mass of mankind. . . . When they desire, they desire without limit, and when they can make moderate gains, they prefer to gain insatiably" (918d). It is Plato's psychology of desire and appetite (*epithumia*) that is pessimistic here, not his economics or his hermeneutics. And, once again, a particular type of love is the problem—not love of idols or alien women as in the Pentateuch but of an even greater enemy of the polity: love of self. "There is an evil, great above all others, which most men have, implanted in their souls. . . . It is the evil indicated in the saying that every man is by nature a lover of self, and that it is right that he should be such" (731e; *L*, 1:339).²⁸ The dangers self-interest poses to the polity are many, but we have already touched upon one of the most important: its tendency, in a monetized economy, to turn men into creatures whose appetites cannot be sated. It is therefore self-love and its

27. See *L*, 2:405–19 and, for comparison, Arist. *Pol.* 1257a14 and following. In the political context of the *Laws* Plato seems to subscribe to the same commonplace Greek ideal, "friends hold everything in common," that he leads toward aporia in *Lysis*.

28. See Arist. *Rh.* 1371b19, *Pol.* 1263b2.

physical accessories of mediation (gold, silver, contracts, and so on) that Plato exiles from the category of love, and from the polity, and assigns to the alien.

This is no trivial exclusion because, for Plato, the exchange of goods is the reason for the foundation of the polis. As Socrates puts it in the *Republic*,

the origin of the city . . . is to be found in the fact that we do not severally suffice for our own needs, but each of us lacks many things. . . . As a result of this, then, one man calling in another for one service and another for another, we, being in need of many things, gather many into one place of abode as associates and helpers, and to this dwelling together we give the name *city* or *state*. . . . And between one man and another there is an interchange of giving, if it so happens, and taking, because each supposes this to be better for himself. [369b–c]

But though this self-interested exchange is the basis of the political for Plato, it cannot be the basis of justice. (I leave aside here the complex history of the word *dikaiosune* [justice], revealingly associated in archaic Greek primarily with the payment of debts.)²⁹ Thus, after dismissing several “self-interested” definitions of justice in books 1 and 2 of the *Republic* (such as Polemarchus’s claim that justice is doing good to one’s friends and harm to one’s enemies [311b–c]), Socrates enunciates a distributive principle. Justice is achieved when the polis reflects and preserves the distribution of innate abilities among different classes of men, maintaining the natural distributions of goods and divisions of labor in society (370a–372c). The farmer should farm, the plough maker make ploughs, and the cobbler stick to his last, each minding his own business and providing for the proportional needs of the other.³⁰

Such a conception of politics and justice seems to require a symbolic economy capable of negotiating the difference between goods (between ploughs and shoes, for example) and establishing a common value between them. Plato could here have developed—as Aristotle would—a theory of value that embraces monetary mediation. Why should not money too be a daimon if, as Aristotle says, money is the “intermediate” that “measures all things”?³¹ Plato, however, says nothing of the sort. Instead, he divorces mon-

29. See Vlastos, “Equality and Justice in Early Greek Cosmologies,” *Classical Philology* 42 (July 1947): 156–78, and, more generally, Eric A. Havelock, *The Greek Concept of Justice: From Its Shadow in Homer to Its Substance in Plato* (Cambridge, Mass., 1978).

30. Justice consists, as Socrates later puts it, in each “minding his own affairs” (Pl. *Resp.* 496d).

31. Arist. *Eth. Nic.* 1133a20–21. Georg Simmel would even predict such a move: “money in its psychological form, as the absolute means and thus as the unifying point of innumerable

etary exchange from love and banishes it from the citizen class, a move that almost amounts to an exile from the polis of the political itself and places a telling limit on Plato's "exaltation of all . . . mediations."

Plato's problem is not far from that of the Pentateuch, and his solutions are in some ways similar, albeit more extreme. Whereas in Leviticus self-love is promoted as the source of political love (remember Lev. 19:18: "you must love your neighbor *as yourself*"), in the *Laws* self-love is downplayed as the enemy of politics. And where the Pentateuch recognized the necessary mediation of material, contractual, and even explicitly asymmetrical relations of exchange between Israelites, even as it sought to limit their impact through poor laws and sabbatical years, the more radical surgery of the *Laws* was an attempt to free love and friendship entirely from monetary mediation.³² Given how impracticably dangerous this amputation was, I find it difficult to be optimistic about the possibilities for a Platonic politics of love in the material world. From a pragmatic point of view we should perhaps treat the *Laws* more as a provocation than as a prescription, a deliberately extreme formulation designed to bring the constitutional crisis of love into high relief rather than to overcome it.

3

Aristotle's treatment of love in the *Eudemian Ethics* represents one response to that provocation. The problem emerges clearly at the beginning of book 7, "On Friendship."³³ How can one achieve a politics of love or friendship if (1) "it is thought to be the special business of the political art to produce friendship," (2) "those who are unjustly treated by one another cannot be friends to one another," (1234b), and (3) so many of the relations

sequences of purposes, possesses a significant relationship to the notion of God" (Georg Simmel, *The Philosophy of Money*, trans. Tom Bottomore and David Frisby [London, 1978], p. 236).

32. I am of course not the first to compare the Pentateuch and Plato's *Laws*. See, for example, Otto Kaiser, "Das Deuteronomium und Platons Nomoi," *Zwischen Athen und Jerusalem: Studien zur griechischen und biblischen Theologie, ihrer Eigenart und ihrem Verhältnis* (Berlin, 2003), pp. 39–62.

33. Among Aristotle's works, the *Eudemian Ethics* is relatively understudied. A recent edition is *Aristotelis Ethica Eudemia*, ed. R. R. Walzer and J. M. Mingay (Oxford, 1991). A commentary on the friendship chapters is still wanting, but the notes to Franz Dirlmeier's German translation come closest; see *Aristoteles Eudemische Ethik*, vol. 7 of *Aristoteles Werke in deutscher Übersetzung*, ed. Ernst Grumach (Darmstadt, 1962). See, more generally, Anthony Kenny, *The Aristotelian Ethics: A Study of the Relationship between the Eudemian and Nicomachean Ethics of Aristotle* (Oxford, 1978). On friendship in Aristotle, see John M. Cooper, "Aristotle on the Forms of Friendship," *Review of Metaphysics* 30 (June 1977): 619–48; "Friendship and the Good in Aristotle," *Philosophical Review* 86 (July 1977): 290–315; and "Aristotle on Friendship," in *Essays on Aristotle's Ethics*, ed. Amélie Oksenberg Rorty (Berkeley, 1980), pp. 301–40. See also M. Pakaluk, "The Egalitarianism of the *Eudemian Ethics*," *Classical Quarterly* 48, no. 2 (1998): 411–32; A. W. Price, *Love and Friendship in Plato and Aristotle* (Oxford, 1989); and Lorraine Smith Pangle, *Aristotle and the Philosophy of Friendship* (Cambridge, 2003).

of exchange that traditionally bear the name of love (even the exemplary one between lover and beloved!) are seemingly asymmetrical and therefore unjust? Plato's answer had been to exile such exchanges and their instruments from the category of friend and from the ideal polity. Aristotle opts instead for a more inclusive taxonomy. He does have a sharp hierarchy of friendships, with legal relations of self-interested or material exchange at the bottom and the nonutilitarian loves of more godlike spirits at the top. But every one of these is capable of supporting a politics and a just constitutional order because every one of them produces equality:

Justice seems to be a sort of equality and friendship also involves equality, if the saying is not wrong that "love is equality." Now constitutions are all of them a particular form of justice; for a constitution is a partnership, and every partnership rests on justice, so that whatever be the number of species of friendship, there are the same of justice and partnership; these all border on one another, and the species of one have differences akin to those of the other. [1241b]

Indeed, precisely the sorts of friendship that Plato banned from his city are those that Aristotle designates as "civic": friendships of utility, sometimes "strictly legal," sometimes moral (that is, without contract), but always governed by an economic calculus. "Civic friendship looks to equality and to the object as sellers and buyers do; hence the proverb 'a fixed wage for a friend'" (1242b).³⁴

Though Aristotle restricts his simile of sellers and buyers here to civic friendship, the phrase is far more than a metaphor. In fact, he will apply it to all types of love and friendship because his theory about how love calculates difference and establishes equality between men turns out to be the same as his theory of economic exchange. It is, of course, not difficult either in friendship or in trade to produce equality when exactly similar quantities of exactly similar friendship are exchanged (though Aristotle seems to agree with Plato that there would be little motivation for such exchanges). The problem arises when different quantities or different kinds are in question. How, for example, should the *quid pro quo* be calculated in asymmetrical relationships of friendship such as those of lover and beloved or teacher and pupil ("for knowledge and money have no common measure")? Aristotle is confident that the value of any friendship can be equated to that of another through a

34. On this topic, see Sibyl A. Schwarzenbach, "On Civic Friendship," *Ethics* 107 (Oct. 1996): 97–128, and Malcolm Schofield, "Political Friendship and the Ideology of Reciprocity," *Saving the City: Philosopher Kings and Other Classical Paradigms* (London, 1999), pp. 82–99.

measurement by one measure, only here not by a term but by a ratio; we must measure by proportion, just as one measures in an association of citizens. For how is a cobbler to have dealings with a farmer unless one equates the work of the two by proportion? So to all whose exchanges are not of the same for the same, proportion is the measure, e.g., if the one complains that he has given wisdom, and the other that he has given money, we must measure first the ratio of wisdom to wealth, and then what has been given for each. [1243b]

Two things seem to me remarkable about this passage. The first is its stunningly promiscuous conflation of love, politics, and economics. We move from measuring love, to political distributions, to the exchange of shoes and vegetables. The second is Aristotle's confidence in his "measure," that is, in the power of his "proportions" (*analogon, analogian*) to make all seemingly disparate exchange (whether of love or of political or economic goods) commensurable.³⁵ It is this confidence about the ability to calculate equivalencies that allows Aristotle to classify as "loving" forms of relation that the Pentateuch and Plato had feared and to integrate exchanges ranging from the most material to the most ideal into one harmonious economy.³⁶

We can already see that Aristotle depends on his mediating proportions to do a great deal of work—not only in his theory of friendship—but also in those of justice and of exchange. His theory of justice, for example, is often summarized in the aphorism: treat equals equally, unequals unequally. Justice is, in other words, distribution in accordance with proportional equality.³⁷ Because so much rides upon the power of Aristotle's

35. In his reliance on proportionality Aristotle was following in an already well-established tradition. See, for instance, Hermann Diels and Walther Kranz, *Die Fragmente der Vorsokratiker*, 3 vols. (Berlin, 1951), 1:435–6, and F. D. Harvey, "Two Kinds of Equality," *Classica et Mediaevalia* 26 (1965): 101–46. On *analogia*, see G. E. R. Lloyd, "The Unity of Analogy," *Aristotelian Explorations* (Cambridge, 1996), pp. 138–59. On the distinction in Greek mathematics between arithmetic, geometric, and harmonic proportionality, see Harvey, "Two Kinds of Equality," pp. 103–4, and Carl A. Huffman, *Archytas of Tarentum: Pythagorean, Philosopher, and Mathematician King* (Cambridge, 2005), pp. 162–81.

36. Aristotle does set significant limits to this calculability, which does not extend to gods or sovereigns: "For it would be ridiculous to accuse a god because the love one receives from him is not equal to the love given him, or for the subject to make the same complaint against his ruler. For the part of the ruler is to receive not to give love, or at least to give love in a different way" (*Eth. Eud.* 1238b).

37. A position not unlike the one we just ascribed to Plato in the *Republic* (cf. *Laws* 757a). The phrase "treat equals equally, unequals unequally," often used to summarize Aristotle's position, is not itself found in his corpus, but a number of like statements are. For example, Aristotle's view of justice as equality (*isotês*) is outlined in book 5 of *Nicomachean Ethics* (1131a10–15). Similarly, "If they are not equals they should not be treated equally" (1131a22). Compare also *Eth. Eud.* 1280a7.

proportions, we should ask just how robust they are. The answer, it turns out, depends a great deal on the realms in which they are deployed.³⁸

In his discussion of commensurability in book 7 of the *Physics*, the criteria are strict. In order for two things to be commensurable—equatable through proportion—there must be a property that both share, even if they have it to differing degrees. There follows a lengthy discussion of what it means for two things to share a property, leading to the conclusion that neither the property of comparison nor the recipients being compared can admit of any “specific difference.” The example he gives is that of color. Two things, such as a horse and a dog, may be made commensurable in terms of a specific color (say, white) but not in terms of color in general (249a3–26). Comparison and commensurability, in other words, are possible only within the same species, not across species within a genus.

The same mathematics of proportional commensurability deployed in the *Physics* applies in Aristotle’s theories of commensurability in love, justice, and economic exchange, but the stringent condition of species identity for comparison does not. The reasons for this return us to our earlier discussions of love. Consider the basic problem of both love and of economic exchange, as Plato and Aristotle imagined it: “We do not have an association [of exchange] between two physicians, but between a physician and a farmer, and in general between different and nonequal; but [in order to have an association between different and unequal people] we must equalize them” (Arist. *Eth. Nic.* 1133a16–18).³⁹ Economic exchange is, in this sense, generally asymmetrical and incommensurable (*asummetra*). Aristotle’s way

In these cases justice will require proportionality, either geometrical (in the case of distributive justice) or arithmetic (in the case of corrective justice); see 1131a32–b3 and 1131b32–1132a2. At 1131a31 Aristotle defines proportionality as “equality of ratios.” For the application of proportion to justice in political distributions, see Arist. *Pol.* 3.9–12.

Given the impact of Aristotle’s views on justice, the bibliography is appropriately vast. See, among others, Hans Kelsen, “Aristotle’s Doctrine of Justice,” *What Is Justice? Justice, Law, and Politics in the Mirror of Science* (Berkeley, 1957), and Ernest J. Weinrib, “Aristotle’s Forms of Justice,” in *Justice, Law, and Method in Plato and Aristotle*, ed. Spiro Panagiotou (Edmonton, Alberta, 1987), pp. 133–52.

38. On the question of commensurability in Aristotle’s physics, ethics, and theories of economic exchange I have been much helped by Charilaos Platanakis, “The Concept of Equality in Aristotle’s Moral and Political Philosophy” (PhD diss., University of Cambridge, 2006). Platanakis generously lent me his manuscript and gave me much advice and bibliography on Aristotle’s ethics more generally.

39. On Aristotle’s economic thought more generally, see Lindsay Judson, “Aristotle on Fair Exchange,” in *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy*, ed. C. C. W. Taylor, 30 vols. (Oxford, 1997), 15:147–75, and Scott Meikle, *Aristotle’s Economic Thought* (Oxford, 1995). An example of the importance of Aristotle’s thinking about proportionality and commensurability for medieval Christian political thought can be found in Thomas Aquinas, *In decem libros Ethicorum Aristotelis ad Nicomacum exposito* (Turin, 1934), §950.

around this problem is to discover a “measure” that can equate them, and the one he first proposes is money, the intermediate that “measures all things” (*Eth. Nic.* 1122a19–20). This solution runs into the difficulty that money cannot be said to be a shared property of any of the things it is meant to mediate between (except when the trade is in currency itself).⁴⁰ Aristotle quickly moves on to another possibility: “Everything must be measured by some one thing, as we said before. In reality this thing is need [*chreia*], which holds everything together” (*Eth. Nic.* 1133a25–27). But although need (sometimes translated tententiously as “demand”) can render disparate things commensurable (it is, for example, the builder’s need for shoes and the cobbler’s need for a house that establishes the proper ratio of exchange between them), it is not itself a measure. Currency is therefore necessary to act as a magnitude for measuring need, a “kind of pledge of need by convention” sufficiently stable (one hopes) to create harmony in the polis (*Eth. Nic.* 1133a28–30, 1132b34).

When it comes to exchange, then, we can say that Aristotle’s proportions, his “measurements by one measure,” are not very robust, for the mediating measure (need) turns out not to be a measure at all and itself requires the mediation of another intermediate (currency), which is, strictly speaking, capable of measuring only itself. There is an *aporia* here, though Aristotle does not surrender to it. Instead, he uses convention to bond the two intermediates, need and currency, together. If buyers and sellers, citizens and friends, understand that the currency in which they conduct their relations is not a need but only a token of a promise of need—and if they are disposed to honor the promise signified by the token—then Aristotle’s theory of proportionality in exchange will work. His theory, in other words, requires what it is meant to produce: the virtue of all parties involved in exchange.

Of course, Aristotle realized that this requirement was far from being met. As he put it in the *Eudemian Ethics*, “most ‘political’ men are not truly so called; they are not in truth ‘political,’ for the ‘political’ man is one who chooses noble acts for their own sake, while most take up the ‘political’ life for the sake of money and greed” (1216a23–27). Two semiotic errors produce this majority of false political men. The first denies mediation itself: “the bad prefer natural goods to a friend and none of them loves a man so much as things; therefore they are not friends. The proverbial ‘community among friends’ is not found among them; the friend is made a part of things, not

40. Nor is it in any way homogenous with the things it measures, although such homogeneity is given in *Metaphysics* 1053a24–27 as a necessary relation between measure and thing measured. For Aristotle’s classification of exchange into four different categories of exchange, some involving money and others not, see *Politics* 1.9.

things regarded as part of the friend” (1237b30–34). Such men (to put it in anachronistic but fashionable terms) are not other-regarding. Since they reduce the other to the objects he possesses, their transactions (can we properly call them exchanges if they are not between two subjects but rather between subject and thing?) presumably cannot establish proportional equalities of need between participants. They therefore produce neither justice, nor friendship, nor political community.⁴¹ The second error, which Aristotle at one point attributes specifically to the “illiberal man,” is also a mistaken attitude toward mediation: “the lover of money is a man eager for the actual money, which is a sign of possession taking the place of the accidental use of other possessions” (1231b–1232a). Such men forget the conventional role of money as a measure of need. They confuse the signifier for the signified and live only to accumulate the symbol itself.

If these errors afflict the majority, if only a minority of men have a virtuous attitude toward symbolic economies that a political economy of love requires, then how can Aristotle maintain the possibility of such a political economy? Plato’s solution, like that of the Pentateuch, was to limit or forbid the forms of exchange that seemed most dangerous. Aristotle, as we have seen, does not do so; indeed he deploys his theory of a mediating proportionality to make all exchanges potentially loving. He limits instead the category of political man so that it includes only those who possess the virtues that politics requires. This is a division that cuts as much through the category of man as it does through that of the political. Just before observing that most who call themselves political men are not truly so, Aristotle establishes “a division of the kinds of life” in which those lives “only pursued for the sake of what is necessary, e.g., those concerned with the vulgar arts, or with commercial and servile occupations,” as well as those pursued “for the pleasure of eating or that of sex,” are not political lives.⁴² They are not even fully human, “for it is clear that to the man making this choice there would be no difference between being born a brute and a man; at any rate

41. This is an idea with a long future; see, for example, Karl Marx’s analysis of the fetishistic character of commodities in book 1 of *Capital*. From the point of view of contemporary economics it is not obvious why in a relation of exchange the conflation of the other with the thing exchanged should lessen the ability of the transaction to accurately measure demand. But it is worth remembering that Aristotle’s *chreia*, need, is not the same thing as demand.

42.

Now if we make a division of the kinds of life, some do not even pretend to this sort of well-being, being only pursued for the sake of what is necessary, e.g., those concerned with the vulgar arts, or with commercial and servile occupations—by vulgar I mean arts pursued only with a view to reputation, by servile those which are sedentary and wage-earning, by commercial those connected with selling in markets and selling in shops. [Arist. *Eth. Eud.* 1215a26–29]

the ox in Egypt, which they reverence as Apis, in most of such matters has more power than many monarchs" (*Eth. Eud.* 1215b35–39).

Plato had made a tripartite hierarchical distinction between lives and politics oriented toward the needs of money, body, or soul. Aristotle makes a bipartite one, between an existence oriented toward necessity (defined as money as well as physical appetites) and a life that is human and political insofar as it is oriented toward friendship rather than toward things. The first he expels both from the human and the political. The biopolitical vocabulary that Aristotle developed in his ethics to unfold these distinctions enjoys a great deal of attention in critical theory today (think of the work of Giorgio Agamben). Less often noted are the semiotic origins of these distinctions, which are (for Aristotle) fundamentally differences between men in their relation to the mediation of signs. Unlike an animal, the bad man is capable of using symbols, but unlike a fully human and political man he does not use them correctly. The existence of such creatures prevents symbolic economies from achieving what Aristotle considers their natural and transcendent goal of overcoming difference, maximizing friendship, and achieving "unity, the good in itself" (1218a20). The extrusion of these creatures into some category other than humanity (for instance, bare life) becomes a step toward the realization of a politics of love.

4

Thus far my claims have been that for quite different reasons Israelite prophets and Greek philosophers worried in structurally similar but autonomous ways about the power of reciprocal exchanges that were generally understood in terms of love. In both cases their anxieties resulted in hierarchical distinctions between types of love and exchange, which led to the exclusion of certain forms of desire from the category of love entirely. And, in both cases, these parallel anxieties produced similar ways of containing the contradictions produced by the inescapable importance of material mediations considered dangerous, namely, the extrusion of the danger into specific figures of thought, such as "foreign women," aliens, or inhuman men.⁴³ After Alexander's conquests brought the relative autonomy of these anxieties to an end, we find a number of attempts to bring them together (for example, in *The Wisdom of Ben Sira*).⁴⁴ But from our point of view the

43. They were also, of course, in some ways remarkably divergent. The prophets, for example, tended to heighten the dangers of mediation through theocracy and theodicy, whereas Aristotle tried to tame them through philosophy.

44. A Jewish text, *The Wisdom of Ben Sira* (ca. 180 BCE) borrows heavily from Greek and demotic sources in order to expand the place of human relations and gift exchange in God's polity. It even has recourse to something like Aristotle's theory of value, assigning a fixed proportion to

most important of these marriages of Israelite and Greek thought on these matters was the Christian one.⁴⁵

An early example of the political form these questions took in Christianity is the famous formula of Matthew 5:43–48:

You have heard how it was said, you will love your neighbor and hate your enemy. But I say this to you, love your enemies [*diligite inimicos vestros / agapate tous echthrous*] . . . and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be children of your Father in heaven, for he makes the sun rise on the just and the unjust. . . . For if you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Do not even the tax collectors do as much? And if you save your greetings for your brothers, are you doing anything exceptional? Do not even gentiles do as much? You must therefore be perfect, just as your heavenly Father is perfect.⁴⁶

Carl Schmitt, eager to maintain the enemy at the heart of the political, claimed that Jesus meant here only the personal enemy (Lat. *inimicus*, Gk. *echthros*), not the political one (Lat. *hostis*, Gk. *polemios*). The distinction is absent in the Greek of the Gospels and untenable in Matthew's hypothetical Aramaic precursor. It is in any event unnecessary, for Jesus' claim to a more

convert between human and divine gifts: "Because He is a God of reciprocity (*tashlomot*) / and He will repay you seven-fold" (32 [35]:13). This divine attribute of reciprocity is not previously attested in Hebrew Scripture. On Ben Sira's borrowings from demotic and possibly Greek literature (such as the *Theognis*), see Jack T. Sanders, *Ben Sira and Demotic Wisdom* (Chico, Calif., 1983), pp. 29–38. On friendship in Ben Sira, see *Freundschaft bei Ben Sira: Beiträge des Symposions zu Ben Sira, Salzburg, 1995*, ed. Friedrich V. Reiterer (Berlin, 1996), and Jeremy Corley, *Ben Sira's Teaching on Friendship* (Providence, R.I., 2002). On both these topics, see Seth Schwartz, "A God of Reciprocity: Torah and Social Relations in an Ancient Mediterranean Society," in *A Tall Order: Writing the Social History of the Ancient World*, ed. Jean-Jacques Aubert and Zsuzsanna Várhelyi (Munich, 2005), pp. 3–35. Schwartz suggests that "Ben Sira's careful distinction, at 32 [35]:10–17, between the (legitimate) gift, made with *tuv 'ayyin* (more or less, generosity of spirit; cf. *megalopsychia*), and the bribe, made from illicit profit to secure further illicit gain, may be meant as a criticism of Proverbs' teaching." "In Ben Sira," he argues, "the term *oheb* has lost its contractual aspect and describes an informal relationship, comparable to Greek *philia*" (*ibid.*, pp. 12, 13 n. 27).

45. A detailed analysis of this marriage can be found in David Konstan, *Friendship in the Classical World* (Cambridge, 1997).

46. Similar articulations in Gal. 5:14: "for the whole law is fulfilled in one word, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself'"; Rom. 13:9; and Matt. 22:39:

But when the Pharisees heard that he had silenced the Sadducees they got together and, to put him to the test, one of them put a further question, "Master, which is the greatest commandment of the Law?" Jesus said to him, "*You must love the Lord your God with all your heart. . . . and with all your mind* [Deut. 6:5 combined with Lev. 19:18, but the one-mindedness is not in Deut.]. This is the greatest and the first commandment. The second resembles it: You must love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments hang the whole Law, and the Prophets too."

See also Mark 12:31, Luke 10:27, James 2:8, and Hebrews 13:1 (with a significant change: "never cease to love your fellow Christians").

perfect polity of love, like the earlier Israelite and Greek claims we have looked at, was clearly dependent on certain exceptional exclusions. This is evident already in the passage from Matthew, with its sharp distinction between the perfect love advocated by Jesus and those imperfect loves that have come before.⁴⁷ Matthew's misquotation of Leviticus (which enjoins love of neighbor but not hatred of enemies) suggests which of these previous politics he was most anxious to appropriate, transform, and supersede: those of the false Israel, that is, the Israel that rejected Jesus' claim to be the fulfillment of God's love. The gospels work, each in its own way, to identify and condemn figures of this false love and its politics: the Pharisees, for example, in Matthew, or the Jewish followers of the princes of this world in John. The product of all this work is Jesus' sovereignty, as he himself proclaims it in the Gospel of Luke: "But as for my enemies, who did not want me to be king over them, bring them here and slay them before me" (19:27).⁴⁸

My goal here is neither to resolve this apparent contradiction within a Christian politics of love nor to wallow in it. My point is only that Christian perfections of love were beset by the same difficulties as Greek and Israelite ones and that the paradoxes generated by these difficulties were sometimes similarly extruded into exceptional figures: in this case those of the "Pharisee" or the "Jew." The problem extended far beyond the topic of sovereignty, for the mediation of love was crucial to nearly every vital question confronting the followers of Jesus. What is the proper form of relation of the true Israel to the false, of the lover of God to the material world, or of God to flesh? The tensions inherent in each of these questions could easily be driven toward polarity. Consider the Christological debates over the nature of Jesus himself. Did God's love for man require him to take material form in order to redeem the human? And, if so, how could perfect love become material without declining from perfection? The many answers produced by the early followers of Jesus ranged from the "Gnostic" claim that the loving God has nothing to do with the material world of flesh and therefore could never have created the world (as the Hebrew Bible has it) or taken human form, to the "Ebionite" position that Jesus was the human Messiah promised by God in the Hebrew Bible but not himself divine. Scholars sometimes call the Christology that eventually triumphed para-

47. The understanding of sacred history as a migration of God's promise from polities of false lovers of God to polities of true ones is itself part of Hebrew Scriptures, ranging from Ps. 78 to Isaiah to the Dead Sea Scrolls. In this sense, as in many others, the early authors of the Jesus movement are thinking within a preexisting politics of love.

48. Here, *pace* Schmitt, *echthrous* is clearly being used in a political sense, opposed as it is to *basileusai*.

doxical. It maintained that Jesus united man and God and that the Hebrew Bible had promised precisely such a mediator. The fact that advocates of this Christology came to represent all their rivals as “Judaizing” may tell us something about how this victory of paradox was achieved.⁴⁹

I say “may” because to make my claim historically would require me to hack slowly through the tangled underbrush of early Christian and patristic sources and their contexts rather than swinging, as I have done throughout this essay, from one outrageously lofty limb to another.⁵⁰ But I must simply swing to another limb, one high enough to give us a good view of the forest’s topography if not of its history and stout enough to propel us into the Middle Ages.

That limb is Saint Augustine. Like many of his colleagues, Augustine was acutely concerned with questions about how words and things mediate between men and God, but as a recovering dualist himself he was more aware than most about the ease with which solutions to these questions tended to split paradox into polarity. This awareness is especially evident in his approach to the crucial question about how scriptural language works. Advocates of a paradoxical Christology had tended to defend their appropriation of the Hebrew Bible against the attacks of both dualists (who dismissed it as carnal) and Jews (who insisted on the ongoing validity of its laws) by thoroughly spiritualizing its words. They argued that those who read the Hebrew Bible literally, whether in order to reject it—like the dualists—or to take up some of its commandments, were “Jews.”⁵¹ Such thoroughgoing spiritualization and de-Judaization of Hebrew Scripture helped Christians claim it for their own, but this widening of the gap between literal meaning and spiritual truth was also dangerous. For the more the spiritualists devalued the literal, historical, and carnal meanings of Scripture, the more they themselves risked becoming dualists and thereby “Jewish.”⁵²

49. Hegessipus (ca. 120–ca. 180 CE) was one of the first to describe communities of Ebionites, but then for him every Christian “heresy” was derived from one of the seven “Jewish Christian” sects that he claimed arose after the passing of the apostolic generation. (This at least is his position in the fragments Eusebius preserves of his work in his section on the origins of heresy, *Hist. Eccl.* 4.22.4.) See Hans Conzelmann, *Gentiles—Jews—Christians: Polemics and Apologetics in the Greco-Roman Era*, trans. M. Eugene Boring (Minneapolis, 1992), pp. 275–77. For the patristic sources on “Jewish Christians,” see the useful collection by A. F. J. Klijn and G. J. Reinink, *Patristic Evidence for Jewish Christian Sects* (Leiden, 1973).

50. Even then the argument would be vulnerable to the objection that Christian figures of Jewish enmity were generated, not by the difficulties of a politics or a hermeneutics of love, but by real threats that real Jews posed to Christians in the first centuries of their common era.

51. Conversely, according to writers like Justin Martyr, Irenaeus, and Eusebius, the Israelite prophets themselves had not been “Jews,” but “Christians,” insofar as they had always understood God’s words spiritually. See, for example, Irenaeus *Adversus Haereses* 4.7.4, 3.6.2, 5.33, 4.26, 6.1.

52. Tertullian was among those theologians who argued strongly against too sharp a differentiation between the figurative interpretation and the literal reality. His words in *Adversus*

That Augustine felt this risk keenly is evident in his criticism of Saint Jerome and other followers of the allegorizing hermeneutics of Origen of Alexandria.⁵³ In an extraordinary series of letters (395–404 CE) that Augustine exchanged with Jerome, he argued that denial of the literal meaning of God's words, whether in the Old Testament or New, opens the door to the dualists, "perverse men" who deny the Hebrew Bible and dismiss New Testament passages awkward to their cause as strategic falsehoods rather than literal truths.⁵⁴ No passage of Scripture, he insisted, should be denied a literally true meaning, lest "nowhere in the sacred books shall the authority of pure truth stand sure" (*Ep.* 28.4; *Ep.* 40, 3.3). Jerome's response was telling. For nine years he did not reply, judging Augustine's argument "tainted with heresy" (*Ep.* 72, 1.2). When he finally did, it was with the ill-tempered charge that Augustine's stress on the literal meaning of scriptural language was "reintroducing within the Church the pestilential heresy" of Judaizing that "will make us Jews" (*Ep.* 75, 4.13).⁵⁵

Of course, Augustine had no intention of turning Christians into Jews, and he was well aware of the Judaizing danger inherent in Christian her-

Marcionem 4.40, for example, are suggestive: "figura autem non fuisset, nisi veritatis esset corpus. Ceterum vacua res, quod est phantasma, figuram capere non posset" ("There could not have been a figure unless there was truth in a body. An empty thing, which is a phantom, cannot capture a figure"). Or, as he writes of the prophets in *De resurrectione carnis*, they expressed themselves in flesh as well as in allegorical shadows: "nec omnia umbrae, sed et corpora." How this caution affected his polemics against Judaism (for instance, in his *Adversus Iudaeos*) remains unexplored.

53. To the quotes from Tertullian above, compare Origen's remark in his commentary on the sacrifice of Isaac: "sicut in Domino corporeum nihil est, ita etiam tu in his omnibus corporeum nihil sentias; sed in spiritu generes" ("Just as there is nothing corporeal in God, so similarly should you feel nothing corporeal in all of this, but generate in the spirit") (Origen *Patrologia Graeca* 12:209b). On Origen's hermeneutics and the controversy it generated, see Elizabeth A. Clark, *The Origenist Controversy: The Cultural Construction of an Early Christian Debate* (Princeton, N.J., 1992), and Karen Jo Torjesen, *Hermeneutical Procedure and Theological Method in Origen's Exegesis* (Berlin, 1986).

54. "I would devote all the strength which the Lord grants me, to show that every one of those texts which are wont to be quoted in defense of the expediency of falsehood ought to be otherwise understood, in order that everywhere the sure truth of these passages themselves may be consistently maintained" (*Ep.* 28, 3.5). One example of the strength Augustine devoted to the task is his *De Genesi ad litteram* (On the Literal Interpretation of Genesis) completed ca. 410. He began but did not complete a similar project in 393, *De Genesi ad litteram liber imperfectus*.

55. The exchange between Augustine and Jerome focused on Paul's exhortation to Peter in Galatians 2:11–14: "If you, though a Jew, live like a Gentile and not like a Jew, how can you compel the Gentiles to Judaize [Lat. *judaizare*]?" Following Origen, Jerome denied that Peter could ever have required Gentile Christians to live according to Jewish law (*Ep.* 75, 3.7, citing Acts 10:10–16). Nor could Paul have observed Jewish law after his conversion, as Acts portrayed him doing (see *Ep.* 28, 3.4; 40, 3.3). Such passages could not be literally true. Augustine's position was a radically different one: "Paul was indeed a Jew; and when he had become a Christian he had not abandoned those Jewish sacraments which that people had received in the right way, and for a certain appointed time" (*Ep.* 40, 4.4).

meneutics. He himself outlined the danger with characteristic clarity in *De doctrina christiana* (3.5.9):

The ambiguities of metaphorical words . . . demand extraordinary care and diligence. What the Apostle says pertains to this problem. “For the letter killeth, but the spirit quickeneth.” That is, when that which is said figuratively is taken as though it were literal, it is understood carnally. Nor can anything more appropriately be called the death of the soul than that condition in which the thing that distinguishes man from beasts, which is the understanding, is subjected to the flesh in pursuit of the letter.

This servitude to the letter is the error of the Jews, says Augustine. Christians could steer clear of this Jewish error and avoid the danger of elevating the literal over the figurative by following a simple rule: whichever reading leads to love of God or neighbor (in that order) is to be preferred; whichever leads to lust for the world is false, for “scripture enjoins nothing but love, and condemns nothing but lust.”

This hermeneutics of love, like some of the others we have encountered, depends on a fairly sharp distinction between seductions that lead toward the divine and those that lead toward the material world. Unlike the Gnostics, Augustine does not condemn the latter, but he does, like the Platonists, insist on an ontological difference between the two; hence the famous distinction in *De doctrina christiana* between the “use-value” of the material world and the “enjoyment-value” of the divine (*uti/frui*). Unlike Aristotle, in other words, Augustine opts for two theories of value rather than trying to unify the field of human relations with one. Nevertheless, like Aristotle, Augustine understands the basic problem to be confusion about how symbolic economies work, and he describes that confusion in terms of biohermeneutic and biopolitical figures, derived now from the scriptural vocabulary of “false Israel,” understood as the Jews.

In his *Contra Faustum* (Against Faustus the Manichee) of 398, for example, the figure takes the form of Cain. Like Cain, who was a tiller of the earth, the Jews were tillers of text (the Old Testament) who killed the very thing they were meant to cultivate (the promised Messiah). In punishment for this killing they became, like Cain, both hypercarnal and alienated from the world: “you are cursed from the earth . . . for you shall till the earth, and it shall no longer yield unto you its strength.” Likewise is their reading of Scripture fruitless: “they continue to till the ground of an earthly circumcision . . . while the hidden strength or virtue of making known Christ, which this tilling contains, is not yielded to the Jews.” Hypercarnal as they are, the Jews are even alienated from their own mortal flesh, as Cain had been:

So Cain . . . said: . . . “I shall be a mourner and an outcast on the earth, and it shall be that everyone who finds me shall slay me.” . . . “Not so,” [God] says; “but whosoever shall kill Cain, vengeance shall be taken on him sevenfold.” That is . . . not by bodily death shall the ungodly race of carnal Jews perish. . . . So to the end of the seven days of time the continued preservation of the Jews will be a proof to believing Christians of the subjection merited by those who . . . put the Lord to death. [12.9–13]⁵⁶

Trembling in this figure of abjection is Augustine’s so-called doctrine of Jewish witness. Unlike some of his contemporaries, Augustine did not imagine a world free of God’s Jewish enemies.⁵⁷ Instead, he transformed them into an enduring monument to the truth of Christian hermeneutics, an eternal admonition to those who would either deny the literal sense of Scripture or fixate upon it. Augustine’s concern here was not the fate of the Jews.⁵⁸ His goal was the creation of a more durable paradox, one that could resist the attack of spiritualist or literalist without threatening to become either dualist or “Jewish” itself. Nevertheless, his solution was, for the Jews, a fateful one, insofar as it preserved them, as it were, in formaldehyde—inert testimony, like Einstein’s brain in a jar, of a revolution in man’s understanding of the cosmos.

Augustine’s deployment of Jewish flesh helped stabilize certain paradoxes but sharpened others. For our purposes here, the most interesting of these were political. Augustine himself realized the political utility of his figures of Judaism. In his exegesis of Psalm 59 against the “Origenist” Pelagius, for example, he explained, citing Romans 9:22, that God had poured his message into two vessels, one of mercy, the other of wrath, the former percep-

56. This exegesis was much cited during the Middle Ages. See Dahan, “L’Exégèse de l’histoire de Caïn et Abel du XIIe au XIVe siècle en Occident,” *Recherches de théologie ancienne et médiévale* 49 (1982): 25–27. Augustine treats Cain quite differently in *De civitate Dei* 15.7, where Cain is the founder of the earthly city. On this contrast, see the beautiful passages of Peter Brown, *Augustine of Hippo: A Biography* (London, 1967), pp. 321, xx. On the evolution of Augustine’s views on religious coercion and his turn to other prooftexts (such as Ps. 59:12, “slay them not”), see Brown, “St. Augustine’s Attitude to Religious Coercion,” *Journal of Roman Studies* 54, nos. 1 and 2 (1964): 107–16, and Jeremy Cohen, *Living Letters of the Law: Ideas of the Jew in Medieval Christianity* (Berkeley, 1999), pp. 54–55. Curiously enough, although Cain is nowhere associated with the concept of penitential exile as it is found in the Talmud (for example, BT Berachoth 56a, Sanhedrin 37b), he becomes a figure for penitential exile in medieval Ashkenaz; see, for example, *Sefer Hasidim* 38. Could the Rhineland pietists’ Cain be a counterfigure to the Christian one?

57. Compare Ambrose (as in Letter 40.8. 23) or John Chrysostom.

58. Indeed he represents the protection of the Jews as nothing more than an imperial practice both current and long-standing. As he put it in the *Contra Faustum*: “no emperor or monarch who finds under his government the people with this mark [of Cain] kills them, that is to say, makes them cease to be Jews, separate in their observance and unlike the rest of the world.”

tible through the latter.⁵⁹ “For so God, willing to show wrath, and to manifest His power, has brought in with much patience the vessels of wrath, which have been perfected unto perdition.” These vessels of wrath were God’s enemies the Jews, destroyed spiritually but preserved in the flesh (“dead men”) that His sovereignty over the earth might be clearly shown. Hence, according to Augustine, the Psalmist sang, “Slay them not, lest sometime they forget your law” (Ps. 59:17–19).

In other words, the continued existence of the Jews as abject biopolitical figures made Christian claims to sovereignty historically legible, just as their continued existence as biohermeneutic figures demonstrated the historical truth of orthodox Christian scriptural interpretation. Behind this parallel stands a broader confidence in the interlegibility of political history and salvation history. Augustine was far from the first to feel this confidence, which was widespread in the first century of Christian empire, but he was among the first to experience its crisis. Late in his life, with the Visigoths beating down the gates of Rome, history became less legible for Augustine, the relationship between God’s polity and man’s more opaque, and the union of a scriptural hermeneutics of love with earthly politics more untenable.

This crisis of confidence is nowhere more evident than in *The City of God*, where Augustine abandons the dream of aligning the politics of the earthly city with that of the heavenly one. Within the *saeculum* (by which he means the inseparable interpenetration of the earthly and the spiritual, as well as the demonic and the divine, that constitutes the world until the apocalypse), no amount of hermeneutic good faith, no approach to symbolic economies, no matter how loving, can effectively mediate between earthly and heavenly politics. Unlike others we have seen encounter this aporia, the elderly Augustine seeks neither to leap into it (like the Gnostics) nor to overcome it (as do the advocates of a politics of love). He opts instead to mark it as a permanent feature of the unperfected world.

He does, however, mark it with a specific name and assign to it a specific figure. In *The City of God* the name is Cain’s; Cain is the “founder of the earthly city” and the first practitioner of its politics. Like Cain, the founder of every polity is of necessity “a fratricide” (Augustine gives the example of Romulus). Like Cain, who sinned by subjecting his reasoning soul to the desires of his flesh, every earthly city “has its good in this world, and rejoices in the material world with such joy as such things can afford,” so that it will at the end of time be “committed to the extreme penalty.” Terrestrial politics gives mistaken priority to flesh, “that part which the philosophers call vi-

59. For a sustained reading of Pelagius as an Origenist, see Clark, *The Origenist Controversy*.

cious, and which ought not to lead the mind, but which the mind ought to rule and restrain by reason.”⁶⁰ Plato or Aristotle might have agreed with the distinction but not with the use to which it is put. Whereas for them the proper analogy for the city and its politics had been the soul, for the elderly Augustine it became the body—the body, moreover, already alienated from itself.

Operating as it does under the curse of Cain, we can see how the earthly city begins to look perilously like the alienated figure of Judaism. Augustine does not seek to slay this figure. Instead he immures her, like the furies under Aeschylus’s Athens, as permanent reminder, exiled but not exorcised, of an *aporia* at the foundations of the polity. Eventually the living logos will return to smash these foundations and reconcile the two cities. But until then, according to Augustine, no reading of Scripture, no matter how loving, can fully emancipate secular relations from “Judaism” or produce a true politics of love.⁶¹

5

Of course the millennium and a half of politics after Augustine did not renounce the ideal of a polity of love nor cease to develop theories of mediation and exchange, some neo-Platonic, some neo-Aristotelian, some neither or both, through which to fantasize its realization. Just one example may suffice to make clear the impact of these fantasies on modernity. Like the Archbishop of Canterbury with whom I began, the young Karl Marx sketched two visions of society in the notes he took on James Mill. The first was governed by the idea of private property and led ineluctably to alienation and inhumanity. “Man as a social being must proceed to *exchange*,” but in a society with private property “the mediating process between men engaged in exchange is not a social or a human process, not *human relationship*.” The result of exchange in such a society must be

that the *mediating activity* or movement, the *human*, social act by which man’s products mutually complement one another, is *estranged* from

60. August. *De civ. D.* 15.4–5, 7. Augustine’s prooftexts here come significantly from Galatians (5:17) and Romans (7:17, 6:13).

61. This is why Erik Peterson’s attack on the political theology of Schmitt in *Der Monotheismus als politisches Problem* (Leipzig, 1935) begins with a dedication, epigraph, and prayer to St. Augustine (the epigraph is from *De vera religione* 45.84: “Habet ergo et superbia quendam appetitum unitatis et omnipotentiae, sed in rerum naturalium principatu, quae omnia transeunt sicut umbra”) and ends with the suggestion that Schmitt’s political theology is Judaizing, as in Peterson’s view any political theology must be; see pp. 98–100. Of course according to my reading what Peterson deplors and deploys as the “Jewishness” of politics is itself the product (as well as the producer) of a Christian political theology.

man and becomes the attribute of money, a *material thing* outside man. Since man alienates this mediating activity itself, he is active here only as a man who has lost himself and is dehumanized; the *relation* itself between things, man's operation with them, becomes the operation of an entity outside man and above man. Owing to this *alien mediator*—instead of man himself being the mediator for man—man regards his will, his activity, and his relation to other men as a power independent of him and them. . . . It is clear that this *mediator* now becomes a *real God*, for the mediator is the *real power* over what it mediates to me. . . . Hence the objects only have value insofar as they *represent* the mediator, whereas originally it seemed that the mediator had value only insofar as it represented *them*.⁶²

In societies with private property, Marx is suggesting, human communication is foiled by the attraction of the mediating sign itself. “The only intelligible language . . . consists of our objects in their relation to each other. We would not understand a human language and it would remain without effect.” Even our own production becomes only the “*sensuously perceptible covering, the hidden shape,*” of another's object (*E*, p. 227).

Against this society and its symbolic economies Marx posits another, one without private property, one that “carried out production as human beings,” for the sake of relation rather than exchange. The benefits of such production would be many, but among the greatest is that “in my production. . . . I would have been for you the *mediator* between you and the species, and therefore would become recognized and felt by you yourself as a completion of your own essential nature and as a necessary part of yourself, and consequently would know myself to be confirmed both in your thought and in your love.” Only within such a society, says Marx, can I realize “my true nature, my *human nature, my communal nature*” (*E*, p. 228).

With these passages I do not mean to promise a careful comparison of Marx's thinking on love and exchange with that of the Israelite prophets, Plato, Aristotle, or Augustine, though such a comparison might be fruitful. I mean only to suggest that the problems Marx is discussing are very much theirs and that the terms in which he does so echo theirs as well. The longing to experience mediation as love, anxiety about the ease with which that mediation becomes alienated idolatry, the biohermeneutic description of the danger, all of these are familiar to us from the long history we have just surveyed. Familiar, too, is the figure into which Marx distills the danger in

62. Karl Marx, *Comments on James Mill's "Elements of Political Economy,"* in *Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, Collected Works*, vol. 3 of *Marx and Engels (1843–44)* (New York, 1975), p. 212; hereafter abbreviated *E*.

the essay he writes about the same time that he took his notes on Mill, the figure whose disappearance from the community will proclaim the overcoming of man's alienation from himself—the figure of the Jew in *On the Jewish Question*.

For nearly a century various versions of Marx's communitarian vision provided the dominant alternative to what was imagined as a liberal capitalism in which politics amounted to nothing more than exchange. Today the limits of those alternatives are clearer, as are the extrusions, exclusions, and exterminations that they, like all preceding attempts at the perfection of exchange, tended to generate. But the hunger for a politics that is more than mere exchange has not lessened; indeed fears of globalization and "Americanization" have only sharpened its pangs. It is this hunger, combined with the collapse of alternatives like Marxism, that drives the current search for more perfect political unions once more toward love.

Some of these searches, like the ones with which I began, advocate explicitly Christian political theologies patterned on incarnational mediations. Scholars again debate the differences between erotic and agapeic sovereignty; call for a "revolutionary Constantinianism . . . committed to the Logos as the foundation of all political discourse"; and recommend Thomism as a solution to the metaphysical and epistemological crises of postmodernity.⁶³ Obviously I cannot critique here all of the Christian politics (much less those of other religions) offered today as prescriptions for an imperfect world. Since past results are not a guarantee of future ones, it is not enough to point out that in their earlier incarnations none of these approaches led to a politics that we today could recognize as loving.⁶⁴ But, at the very least, my survey of the foundations of these political theologies has made plausible the suspicion that their promise of universal love depends upon and produces the very exclusions and enmities it claims to be overcoming.

Other contemporary quests for a politics mediated by love are neither Christian nor theological, or at least not explicitly so. Consider, since we

63. On sovereignties of *eros* and *agape*, see Desmond, *Ethics and the Between* (Albany, 2001), chaps. 15 and 16. The call for "revolutionary Constantinianism" is by Creston Davis and Patrick Aaron Riches, "Metanoia: The Theological Praxis of Revolution," in *Theology and the Political*, p. 47 n. 2. Aquinas is championed in John Milbank, "Only Theology Overcomes Metaphysics," in *The Word Made Strange: Theology, Language, Culture* (Cambridge, Mass., 1997), and Milbank and Pickstock, *Truth in Aquinas* (London, 2001).

64. Aquinas's treatment of Islam provides a revealing example; see Tomaž Mastnak, *Crusading Peace: Christendom, the Muslim World, and Western Political Order* (Berkeley, 2002), pp. 208–16. A similar investigation is lacking for Judaism, though John Y. B. Hood, *Aquinas and the Jews* (Philadelphia, 1995) provides an introduction. For a good example of forms of relation that medieval theologians considered loving but modern political philosophers would not, see Jonathan Riley-Smith, "Crusading as an Act of Love," *History* 65 (June 1980): 177–92.

have space for only one example, the politics of recognition advocated by Charles Taylor, Axel Honneth, and others as a potential counter to a politics of distribution.⁶⁵ For his part, Honneth's vocabulary of love is spare, but insofar as his notion of "recognition" derives from Hegel's it is inescapably rooted in that vocabulary. Hegel called his dialectic of the moral relationship, which he represented in terms of love, the "struggle for recognition." As he put it in his first Jena lecture, "In love the separated entities [*das Getrennte*] still exist, but no longer as separated: as united [*Einiges*]." In his second lecture, love became the "knowing" (*Erkennen*) of the "I" that recognizes itself in the other. (Habermas outlines with characteristic clarity how this loving model of intersubjectivity animated Hegel's theories of communicative and symbolic action, and generated distinct dialectics of representation and of labor.)⁶⁶ Marx's distinction between alienating exchange and a loving mediation producing recognition; Habermas's distinction between "work" (purposive-rational action) and "interaction" (communicative action); Honneth's distinction between a politics of distribution and one of recognition: each is in its own way a detheologized descendant of Hegel's Christian love.⁶⁷

Why should we worry about the abiding importance of love in our attempts to imagine more perfect forms of community and communication? There are those (like Schmitt) who believe that the language with which we

65. See Axel Honneth, *Kampf um Anerkennung: Zur moralischen Grammatik sozialer Konflikte* (Frankfurt am Main, 1992), and Charles Taylor, "The Politics of Recognition," in *Multiculturalism: Examining the Politics of Recognition*, ed. Amy Gutmann (Princeton, N.J., 1994), pp. 25–73.

66. G. W. F. Hegel, *Theologische Jugendschriften*, ed. Herman Nohl (Tübingen, 1907), p. 379 and *Jenenser Realphilosophie*, ed. Johannes Hoffmeister, 2 vols. (Leipzig, 1931–2), 2:201. See also Jürgen Habermas, "Arbeit und Interaktion: Bemerkungen zu Hegels Jenenser 'Philosophie des Geistes,'" *Technik und Wissenschaft als 'Ideologie'* (Frankfurt am Main, 1968), p. 16.

67. See Habermas, "Technik und Wissenschaft als 'Ideologie,'" *Technik und Wissenschaft als 'Ideologie'*, pp. 62–63. For Honneth's reading of Hegel's "Anerkennung," see Honneth, *Kampf um Anerkennung*, chap. 1. Also instructive are Nancy Fraser's critique of the theory of recognition as Honneth has developed it and Honneth's response; see Nancy Fraser and Honneth, *Redistribution or Recognition? A Political-Philosophical Exchange*, trans. Joel Golb et al. (London, 2003).

A number of post-Marxist attempts to conceive of "holistic" political communities along Hegelian lines (*holism* is W. V. Quine's word, not Hegel's) could also be called detheologized descendants of Christian love. See Ludwig Siep, "Hegel und der Holismus in der politischen Philosophie," in *Modelle politischer Philosophie*, ed. Rolf Geiger et al. (Paderborn, 2003), pp. 63–77, and "Hegels Holismus und die gegenwärtige Sozialphilosophie," in *Kultur—Kunst—Öffentlichkeit: Philosophische Perspektiven auf praktische Probleme*, ed. Annemarie Gethmann-Siefert and Elisabeth Weisser-Lohmann (Munich, 2001), pp. 69–80; Michael Esfeld, *Holism in Philosophy of Mind and Philosophy of Physics* (Dordrecht, 2001); Philip Pettit, "Defining and Defending Social Holism," *Philosophical Explorations* 1, no. 3 (1998): 169–84; and Martin Seel, "Für einen Holismus ohne Ganzes," in *Holismus in der Philosophie: Ein zentrales Motiv der Gegenwartsphilosophie*, ed. Georg W. Bertram and Jasper Liptow (Weilerswist, 2002), pp. 30–40. The goal of most of this contemporary work is a holism that avoids what is understood as Hegel's (potentially totalitarian) hypostasis of the collective.

represent the political is extraneous to the question of determining the essence or concept of the political itself. I have tried to show that the opposite is true. Particular histories of struggle to reconcile the inescapably mediated nature of communal and communicative life with evolving political ideals of love generate specific anxieties and figures of exclusion, figures that shape the ways in which political love can be imagined, and eventually lend their form to concepts of the political itself. If this codependence is difficult to concede, it is in part because the vocabulary of love has a most peculiar virtue. Through it we fantasize the overcoming of those very exclusions that the history of its use has generated. Hence this essay has focused on that history's exiles. Their suffering may help to remind us that, whatever love's attraction as an antidote to the inequalities generated by our contemporary systems of exchange, any politics that acts in love's name will have the potential to produce its enemies (to paraphrase Marx on Judaism) "out of its own entrails," as "the alienated essence of man's labor and life."⁶⁸

68. Marx, *Zur Judenfrage*, in *Karl Marx, Friedrich Engels: Werke*, 41 vols. (Berlin, 1957), 1:374.