

How Democracy Hurts

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Imagine a resident of Hamtramck, Michigan, the predominantly Polish Catholic town adjacent to Detroit that has recently seen the arrival of a large number of Muslim immigrants. In 2003, a mosque petitioned the city council for an exemption to the town's noise ordinance in order to broadcast over loudspeakers the *azan*, the call to prayer. The resulting controversy attracted national attention as supporters and opponents of the *azan* exemption voiced their views.¹ What could an academic provide to a resident of Hamtramck that might make the resident change her mind about whether to allow the *azan*? Explication of the history and values of the resident's community might shape her perspective, but it seems unlikely that a robust theory of democracy, justice, equality, or tolerance independent of that community's history and values would have an impact. The resident does not aspire to have the right normative theory, but to perceive the situation rightly, to judge it rightly, and to act rightly—that is, to exercise practical wisdom, *phronesis*. The useful assistance that the academic can provide, such as explication of history or values, aids in perceiving better, judging better, acting better. Indeed, we might conjecture that the more robust the resident's theoretical commitments, the more they distort her right perception, judgment, and action.²

Alternatives to robust theorizing have gained traction in recent years among political theorists.³ Eschewing conceptual analysis, phenomenological reflection, or critical theory in favor of “real politics,” the task of the theorist becomes contributing to right perception, judgment, and action. In other words, instead of exploring the implications of some ideal theory for certain questions of politics, the political theorist would explicate exemplary cases of right

perception, judgment, and action, and would describe the distortions found in other cases (a task that includes the critique of ideal theories). While this approach avoids dogmatic secularism, secularism as entailed by ideal theory, I worry that this turn to practical wisdom depends on a subtler, but no less problematic, form of secularism. My worry is not that religious beliefs are excluded because they are classed as ideal theory, but that the turn to practical wisdom is limited by its exclusion of certain theological practices, of theological virtue that complements secular virtue. In a democratic context, confronted with pluralism, theological virtue may be just what is needed—and it hurts.

There are many varieties of ideal theory; what they share is a lack of accountability to political perception, judgment, and action. The motivation for such theories is the sense that we ought to be concerned with the truth of the matter rather than with what seems helpful. Philosophical reflection allows us to discern truths, perhaps encapsulated in principles of justice or equality or freedom, which then are to be implemented in our personal and social lives. Everyone would accept these principles if they had sufficient time and resources for philosophical reflection—that is the argument that would be made to the resident of Hamtramck. If this route to ideal theory is dismissed as overly rational, another presents itself: perhaps it is a certain ethos that is politically desirable, say, a democratic ethos that involves a fuzzy blend of freedom, equality, and justice, of generosity and receptivity, all secured through a refusal of rationalism. Advocates of such a position would try to convince the Hamtramck resident that whatever dogmatic position she holds, and her opponent holds, is inherently unstable; what the resident is left with when she realizes this, when presumptions to dogmatic truth dissolve, is the ethos the theorist advocates. But it is not clear that the Hamtramck resident is committed to the rigid consistency of her own position. She, like everyone, surely holds inconsistent beliefs and is

not particularly troubled by this; moreover, her perceptions, judgments, and actions are motivated by a hodgepodge of commitments as well as affects of various provenances. Beliefs and affects matter for her; she is not willing to submerge them in an amorphous ethos, but she is also not interested in congealing them into a consistent system.

What our Hamtramck resident would find compelling, and what would alter her perception, judgment, and action, are descriptions of her community's practices and its history that underscore the community's values.⁴ Just as the actions of a judge are informed by precedent and by decisions in other jurisdictions, our Hamtramck resident begins to see herself and her world differently as she learns more about of her community and its past—in other words, as commitments she already holds, commitments that are constitutive of who she is, thicken. She may be informed by artists and writers who encapsulate the values of her community in their work, by the stories of family members, or by her own reflection on practices central to her community. If the resident is from a Polish Catholic family, she may be informed by oral histories of Poles as they first arrived in Hamtramck, by Catholic Church teachings on hospitality, by reflection on the annual Polish Day parade, and so on. If the resident is from a Muslim immigrant family, she may be informed by her grandparents' (or anthropologists') stories of her home country, by Quranic study, by reflection on Islamic rituals, or by practices like parent teacher conferences at her children's multicultural elementary school. We are all part of many communities with many histories, and on this view thickening our understanding of these is the starting point for politics, and for political critique. Indeed, the convention in contemporary American political theory of writing books that re-work the canon on a particular topic is doing precisely this: thickening the history of a community. The theorist errs when she privileges the history of political thought; this is just one of the politically relevant histories that

can be told, and a relatively minor one (indeed, this error is another form of ideal theory).

The practice of offering thick descriptions of community practices and histories maintains right perception, judgment, and action at the root of politics. How might we describe this root? Perception, judgment, and action, when detached from the pretensions of ideal theory, cannot be described in terms of following rules.⁵ They are habits, acquired through participation in a community. Their performance comes first; if they appear to follow a rule, this appearance can only be a product of *post facto* description (itself an explication of community practice). Even the separation of perception, judgment, and action, their appearance as three distinct moments, is a *post facto* description of a seamless movement. To possess practical wisdom is for right action always to follow from right judgment which always follows from right perception. Articulating reasons for judgment, or describing perception, or announcing action, these, too, are *post facto*. It is as if reasons motivate, as if we can talk about motivation, but these are like pictures of a sound: striving to fail better in their flagrantly futile quest for representation.

Through a community's praise and reprimand the habits of right perception, judgment, and action are inculcated, and it is to that community they are accountable.⁶ But community is always under-determined, accountability always amorphous. Communities are constituted through their practices and their histories, and through the explication of those practices and histories. A reprimand for poor perception, judgment, or action can be appealed by presenting thick descriptions of those practices and histories. Thus, *post facto* representations may be futile, but they are necessary in order for this mechanism of accountability to function. Acculturation does not just happen through osmosis. Reasons, and affect, are exchanged. The distinction between reason and affect is not important. They are both mechanisms of *post facto* representation: a reprimand could be an explanation, a shout, or an angry look. In this way, the

well acculturated individual, the individual who has acquired practical wisdom, is happy, has *eudaimonia*, assured of the continual praise of her peers.

It might be objected that such a description of the root of politics misses what politics is all about, namely managing those who are deficient in practical wisdom (likely everyone). But the claim here is not about politics but about political theory. It may well be the case that politics often involves managing those deficient in practical wisdom, but if supplying a theory of this management necessarily invokes ideal theory, to supply such a theory would do more harm than good. One might even say that the only effective way to manage those without practical wisdom is by employing practical wisdom: by perceiving community practices and histories, by judging virtues and vices, and by acting. Focusing on form rather than content, as it were, the theorist's clarifications of practical wisdom employed in the practice of politics are the most helpful activity in which the theorist can engage—and an activity which has the salutary secondary effect (if such phrasing is appropriate) of also enhancing content, i.e., the management of those without practical wisdom.

When the root of politics is understood in this way, pluralism is not a “problem”; it does not even exist. As each participates in—and so is accountable to—multiple under-determined communities, the political work of explicating community practices and histories is work that everyone is constantly engaged in (to believe oneself the part of only one community, or an over-determined community, is another form of ideal theory). Political office holders engage in this work when they consult, and inform, their constituents. Men at barbershops and women in beauty salons engage in this work as they swap stories about the neighborhood or the nation, the friend or the politician. Community organizers engage in this work when they describe a crippling but previously unarticulated problem facing a community, and so make those in the

community see what they did not see before—and judge, and act. On this perspective, with ideal theory abandoned, there is nothing special about religious difference. Religious communities and histories hold those associated with them (members would be a misleading term) accountable, and those associated with religious communities continually offer novel descriptions of those communities' practices and histories, just as they would any community. The absolute or exclusive commitments sometimes associated with religious belief are *post facto* descriptions of certain community practices and histories—descriptions just as contestable as any other.

President Obama is perhaps a model of practical wisdom at the root of politics, and an indication of the limits of such a view. Always careful to acknowledge his participation in multiple communities, he is also masterful at the art (or rhetoric) of re-description. He is known for the care he takes examining and judging available options, consultation with relevant experts, before choosing that which seems eminently reasonable. Ideal theory plays no role; indeed, it appears that ideal theory is almost always motivating his critics, on both right and left. When situations are described anew in a sufficiently compelling way that Obama's decisions appear erroneous, such as the expansion of offshore oil drilling in light of the Deepwater Horizon disaster, Obama is willing to be held accountable. Yet there is reason to become suspicious of the desirability of such traits. Given the various options that were considered for the war in Afghanistan, Obama may have chosen the most prudent course—but we may still want to resist calling that the right course. Given the complexity of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, continued support for Israel coupled with the occasional complaint about settlements may be the prudent course—but we may still want to resist calling that the right course. Given the senate confirmation process, choosing Supreme Court nominees after his own mold, excelling in practical wisdom (the “wise Latina woman”), may have been the prudent course—but we may still resist. I do not

think that these moments of resistance are motivated by the lingering appeal of ideal theory.

There is a deeper worry: that rooting politics in practical wisdom can affirm a pre-existing tunnel vision of perception—and so of judgment and action. More dramatically, it is not hard to imagine someone who excels in practical wisdom but participates in deeply problematic, but largely insular, communities and so does not have the critical resources to recognize these defects (an ethnographic researcher once pointed out to me the exceptional practical wisdom possessed by a leader of the Westboro Baptist Church).⁷

It is tempting to reduce this problem to that of ideology, and to respond that a focus on practical wisdom involves, or at least makes possible, resources for ideology critique. This is precisely what novel descriptions of community practices and history involve: unsettling the entrenched self-image of a community. To ask for anything more would be to sink Neurath's boat. But ideology is not quite the worry (in fact there are two) toward which my hesitations about Obama point. The first worry is that the focus on practical wisdom eliminates space for genuine novelties: for perceptions, judgments, and actions not *ex ante* authorized by a community but welcomed by that community. There is no rest in the seamless movement of perception, judgment, and action to pause and imagine how things could be different. It is unsatisfying to foreclose the possibility of, to use the cliché, a paradigm shift. This is all the more pressing concerning seemingly intractable political problems. The examples of Afghanistan and occupied Palestine above come to mind, but so does the city council meeting in Hamtramck where the resources available to a Polish Catholic resident and to a Muslim immigrant resident might just not be sufficient to allow for de-escalation. What would it mean to imagine a shared community with a bricolage of practices located in Hamtramck, one that does not yet appear to exist? Imagination is an imprecise term for what is meant here; it is in fact the unimaginable, that

which even a community's prophets do not fathom, which seems foreclosed.⁸ It is a practice for which there can be no reason to embrace, yet once embraced (by something like Gestalt switch) it takes a constitutive role in the community—perhaps a community that did not exist beforehand.

The second worry about a politics of practical wisdom, not unrelated to the first, has to do with distortions of a community's practices and history. Practices and history are made explicit through reflection and explication, but in a media saturated environment, where children spend eight or more hours a day watching television and on the internet, an image of a community is available pre-packaged, like fast food.⁹ There is no need to reflect on American practices and histories to thicken one's understanding of the American community. An image of that American community is already available and seemingly complete—and almost unavoidable. Instead of practices constituting community, a mass produced image of community makes possible certain practices and forecloses the space for others. It seems as though the combination of huge exposure to mass media and the consolidation of media control into a few multinational corporations could lead to the obsolescence of practical wisdom. It only takes practical reason to navigate such a world, not practical wisdom. Politics splits into technocratic bureaucracy and manufactured populism.

Or so it seems. On further reflection, however, such a doomsday scenario is made possible by a fantasy of undistorted community, perhaps of the medieval country village populated by artisans singing songs of days gone by as they ply their trades. Yet there are always technologies of representation at work to explicate communities and their histories—whether they be specific languages (Chinese, Hebrew, Spanish), specific genres (epic poems, academic history texts, fragmentary blog posts), specific authoritative texts through which a community's practices and history are interpreted, or specific forms of communication (letters, telephones,

radio, e-mail). Perhaps the menace of multinational corporations controlling television and radio is greater than the menace to ancient Greek society of Homer's two texts filtering interpretations because of the profit-seeking motives of corporations, but it is not entirely clear that this difference plays out significantly on the ground, as community values and histories are being explicated through exegesis of the last episode of "Modern Family" or "Gossip Girl" at the water cooler. In other words, the worry that community practices and histories are deeply distorted is not unique to the last few years or few centuries—it is a worry that always accompanies a politics rooted in practical wisdom. It links with the worry about the limitations of imagination; distortions of community limit what is possible, and what can be imagined, in ways that are barely if at all visible from within a community.

While pluralism seemed to disappear as an issue for a politics of practical wisdom, the twin worries about the limitations of imagination and the distortions of community compound into a concern that pluralism might simply be repressed in such politics. Even if thick description of practices and histories are employed in Hamtramck, it might not be enough—or, an apparent resolution may be reached which actually deepens the conflict (the examples of Afghanistan and occupied Palestine are again illustrative here). One popular, but not particularly satisfactory, response is to simply force together a politics of practical wisdom with some sort of openness to the radically new. Because judgment has "no foundations," any moment can produce something radically new, and every moment can be viewed in such a way that it is producing something radically new.¹⁰ The distinction between administrative regularity and executive decision collapses as each administrative action which seemed to be simply following a rule is understood as actually an act of judgment without foundations. It becomes the task of the political actor to describe a context in such a way that it reveals an apparently routine moment as a political

decision—to show the miracle in the mundane.

This approach veers dangerously close to the version of ideal theory that posits a certain ethos as the negation of reason. The world is portrayed as effervescent, each moment holding radical new possibilities if only we see them rightly. Like any ideal theory, the moments that tend to be identified as exemplifying the theory fit an obvious political program (a recent book uses immigration reform, assisted suicide, and slow food among its examples). To prevent its regression (or ascension) to ideal theory, this politics of novelty would have to tame its exuberance at the absence of foundations. Just because there are no (*ex ante*) rules does not mean that there is no accountability to a community.¹¹ Indeed, the most interesting examples of this politics of novelty point to moments that recover, in their performance, a history of a community that has not been often told, or that has been actively repressed—for example, Frederick Douglass’s July Fourth speech synthesizing the history of black Americans with the history of the American nation in general, offering a novel description of two communities’ histories.¹² Such examples call attention to an important maneuver within the repertoire of a politics of practical wisdom, but their enthusiasm for novelty often misleadingly suggests that they exceed such a politics.

Another response to the worries about a politics of practical wisdom would be to unabashedly return to ideal theory. Perhaps there is a subtler approach to ideal theory, one that posits an absolute without content, or an absolute the only content of which is that it is radically other than the practices and history of a community. Such an absolute would not just be posited, but believed—a belief in “the necessity of contingency.”¹³ The advantage of such a belief is that it would provide a source of authority independent of a community’s practices and history. In this way, it might be possible to welcome that which is unimaginable in the terms of a community,

that which cannot be perceived. It would also make it possible to criticize—or at least emphasize the contingency of—a community’s practices and history, always already distorted, in terms other than those of the community itself.

Unfortunately, such a position again veers towards ideal theory. Where else could belief in an absolute, even one with minimal content, reside except in the transcendental register of the ideal, to be applied in the empirical world of the political? Moreover, even if it is located in the register of the ideal, with so little content how could it authorize any empirical political practices at all? Put another way, the mechanism through which commitment to such an absolute is supposed to authorize an action not authorized by the practices and history of a community is vague—I suspect hopelessly so. But perhaps there is a way to harness the potential of this approach without committing to ideal theory. Instead of understanding commitment to the absolute as a belief, let us understand it as a practice. More precisely, let us understand it as theological virtue, which I will abbreviate here as the virtue of faith. Instead of belief without sufficient reason (e.g., belief in an absolute), faith as a virtue is commitment without sufficient reason. My contention is that the (subtly secular) virtue of practical wisdom requires the (theological) virtue of faith in order to offer a viable political alternative to ideal theory.

As commitment without sufficient reason, faithful practice differs from practices authorized by a community and its history. The latter practices do not have sufficient reason *ex ante*, but can be described as having sufficient reason *post facto*. Practices of faith neither have sufficient reason *ex ante* nor *post facto*. There are two sorts of such practices, one of orthodoxy and the other of novelty. In the former, there is reason to act differently in this case than in past cases, but that reason is ignored. Someone with practical wisdom would act in a new way in these new circumstances, but someone with the virtue of faith remains committed to the previous

way of acting without good reason. In other words, this aspect of the virtue of faith involves what might uncharitably be described as clinging to the past, or resistance to change. Note how this is distinct from the commitment to a community's practices and history that always accompanies practical wisdom, but which does not appear as clinging to the past and which always is able to be justified by reasons *post facto*. While this presentation of practical wisdom might seem to have an inherently conservative tendency, in fact it is highly dynamic, allowing for a lively contest of responses to changing circumstances as practices and histories are described in different ways. The orthodox aspect of the virtue of faith, however, does have an at least superficially conservative appearance: the world is changing and the faithful do not keep up.

Recall how the theorist of novelty urged that the distinction between the exercise of purely discretionary executive authority and purely rule-based administrative authority be abandoned. For her, the most important consequence of this collapse is that every moment that appears to be merely rule-applying can in fact be understood as a political decision. The complementary, but little discussed, consequence of this collapse, at least when the lure of ideal theory is avoided, is that there is a way to understand the supposedly pure discretion of executive authority as resembling rule-following—and that doing so might involve a political action. In other words, for the executive (or the citizen) to refuse her discretion, to refuse her capacity to perceive all salient options, to judge, and to act, but instead to cede authority to what was done before—this is the exercise of the virtue of faith. It might look thoughtless, or uncaring, or downright mean; it certainly is unreasonable. We can imagine an elderly Polish Catholic resident of Hamtramck who brings every discussion of the dispute to a brisk close with, “that’s just the way we have always done things here.” She refuses dialogue; she refuses even to take the effort

to perceive. It is not that she is doing so based on an ideal theory, based on a robust belief system about justice and equality that she is applying to the distribution of sound in Hamtramck. She is simply, without sufficient reason, affirming what has been done before.

Why would such apparent obstinacy be desirable, be described as a virtue? Because it enacts “the grace of doing nothing.”¹⁴ It is an ascetic practice, a practice that performs a pedagogy of humility. The seamless exercise of practical wisdom, embodied in the unflappable Obama, cultivates the illusion that excellent, ever increasing understanding of the practices and history of one’s community does indeed lead one to perceive rightly, judge rightly, and act rightly. It forces the forgetting of the distortions of community always brought about in its representations, and it forces the forgetting of the possibility of radical transformation. Faithfulness to orthodoxy, generic orthodoxy, reminds. In doing so, it also welcomes. Faithfulness to orthodoxy makes possible faithfulness to novelty, a commitment without sufficient reason to a new perception, or judgment, or action, not authorized by community practices or history. There is no telling if or when such novelty might arise; if there was, it would not be novelty requiring faith. Faithfulness to orthodoxy teaches patience, endures frustration without repression. So does faithfulness to novelty, for the Gestalt switch solicited by the novelty may or may not happen, now or later or in the distant future.

It might seem as though this virtue of faithfulness is hardly theological, as it has been presented independent of any religious commitment or even of religious community. There is not a necessary connection, but there may be contingent connections. It may be, particularly in a dogmatically secular community, that religious practices of all stripes necessarily cultivate this political-theological virtue, necessarily cultivate faithfulness.¹⁵ One thinks, for instance, of the complicated context of communities in which an immigrant finds herself, with temptations to

sentimentalize or abandon participation in her religious community. To maintain a difficult, painful commitment to such a community, when it is in obvious conflict with the practices of other communities in which she participates, here is fertile soil for the cultivation of theological virtue. Such soil is also found when the messages of religious authorities are not of one's own choosing and when they conflict, sometimes dramatically, with how one otherwise has reason to see the world, to judge, and to act.

It was easy to ridicule those who complained that Obama did not show the appropriate level of anger at the Gulf oil spill. But preternatural composure is symptomatic of a politics of practical wisdom, in which the affects have been carefully trained, are offered *post facto* along with the appropriate reasons for judgment and action. The smooth movement of practical wisdom is assured that it will ultimately be praised by those who matter, by those with a sufficiently thick knowledge of a community's practices and its history, even if certain actions produce seemingly problematic consequences. Similarly, those committed to ideal theory have no occasions for anger. They are confident in their knowledge of the true and the good, though perhaps frustrated at the slow pace of politicians and their fellow citizens to appreciate this insight. Some proponents of ideal theory suffer from a pleasant melancholy, their ideal negative, the impossibility of an ideal, its proponents occupying themselves full time in the pleasant task of taking apart the purported ideals of others—and in doing so they remain just as happily oblivious to the texture of the social world as those they would critique. It is only with the theological virtue of faith that politics hurts. There is no way to soften the pain of faithfulness to orthodoxy or to novelty that does not appeal to ideal theory. To ignore reasons to act differently, to know that one's actions call for reprimand, to reprimand oneself while at the same time persevering in one's commitment—here is suffering without theodicy. To be surrounded by

members of one's community who very reasonably want to allow students to wear headscarves in public schools, and yet to cling to past practice without reason—the felt pain involved in this (when it is not motivated by crude nationalism) is difficult to overlook. Perhaps it is necessary to ponder what training in political asceticism that would build tolerance for such suffering would look like. Perhaps it would look like a church, or mosque.

The discussion thus far has considered political practice in a democratic context. But I wonder whether there might be something particularly democratic about theological virtue. Even if democracy is not understood as ideal theory, if it is not a set of ideals or principles or an ethos or a state of continual theoretical critique, it must be more than the ubiquity, or aspiration for, right perception, right judgment, and right action. What is there to guarantee that right perception, judgment, and action will lead to a form of politics that we would recognize as democracy? There is no guarantee, but in a sense practical wisdom is already rule of the people, each citizen a political actor as she perceives, judges, and acts—and as she explicates the practices and histories of her communities. Theorizing about democratic institutions quickly veers towards ideal theory—unless that theorizing takes the form of explication of communities' practices and histories (that community could be the Hamtramck city council, or the U.S. Senate), returning the focus to practical wisdom. But there is no straightforward path to the people to rule, for such paths are the false promise of ideal theory or ignore the ever present distortions and lost opportunities of practical wisdom. The democratic citizen, or official, can only faithfully pray: *deo volente*—or *inshallah*.

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¹ My colleague Isaac Weiner is working on a book that examines this case, among others. He has kindly discussed his research with me.

² A similar conjecture could be made about academic politics: it is rare that robust commitments to, say, post-structuralist theory or Balthasarian theology accompany practical wisdom—a cause of much departmental dysfunction.

³ I am thinking particularly of Raymond Geuss, *Philosophy and Real Politics* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2008), but I read others as approaching the same point from different directions. See, for example, Linda M. G. Zerilli, *Feminism and the Abyss of Freedom* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005) and Bryan Garsten, “The Elusiveness of Arendtian Judgment,” *Social Research* 74, no. 4 (Winter 2007): 1071-1108.

⁴ I am elaborating on a point made by Jeffrey Stout, *Democracy and Tradition* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2004).

⁵ John McDowell’s work is particularly helpful on this point. See his “Virtue and Reason,” *The Monist* 62 (1979): 331-350.

⁶ This point is developed by Robert Brandom, “Freedom and Constraint by Norms,” *American Philosophical Quarterly* 16, no. 3 (1979): 187-196 and by John Haugeland, “Heidegger on Being

a Person,” *Nous* 16, no. 1 (1982): 15-26.

⁷ This point about Westboro Baptist Church is made in as yet unpublished research by Hillel Gray, recently presented at Emory University’s Center for Ethics.

⁸ By this use of prophecy I have in mind Cornel West’s descriptions of prophetic criticism. See, for example, the final chapter of his *The American Evasion of Philosophy: A Genealogy of Pragmatism* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1989). On the importance of the imagination for a politics of practical wisdom, see Raymond Geuss, *Politics and the Imagination* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2010).

⁹ This point is developed in Bernard Stiegler, *Taking Care of Youth and the Generations*, trans. Stephen Barker (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2010).

¹⁰ Bonnie Honig, *Emergency Politics: Paradox, Law, Democracy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2009). See also Linda M. G. Zerilli, “Toward a Feminist Theory of Judgment,” *Signs* 34, no. 2 (2009): 295-317.

¹¹ A frustratingly selective reading of Wittgenstein tends to be deployed. A useful corrective is the third chapter of Saul A. Kripke, *Wittgenstein on Rules and Private Language* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1982).

¹² Jason Frank, *Constituent Moments: Enacting the People in Postrevolutionary American* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010): Chapter 7. See also George M. Shulman, *American Prophecy: Race and Redemption in American Political Culture* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008).

¹³ Quentin Meillassoux, *After Finitude: An Essay on the Necessity of Contingency*, trans. Ray Brassier (London: Continuum, 2008). This point is also made in the work of Alain Badiou.

¹⁴ H. Richard Niebuhr, "The Grace of Doing Nothing," *The Christian Century* (March 23, 1932),
Online: <http://www.ucc.org/beliefs/theology/the-grace-of-doing-nothing.html>

¹⁵ Charles Mathewes makes a related point in his *A Theology of Public Life* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).