

*The Problem with Grace: Reconfiguring Political Theology*

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**Introduction: Beyond Supersessionism**

In 1933, Grace Mulligan was passing through rural Alabama when she happened upon the Manderlay plantation. A white woman of refined tastes and social conscience, Grace was traveling with her father and his posse of up-market gangsters. The cars in their caravan slowed, and then stopped, as a black woman hailed them and asked for help. “They’re going to whip him,” the distraught woman cried. Grace discovered a community of African Americans who had never been informed that slavery was abolished decades before. As she entered the Manderlay plantation to investigate, Grace took it upon herself to inform the black residents of Manderlay that they no longer were slaves, that they were now free. Grace abolished the rules of the plantation, “Mam’s Law,” and reorganized the community into a democratic polity. She remained at Manderlay to facilitate the transition from slavery to freedom, overcoming various difficulties along the way. Her efforts paid off, and the new community reaped a bountiful harvest. But Grace’s success was short-lived: the community soon imploded with suspicion, blood, and flames, viciously turning on itself and on Grace.

Lars von Trier’s film, *Manderlay*, ends as its fictional heroine, Grace, is fleeing the plantation. Grace came to replace Law – with unanticipated, disastrous results. *Manderlay* allegorizes a structure that is pervasive but almost never acknowledged in political theory, and political theology. *Manderlay* allegorizes a supersessionist logic. The world is amiss, fallen; some redemptive force, with its origins both inside and outside the world, is needed to make it right. Supersessionism within Christian theology has been forcefully criticized and largely abandoned in academic theology over the past few decades. But supersessionist logic, in many guises, remains regnant in political thought. The time to question its supremacy, and to offer an alternative, is long overdue. There is a political theology underlying much political theory, and that political theology must be reconfigured.

Political theology, understood as the discussion of religious concepts in a political context, has been stifled by a limited theological vocabulary. Political theology, as well as adjunct discourses such as theories of secularization, has focused on shifts between “immanent” and “transcendent” conceptions of God, noting how these correlate with different political structures. The needed fix to the fallen world comes either from outside (in sovereign God or sovereign king) or from within. Such political theology reduces theology to the practice of pointing out or pointing in. Reducing the richness of theological tradition to two vague gestures leads directly into the trap of discarding Law in favor of Grace, for it focuses on modes of redemption rather than modes of living and acting, religiously or politically.

I take religious language seriously, and I do so in a way that retains the rich legacy of religious (specifically, Jewish and Christian) reflection on and refinement of religious concepts without subordinating them to an overarching theological narrative. We gain something of value when concepts like tradition, liturgy, and sanctity are made available for political theorizing, but we lose something of value when such concepts are stripped of their religious heritage. We also lose something of value when every mention of concepts like tradition, liturgy, and sanctity brings with it unwanted commitments that are specifically theological. Some middle path must be possible – and it is precisely the task of this book to identify and traverse that path.

As political theology has gained traction in the humanities, the supersessionist logic undergirding the field has gone unquestioned. Keywords in recent essays and books on political theology include “ontology,” “infinite desire,” “reenchantment,” and “the political.” This is the current vocabulary of supersessionist political theology, and the project of this book is to offer a new vocabulary. Instead of “ontology,” I focus on social practice. Rather than focusing on what there is, I focus on what people do -- positing that things are this way or that is something that people do. Instead of “infinite desire,” I focus on specific goal-directed actions, desires that can be sated. Instead of “reenchantment,” I focus on sober appropriation of religious language for political analysis and action. Instead of “the political,” I focus on specific personal and collective practices of politics.

It might seem as though detaching religious language from religious thought, from comprehensive stories about how the world is and how we ought to act, leads to a project that is rhetorical rather than substantive. Religious language evokes a special affective response; am I simply attempting to harness the political potential of that affect? No: it is the current discourse of political theology, the discourse that needs to be reconfigured, that is using religious language in a purely rhetorical sense. Subtly in Carl Schmitt’s work and less subtly afterwards, the observation that there are historical correlations between religious and political thought has led theorists to offer religious re-descriptions of our world in order to push political thought in the direction the theorists desire. Schmitt quietly laments the loss of the transcendent relationship to religious-political sovereignty in an age of immanence; latter-day political theologians expose the “enchantment” underlying modernity, or the “infinite desire” expressed in actions, or the possibilities of an alternate “ontology,” to motivate political change. These dulcet phrases are evocative because of a theological story from which they are plucked, but away from that story they quickly wilt. Their force comes from reference to the theological stories to which they are subordinate; they lack independent standing.

In contrast, my interest is primarily in the practices to which religious concepts refer, not in harnessing the affect that religious language produces. My interest is in the social world, richly textured with practices and norms. Religious concepts help describe that texture. While pragmatists blithely gesture at the primacy of social practice, pragmatists’ allergy to conceptual analysis and to metaphysics assures that this gesture remains vague. Social practices and norms must be rigorously distinguished and individuated, their workings carefully analyzed. The most interesting recent work from both “pragmatic” (e.g., Robert Brandom) and “Continental” (e.g., Judith Butler) theorists has moved towards this approach. Only once that complex texture of the social world is acknowledged can we understand the usefulness of religious language in naming practices of political significance. Tradition, liturgy, sanctity, revelation, prophecy, faith,

and love are all ways of exploiting the difference between practices and norms, and with such specific concepts, not with supersessionist logic, is where the work of political theology must begin.

It is tempting to read *Manderlay*, released in 2005, as a tale that speaks to the blind zeal for spreading democracy of the contemporary U.S. administration, or, more generally, as a critique of the efficacy of liberal politics. Grace is confronted with oppression: a community of black people is living in slavery. At the moment she happens upon the community, one of the black people is going to be whipped. While her father argues that it is merely “a local matter” and that it is “not our responsibility,” Grace says that “we” (white people) have created the situation and so have a “moral obligation” to fix it. Grace, with the support of her father’s gangsters, informs the former slaves that they have rights. She tells them that each human being has inherent worth and dignity that must be respected. “They can now enjoy the same freedoms as any other citizen of this country,” Grace proudly announces. She creates a forum for democratic participation in the governance of the community, complete with a system for voting.

Indeed, Grace not only creates the political institutions that she thinks are necessary to end the oppression of the former slaves; she also tries to personally reach out to them. She buys an easel and paints for one young man (because his face “possess[es] an artist's sensitivity”) and proudly presents the supplies to him with the words “because we believe in you.” But her high hopes are soon dashed: Grace discovers that she has confused the artistic young man with his brother. Timothy, a strong-spirited former slave, looking on, notes facetiously how all black men look alike. He attempts Grace, as representative of liberalism, makes at recognizing differences within the community of Manderlay run aground.

Moreover, the newly constituted liberal democratic polity miserably fails. First, it turns in on itself, with its newly “liberated” members using the democratic processes just established to their own advantage and in “inappropriate” ways (voting on when a jokester can laugh at his own jokes; sentencing a woman accused of stealing food to death). Then, after the initial troubles seem resolved, the community self-destructs. Set off by the theft of the harvest profits, Manderlay goes up in flames. Liberalism has failed. Empowerment did not end oppression; it merely transfigured oppression.

It is also tempting to read *Manderlay* as a Nietzschean critique of values, complementary to the critique of liberalism. Not only does liberal politics not work, but it is based on values with suppressed, dark origins. Before Grace arrives, Manderlay is ruled by the noble and powerful. The whites at Manderlay have guns and whips, in addition to their fair skins and civilized culture. With the help of a priestly class, Grace and her entourage, the weak overthrow the strong in a “slave revolt.” The priestly class institutes its own set of rituals to secure its power: democratic community meetings, votes, and celebrations replace inspections and whippings. At first, the former slaves are wary of Grace and her entourage, but eventually they forget the founding moment of their community and seem to live in harmony, not only with Grace but also with the white former slave owners. Grace, as Nietzsche diagnoses the Judeo-Christian consciousness, is plagued by *ressentiment*: “The sins of the past are sins I cannot and do not wish to help you erase.” As Grace later puts it, “Manderlay is a moral obligation, because we made you.”

But history is not complete. There is still a noble man -- strong, physical, cunning -- who has not been entirely domesticated by the slave revolt. Timothy appears to have just the sort of character that Nietzsche holds in high regard. When he hears Grace talking about "moral obligations" and "truth," Timothy memorably responds: "Luckily, I'm just a nigger who don't understand such words." He has a haughty attitude, replying to Grace's apparent desire for gratitude cuttingly: "When we were slaves, we were not required to offer thanks for our supper, and for the water we drank, and for the air we breathed."

Timothy is classified by Mam's Law as a "Proudy Nigger," and he is said to come from a line of ancient African kings ("that old-fashioned morality," we are told). However, at the end of the film it is revealed that, in fact, he is actually classified as a "Pleasin' Nigger," a "chameleon," who is "diabolically clever." He could "transform [himself] into exactly the type the beholder wanted to see." Nietzsche writes that the character type he endorses is "necessarily a great actor" whose goals are "achieved by the same 'immoral' means as any other victory: violence, lies, slander, injustice."<sup>1</sup> Timothy tricks the community in revolt against the "slave" values brought by Grace -- values which he never accepted. The community disintegrates and the strong, who have hidden their power up until then in the mask of "pleasin'," reveal themselves.

Here we find the standard critique of liberalism advanced in recent political theory. Liberalism, as the continuation of Socratic-Judeo-Christian values under another name (according to Nietzsche), faces an inherent contradiction which is bound to explode in internal rupture -- what Sheldon Wolin calls "Nietzsche's prophecy of the disintegration of the liberal-democratic state."<sup>ii</sup> The liberal project does not end oppression; it simply replaces one set of values with another while the masses remain subordinated to an aristocratic elite. This new set of values is particularly pernicious because it advances under the label of universalism, providing a "tolerant" umbrella for all points of view. It is agonism, not suppression of conflict, which holds the potential to affect a decisive switch out of an oppressive problematic, many critics of liberalism contend. This agonism is a performance, its achievement always "to come."

However, reading *Manderlay* in this way misses what is most interesting about the film: its critique of political theology. *Manderlay* calls into question both the political theory of liberalism and the political theory of many of its critics. In reading *Manderlay*, we must not overlook what is most obvious. The main character is named "Grace." Grace is the name of the protagonist in all three films in von Trier's American-themed trilogy. Two of von Trier's earlier films, *Dancer in the Dark* and *Breaking the Waves*, while not featuring main characters named Grace, feature female protagonists of a similar type. In each case, the female protagonist feels as if she is sacrificing herself to help others. She imagines herself as pure and selfless, putting the needs of others in front of her own and making of herself a gift to them. In *Dancer in the Dark* and *Breaking the Waves*, this sacrifice results in the death of the protagonists, a death intended to give others a better life (acknowledged at the end of *Breaking the Waves* by the ringing of supernatural church bells). In *Dogville* and *Manderlay*, the sacrifice apparently misfires. It results in the deaths of some of those Grace is trying to benefit as a direct or indirect result of her intervention. But in these cases, Grace is still aligned with Christian grace. When she is first informed of the persistent slavery at Manderlay, her slave informant describes Manderlay as "this godforsaken place." Grace's arrival at Manderlay is an (attempted)

gift to the inhabitants of the plantation, intended to improve their condition, to help them form a new community.

Grace is not the only explicitly theological word that plays a central role in *Manderlay*. In addition to Grace, there is Law. Referred to as “Mam’s Law” (from Mam, the plantation mistress, its supposed author, played by Lauren Bacall) and regarded as “almost sacred,” we first encounter this Law when the dying Mam, moribund along with -- likely, because of -- the dying way of life she represents, asks to speak privately with Grace. She asks Grace for one favor, “one woman to another” (to which Grace responds that gender offers no privilege). Mam asks Grace to destroy the book of Law kept under Mam’s bed. It contains the rules and customs by which the plantation operates, “well-filled with bizarre and vicious regulations,” we are told by the narrator. Grace flatly refuses, asserting that any decision should be made in public, by the community as a whole: “[I]t’s my view that anything, no matter what, is best served by being brought out into the open.” By bringing it out into the open, Grace can demystify the Law, destroying its authority – through her own authority.

As Grace encounters difficulties guiding the liberated plantation, she considers revealing the book of Law to the community. She is convinced by Wilhelm to wait, accepting his advice that the community might not yet be ready. After the community has gone up in flames, as Grace is departing, she delivers the book of Law to the community as a parting “gift” (her gift: to overturn, to turn over, the Law). The film dramatically reveals that Wilhelm, the elderly former slave who had seemed most sympathetic to Grace and her project, had written the Law: “I wrote Mam’s Law for the good of everyone.”

Wilhelm had tried, long ago, to formalize the best customary practices of the community. Each of the apparently meaningless or simply oppressive regulations had a significance which was, on his view, in the best interest of the community. All slaves had to line up in a particular part of the plantation each day because that was the only part of the plantation that had shade during the hottest part of the day; paper money was prohibited so it would not be gambled away; cutting down trees in the “Old Lady’s Garden” was prohibited because they blocked the wind from covering crops with dust; and the slaves were divided into categories (e.g., Group 1, “Proudy Nigger”; Group 2, “Talkin’ Nigger”; Group 5, “Clownin’ Nigger”, each receiving different amounts of food and permitted different liberties) because this allowed for the best organization of the plantation based on the psychologies of its members. These categories kept the plantation “in an iron grip,” according to the narrator who here identifies with Grace. After Wilhelm explains the advantages he perceives of the Law, Grace retorts, “Damn it, Wilhelm, they’re not free!”

Simply by looking on the surface, at the relationship between “Grace” and “Law” in *Manderlay*, we can begin to understand what the underlying political theological project of the film might involve. Before Grace comes to Manderlay, the plantation was ruled according to the Law. Grace overthrows the Law. She says that the Law no longer matters. She thinks each former slave, regardless of his or her “group,” should receive the same amount of food; she thinks it silly that the former slaves line up on the parade ground each day; and she suggests that the “Old Lady’s Garden” be cut down in order to improve the decrepit cabins in which the former slaves live. We cannot help but think of the Christian narrative: Old Testament Law overturned by New Testament Grace.

The results of Grace's attempt to overthrow the Law are calamitous. A dust storm destroys most of the crops which the community had planted because, in violation of the Law, Grace encouraged the community to chop down the trees in the Old Lady's Garden. With the abolition of the "groups" into which the slaves had been categorized, those who, by their "psychology," were prone to take advantage of others did so. Wilma steals food from a dying baby and Timothy steals money from the community as a whole. Both acts result in further violence. One is reminded of the violence that Walter Benjamin suggests lies at the foundation of the law. For Benjamin, law-making violence is hidden by the law, and the law is sustained by law-preserving violence. When the law is suspended, such as in a general strike, law-making violence is exposed. Benjamin seems to relish this violence, aligning himself with an anomic apocalypticism and praying for a Messiah to sweep away worldly law with divine violence. In *Manderlay*, it seems as though we witness the moment at which Law is superseded by Grace -- and we witness the violence that necessarily ensues.

But this reading, which relies on the same supersessionist logic as the initial reading, misses the dramatic revelation at the end of *Manderlay*: the Law was written by the slaves themselves (at least, by one of the slaves, with the supposed best interest of the slaves as a whole in mind). With this information, von Trier forces us to reevaluate our understanding of the relationship between Law and Grace; he forces us to push beyond any simplistic story relating the two. The Law is not imposed from the outside by some supernatural force. *Manderlay* exhibits the problems that result when Law is misunderstood: it appears that Grace is necessary for salvation because Law is a foreign imposition. The result is that we appear to be faced with a choice between the violence of Law and the salvation -- or the redemptive violence -- of Grace.

Political theology, as it is currently understood, rests on a supersessionist logic. According to Carl Schmitt, in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries, God was understood to be transcendent, and so was the political sovereign.<sup>iii</sup> God was thought to create the world, and to set in motion the laws of nature; so, too, with the political sovereign and the laws of the state. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, God was understood to be immanent, and so was the sovereign. Ruler and ruled became one and the same in democratic polities, just as the distinction between God and history (and society) collapsed. The political-theological correlation concerns legitimacy, or rather perceptions of legitimacy. Schmitt argues that commitment to a particular theological configuration makes the structure of that configuration plausible in politics. If God is thought to be able to suspend the laws of nature to work miracles, then it is plausible that the sovereign can legitimately suspend the laws of the state in times of emergency. This seminal formulation of political theology rests on the observation that the world is perceived to be fallen, incomplete, and in need of redemption (where these terms are understood in the broadest senses). The world is made right, both religiously and politically, from outside or from within.

Mark Lilla's recent reflection on political theology, like Schmitt's, traces various forms of the relationship between religion and politics in the West, but concludes on an equivocal note.<sup>iv</sup> Lilla recognizes the role of Grace in political theorizing: he calls it messianism and the "inverted messianism" of theorists of secularization and modernity. Such stories make sense of our world, and this is something we innately desire, according to Lilla. But it is not inevitable. After the West underwent what Lilla calls the "Great

Separation” -- the early modern divorce of theology and politics -- it became possible to understand politics independent of legitimacy derived from theological structures. For Lilla, there are two responses to this departure from what he calls political theology. One descends from Hobbes and erects the sovereign as an “earthly God.” The other is found in Rousseau and his intellectual descendants, and it retains a role for gentle religiosity in political life. Lilla claims that the debate between the intellectual descendants of Hobbes and those of Rousseau is “philosophical” rather than “theological” -- they all reject “political theology.” But Lilla is using the language of political theology in an idiosyncratic manner. The difference between Hobbes and Rousseau maps precisely onto the difference between transcendent and immanent political theologies in Schmitt’s terminology. Lilla understands political theology to involve debates about God that directly affect politics; Schmitt understands political theology as a correlation between religious and political beliefs. The net result is that Lilla’s excitement at the end of messianism and inverted messianism conceals his wholehearted endorsement of what, in Schmitt’s terms, is a political theology governed by two options: immanent and transcendent. Supersessionist logic remains at work.

It is not only in political theology proper that a supersessionist logic pervades. Avatars of this logic are found in related explorations of modernity and secularization. To take but two recent examples, Marcel Gauchet and Charles Taylor both build their stories of secularization around the opposition of immanent and transcendent societal self-images.<sup>v</sup> In Gauchet’s story, the pre-modern world is a spatially integrated whole. Gods, spirits, humans, animals, and the rest of nature all occupy the same space. But the source of normativity, the place where the ordering principles of society come from, is in the mythical past. This is not in historical time, it is in a time of heroes or gods absolutely separated from the present. All that is possible is to repeat the events and social structures of this mythical past; it is so separate from our world that no one can claim special privilege as an interpreter. With the advent of the “axial age” (the term is Karl Jaspers’), the gods of the mythical past are condensed into one God, and that God recedes ever farther from our world, both temporally and spatially. God becomes Wholly Other. The less content that can be ascribed to God, the more there is need for human interpreters (Gauchet singles out the Christian paradox of the Incarnation as particularly inviting earthly interpreters). As God recedes, according to Gauchet, religiously-sanctioned hierarchy develops; it is now possible for a state to develop independent of society, a state which embodies the earthly presence of the religious Other. Immanence has transformed into transcendence.

Taylor tracks how the transcendence of the axial age transforms into the immanence that characterizes modernity and post-modernity. Through the emergence of conceptions of instrumental reason, an inner will, and universal sympathy, morality which was once understood to originate outside was “immanentized.” This shift was not just about morality; the cultural changes of modernity, such as the growth of government bureaucracies, economic development, state “disciplinary” practices, and science all led to a change in the conditions of possibility for religious belief. But modernity is unsatisfactory; it produces alienation, malaise. Religions framed in terms of transcendence no longer offer comfort; religions became compatible with immanence, through romanticism, rationalism, or, most recently, a spiritual marketplace. Contemporary science-versus-religion battles play out on the plane of immanence. But

these debates presuppose a “closed” form of immanence; Taylor wants to replace it with an “open” form that makes room for human aspirations to higher meaning -- indeed, transcendence -- within the plane of immanence.

It might be objected that political theologians and secularization theorists are simply describing how individuals in a given culture imagine their worlds. Supersessionist logic, as I have described it, suggests overturning one world and replacing it with another. But ascriptions of transcendence and immanence are more than simple historical descriptions. They are attempts to identify the governing logic, the “essence,” of the cultures in question (for instance, of “modernity”).<sup>vi</sup> To suggest that a culture sees itself primarily in terms of immanence or transcendence, in whatever configuration, is to suggest that individuals in that culture see their lives as in need of perfecting through some mechanism beyond themselves. I think this is a faulty account of the human experience. Individuals spend most of their time and energy navigating their social worlds, doing what is done, making commitments, spending time with friends, bantering about what ought to be done. Concerns about the sorts of “big questions” that might call for answers involving immanence or transcendence, or touch on the source of normativity, arise only infrequently.

Then perhaps it is not on the level of human experience that immanence and transcendence are relevant, but on the level of political concepts and organizations. I am willing to accept the point that, on this superstructural level, there are parallels between ideas about the state and ideas about religion. But the discourse of political theology is never content to stop there. Schmitt’s intellectual history (particularly the eponymous third chapter of his *Political Theology*) is an aside to the thrust of his project. It is the transcendent conception of politics that he favors -- his text is an extended exegesis on the opening sentence, “Sovereign is he who decides on the exception” -- and his historical narrative serves only to highlight the conceptual confusion into which sovereignty has fallen, making his conceptual clarification all the more necessary.

Moreover, even if a project of pure historical description were possible, using immanence and transcendence as the overarching categories to govern such an analysis would be misguided. To do so would be to buy into the theologically freighted (not purely descriptive) notion that all religious concepts point to God, who is beyond the world or within. A political theology -- that is, analysis of the role of religious concepts in political theory and practice -- without Christian presuppositions would not subsume religious concepts under their relationship with God by privileging the relationship of God to the world. This is the reconfiguration of political theology that I am urging, and that I perform in the chapters that follow: an analysis of the rich variety of religious concepts that have political relevance. This same point could be made from the political rather than the theological direction: privileging questions of sovereignty and legitimacy is already to view political theory from a partisan perspective that ultimately desiccates political analysis. Only by removing that privilege and looking at a rich texture of political concepts and practices can political theory flourish.

Supersessionist logic appears yet again in another discourse around political theology: in the choice posed between Athens and Jerusalem, Hellenic reason and Hebraic faith. Leo Strauss contrasts “Philosophy and the Bible,” where “Each of the two antagonists claims to know or to hold the truth, the decisive truth, the truth regarding the right way of life. But there can be only one truth...”<sup>vii</sup> Levinas and Derrida position



themselves as partisans of Jerusalem, understanding the task of philosophy (and ethics, and politics) to be that of tugging at the threads left loose in the web of reason -- doing this is the work of justice. Our modern world may be modeled on Athens, but by noting the incompleteness of reason, we can transform it (eventually, in a time "to come") into Jerusalem. In the attempt to transform our world into either Athens or Jerusalem, in the embrace of modernity or its other, we find ourselves yet again entranced by Grace, yet again denigrating Law. The impulse to make rigid and rational or to make fluid and faithful forgets what the world is: textured, messy, viscous, difficult. It is to focus on the world we want, not the world we have -- and so to authorize violence against the world that we have.

In the reading of *Manderlay* that I initially proposed, critics of liberalism saw von Trier as an ally. But this reading is undercut by the film itself, by the resilience of Law in the face of Grace, and by the demonstration of the explosive combination of the two. It is not coincidental that critics of liberalism would be entranced by a story of Grace. They, too, are often bewitched by a supersessionist logic. Instead of trying to redeem the fallen world through reason, like the liberals they critique, scholars such as Bonnie Honig and Ernesto Laclau embrace agonism. Politics happens through contest, through articulating political positions and pitting them against each other, not through quieting that contest with a vision of justice which we can all share. It is that contest, which must take place in very carefully constructed parameters, that becomes a new avatar of Grace. Wendy Brown, another critic of liberalism, understands herself to be working "in the wake of metaphysics and metanarratives" that legitimize liberalism -- they have past, they no longer hold sway. She concludes a recent book with the wish that her work "offers modest new possibilities for the practice of freedom."<sup>viii</sup> Brown has cast herself as Grace, shrugging off metaphysics and metanarratives and instead offering freedom. For these critics of liberalism, Grace is just as necessary as it is for liberals; it is just a feisty, loud sort of Grace, Grace with an attitude, rather than the quiet, demure, calming Grace of liberals. For critics of liberalism fear that, without Grace of their favored variety, there will be totalitarianism -- either the crude totalitarianism of fascism or the polished totalitarianism of modern rationality and technology, with its dark underside of colonialism and genocide.

Pragmatists, it would seem, ought to be the most suspicious of supersessionist logic. Are not avatars of Grace discarded along with all other metaphysical mystifications? Just the opposite: it is the pragmatist's self-confident dismissal of metaphysical mystifications that casts her in the role of Grace. The pragmatist, like Grace arriving in *Manderlay*, cheerily announces (already present) freedom: No more metaphysics! Essence is a hoax! Ontology is over! These conceptual clarifications are supposed to allow the pragmatist to focus on what is really important: how people live. For instance, instead of trying to figure out what race "really" is, the pragmatist dismisses any "ontological" conception of race, instead looking at "social context" and imagining how race language could be strategically employed to better the lives of those in need.<sup>ix</sup> Grace entered *Manderlay* to inform the slaves that they were free. Grace brought conceptual clarity to the slaves. A few of their rituals changed: they held democratic meetings and each received an equal share of the food supply. But, for the most part, their lives remained the same -- until the changes ushered in by Grace led to various increasingly violent acts. Pragmatists claim to be bringing clarity, to be informing us that

race does not “really” exist -- indeed, that the whole metaphysical enterprise is superfluous. Certainly, the practice of the social critic must change slightly. She must no longer talk about race in certain ways. The former slaves at Manderlay must no longer refer to each other as “Pleasin’ Niggers” or “Proudy Niggers.” But the real effects of such changes are questionable -- and, as *Manderlay* demonstrates, possibly quite dangerous.

The pragmatist claims to be interested in “social context,” in “the messiness of life.” So is Grace. But by dismissing Law, Grace is bereft of resources to engage with social context. The pragmatist is similarly bereft of resources, for the pragmatist dismisses the necessary intellectual resources -- posited distinctions, claims about representation, classificatory schemas -- as “metaphysics.” Grace, the character, refuses to use Mam’s law to classify the different “groups” of former slaves, with the eventual consequence that the community goes out of control and self-destructs. Further, recall how Grace at one point purports to have an interest in the textured life of the former slave community. She tries to give little Jim an easel and paints -- but she accidentally gives them to his brother, Jack. From the perspective of Grace, all black people look alike, for Grace has overturned Law and all of the distinctions which Law entails.

Avatars of supersessionist logic bring with them melancholia. Fixation on a lost object makes the existing world appear in shades of grey. The fixation never loosens. In fact, it tightens when it is coupled with hope: fixation on a lost object in the past is maintained by projection of a desired object into the future. Schmitt’s discontent with the immanent political-theological model and his longing for a return to the transcendent, a longing which skews his political judgment about his contemporary world, shows this melancholia. So do the meandering meditations of secularization theorists on modernity, culminating in Taylor’s melancholic desire for an open-ended form of immanence. So does the work of those meditating on Athens and Jerusalem, with their fixation on mythical cities at the expense of the cities in which they live today. So do critics of liberalism, even those who acknowledge the danger of melancholia, yet in their very acknowledgment of the danger fall into its orbit. They fixate on the melancholia itself, offering only a vague gesture towards a “mixture of heaviness and hope” as an alternative.<sup>x</sup> And so do pragmatists, who acknowledge the “tragic” dimension of life, yet in its place offer rhetoric rather than analysis -- who offer as an antidote the language and “spirit” of hope (a recent book on pragmatism and politics bears the title *In a Shade of Blue*, unintentionally foregrounding its thoroughgoing melancholia).

Let us return to *Manderlay*. Let us examine what it does, not what it says. And let us look at how it persuades. It inflates Law and Grace until they pop. What remains? Practices and norms are left, the practices and norms that compose filmic conventions, on display for all to see. The enchantment which makes up cinema, which gives it authority, which allows it to dazzle, is undercut when the individual ingredients that compose a film are paraded before the viewer as these conventions are manipulated, toyed with.

*Manderlay* is visually striking. It is set on a simple white stage with only blackness beyond the stage’s edges. All of the characters remain on the stage all of the time -- it is Manderlay, their home. There are only the most minimal props on the stage: Mam’s bed; the pillars representing the plantation house which, significantly, support a beam engraved with the slogan “LITTLE LITTLE CAN I GIVE;” a few pieces of wood representing the leaky slave cabins; and one or two other props. Many locations are

designated by labels written on the floor in white lettering. There are not doors: when a character needs to represent going in or out of a doorway, he or she knocks and turns the air.

The result is a visual minimalism, sometimes disorienting, sometimes claustrophobic. Indeed, the style is nearly the opposite of von Trier's earlier ("Dogma-style") films such as *Breaking the Waves* and *Dancer in the Dark*. These earlier films were made almost entirely on location in quasi-documentary style (these films were, in turn, a response to von Trier's technically sophisticated earliest films). Moreover, in both the on-location films and the entirely set-bound (indeed: theater-style) *Dogville* and *Manderlay*, von Trier uses a handheld camera which he himself operates much of the time. This has an effect both on the actors and on the viewer. The relationship between actor and director is dramatically altered when the director is but a few feet in front of him or her all of the time. The viewer is taken into the scene; the detachment allowed by an "objective" view through the lens of the camera is taken away. There is no framing: the viewer is not allowed the relaxation of symmetry or ordering in what she sees. Another effect of the handheld, director-operated camera is that the film is often momentarily but noticeably out of focus.

Dominating the feel of *Manderlay* is the voice of a narrator (John Hurt). This voice -- strong, masculine, mid-Atlantic, authoritative -- booms across the plantation set. Despite his authoritative sound, the narrator is not, in fact, an authority. He misleads us, and his allegiances are unclear. When Grace first liberates blacks at *Manderlay* and begins to facilitate their transition to "freedom," the narrator reassuringly tells us, "Her actions would comprise an unconditional enrichment of these people's lives, there was no doubt about that." Notice also the excessively -- facetiously -- pretentious language and stance. It provides a clue that something is amiss, that the authority of the narrator should not be taken for granted. Yet the narrator himself brings his authority into question. After making the statement just quoted, we are shown the skeptical faces of the former slaves. The narrator adds -- "or was there?" In another case, the narrator tells us that the slave community is "Living proof of the devastating power of oppression" -- a statement that, as the finale of the film shows, is at the very least misleading.

The voice of the narrator is complemented by "chapter" titles displayed in black lettering on a white screen -- for example, "Chapter ONE: In which we happen upon *Manderlay* and meet the people there" and "Chapter EIGHT: In which Grace settles with *Manderlay* and the film ends." The combination of narrator and titles serves to replicate, in excess, the Hollywood conventions which guide the viewer through an ordinary plot. The narrator's voice is too strong, too masculine... too authoritative. Similarly, the chapter titles tell us too much. It is not that their content gives away what is about to happen in the film, but rather that, like the restrictive set, they frame the narrative excessively.

Finally, when we turn back to the narrative itself, we find even more examples of convention-bound unconventionality. The narrator's voice banally opens the film, "It was in the year of 1933..." There is a main character who encounters difficulties while trying to do the right thing. A woman lusts after a forbidden man, the "wildest" of the former slaves, Timothy. The winds of fortune blow this way and that: Grace's difficulties are sometimes resolved, sometimes compounded. There are Hollywood stars: Bryce Dallas Howard plays Grace (Nicole Kidman was set to reclaim the role, which she played in

*Dogville*, but she had a scheduling conflict); other actors include Danny Glover and Lauren Bacall.

At the same time, these Hollywood conventions are altered: the main character is female, not male; the difficulties she faces are largely her own fault; her moralism is explicit and ubiquitous; and, dramatically, there is no happy ending -- or even any resolution. It is not clear what will happen to Grace at the end of the film. She simply runs away, escapes. And it is not clear what will happen to the remaining former slaves, who seem to have internalized some democratic values (e.g., voting), but who remain tied to the old customs of Manderlay.

In each of these ways, *Manderlay* toys with rules. Indeed, rules -- Law -- have long been a fascination, perhaps obsession, of von Trier. He famously distributed little red pamphlets containing the new "rules" for filmmaking in 1995, the organizing document of what came to be known as Dogma 95. Billed as a response to Hollywood excess, the Dogma rules prohibited filmmakers from using music, required filmmakers to use digital cameras, and prohibited lighting and special effects. In 2003, von Trier challenged fellow Danish filmmaker Jørgen Leth to remake the latter's 1967 film "The Perfect Human" with five obstructions. These obstructions were each rules constraining what Leth could do. One obstruction was to have no shot with more than 12 frames, another was to use only animation.

Unlike von Trier's project with Leth, the way that *Manderlay* toys with rules is not purely constrictive. *Manderlay* takes familiar conventions and follows them in such a way that they are brought into question. It follows norms alternately excessively and deficiently, denaturalizing them. At once, the film is restricted to a stage and is filmed through a handheld camera. At once, we see familiar Hollywood faces and we see those faces in the roles of ill-fated characters. And, at once, we are reminded of the formality of the plot by a narrator's voice and the standard rules which characterize a "good" plot are violated.

Von Trier practices what might be called anti-Aristotelian virtue. Instead of striving to meet the community norm, he tries to exceed that norm or to fall below it. Aristotle would call such practice vice. But it is not that von Trier is uneducated, it is not that he was insufficiently acculturated into the norms of the filmmaking community. Rather, the excesses and deficiencies of his filmmaking practice are always entirely conscious and intentional with full knowledge of the rules that are not being perfectly followed. *Manderlay* rejects the opposition of Law and Grace. In its style, *Manderlay* investigates the interstices of Law, highlighting and toying with specific norms. *Manderlay* invites political theorists to investigate the ways in which Law -- that is, customs, norms -- are manipulated. And *Manderlay* invites political activists to stop arguing about, or waiting for, avatars of Grace and to instead proceed with the difficult work of highlighting and challenging specific problematic norms and conventions. The film does this by using aesthetics to persuade. In fact, might it be possible to read *Manderlay* as arguing for the *necessity* of political theology, of the rhetorical force of political theology? Perhaps the problem it identifies is that political theorists and political activists have repressed political theology; what they need to do is reconfigure it.

In the pages that follow, I seek to constitute an anti-supersessionist canon of political thought. These writers -- Franz Kafka, Simone Weil, and James Baldwin -- are

in some sense “too Jewish to be Christian and too Christian to be Jewish” (a phrase Gillian Rose used to describe herself). Anodyne labels like “spiritual but not religious” or “religious without religion” miss the significance of these writers’ work for political theology. I argue that they use the rhetoric of political theology to make supersessionist logic self-destruct, and to open up space for thinking and acting in a way that accepts, rather than rejects, the richly textured world of social norms and practices. They return to the ordinary, and the ordinary, understood rightly, is political.

There are resources for exploring this world of norms and practices to be found in recent writers. I have found particularly helpful the work of Robert Brandom, Judith Butler, Jeffrey Stout -- and, almost as a muse, the late Gillian Rose. Brandom, Butler, and Stout do not see their work as part of a concerted effort to overturn supersessionist logic; Gillian Rose does. She offers both theoretical resources and literary work deserving a place in the anti-supersessionist canon. Rose’s wide-ranging work addressed issues of sociology (the field of her academic appointment), philosophy, religious thought (both Jewish and Christian), and political theory. Rose urged a switch from melancholia to mourning, from unending fixation on a lost object (reason or faith, a time in the irrecoverable past or the always-distant future) to a sadness that propels the mourner back into engagement with the world.

Rose was a committed Hegelian. She understood herself to be faithful to Hegel against his many betrayers, ranging from Marx to post-structuralists. According to Rose, Hegel has been betrayed because of the allure of an insidious neo-Kantian problematic. The defining feature of neo-Kantianism is its “diremption,” or splitting, between the empirical world and some set of transcendental presuppositions not accountable to the empirical world. To take two disparate examples, Rose argues that Durkheim took “society” to exist in the transcendental register and then applied the category of “society” to his investigation of the empirical world without allowing the empirical world to feedback into his understanding of society. Similarly, she argues that Foucault took “power” to exist, unaccountable, in the transcendental register as he applied the category of power to his investigations of the empirical world. This latent neo-Kantianism is the root of supersessionist logic (though the latter is my term, not Rose’s).

In opposition to this neo-Kantian apostasy, Rose locates herself as a (perhaps the) orthodox Hegelian. She does this by understanding philosophy and social theory as the study of social norms.<sup>xi</sup> True to her Hegelian commitments, Rose emphasizes the unavoidability of “metaphysics.” She argues that metaphysics and politics are always already intertwined. Philosophy and social theory go wrong when they attempt to disentangle the two, when they repeat the neo-Kantian diremption between, shall we say, Law and Grace. To think that metaphysics and politics, Law and Grace, are inextricably entangled is a “disturbing possibility.” Rose suggests that this view is, and will be, strongly resisted: “In both the world of politics and the intellectual world, there seems to be a low tolerance of equivocation. The result of this intolerance and unease is the reproduction of dualistic ways of thinking...”<sup>xii</sup>

Rose only gestures towards an alternative to the diremptive tradition with which she disagrees. In her constructive vision, the theorist (or subject) acknowledges that action, power, law, and violence are always intertwined. Her slogan, “mourning becomes the law,” means that the frustration effected by the violence inherent in the social world must remind us of our commitment to justice, and it must return us to the political realm

“renewed and reinvigorated for participation, ready to take on the difficulties and injustices of the existing city.”<sup>xiii</sup> We are not to slip into melancholic fixation on a fantasized but ever-distant “New Jerusalem,” a fantasized land of Grace. Instead, we are to be committed to “political action” tied to “structural analysis” -- which is to say, we must commit ourselves to a thorough investigation of the social world of practices and norms, and we must commit ourselves to act based on the results of that investigation.

Rose’s intellectual voice has not as yet found a wide audience. This is in part because of her liminal academic position -- too much a sociologist to be a philosopher, and too much a philosopher to be a sociologist -- but also because of the rapid Christian appropriation of her thought.<sup>xiv</sup> The Anglo-Catholic theologian John Milbank has skyrocketed to academic fame in large part by Christianizing Rose’s insights. Like Rose, Milbank argues that there are appeals to transcendence latent in, and undergirding, the work of nearly all ostensibly secular social theorists. Unlike Rose, Milbank embraces this structure -- but replaces latent neo-Kantianism with blatant Christian triumphalism. He does this via a return to immanence, an immanence through which transcendence percolates.<sup>xv</sup> Our shared world, when we live rightly, is sanctified. There can be unity through difference, Milbank argues, when that difference is viewed aesthetically, as musical notes functioning together harmoniously. But Milbank’s theological project is supersessionist -- both in the broad sense I am using here and the narrow, theological sense.<sup>xvi</sup> In our everyday lives, we must dance to the beat of Christian music. If we don’t, according to Milbank, discipline must be applied. Milbank’s appropriation misses what is most interesting about Rose’s thought: her examination of the difficulty involved in navigating the social world, and her accounts of the virtues of faith and love as crucial tools for that arduous task.

The following chapters offer resources for a post-sectarian, post-secular political theology that is “too Jewish to be Christian and too Christian to be Jewish.” Each chapter focuses on one religious practice. Through conceptual analysis and engagement with theoretical and literary texts, I show how the practice in question can be understood in terms of its relationship to social norms and practices, thereby detaching it from an overarching theological narrative and exploring its political potential. The first three chapters consider the theological virtues: love, faith, and hope. While political theorists such as Richard Rorty, seemingly unaware of or uninterested in these virtues’ religious heritage, commend the “fuzzy blend” of the three, I carefully analyze each separately. The invocation of this triptych draws on a specifically Christian heritage which needs to be reformulated for political theorizing. In fact, hope is not a virtue at all: it is a rhetoric that can be exploited for good or ill. What seems like the virtue of hope is actually an incongruous blend of the virtue of faith and a rhetoric of hope.

These initial three chapters also develop the account of social norms and practices on which the rest of the book builds. In Chapter 1’s discussion of love, I read Rose’s memoir, *Love’s Work*, a book about love that, curiously, says virtually nothing about desire. The entanglement of love and desire relies on opposing immanent and transcendent notions of love, and Rose’s memoir demonstrates the inadequacy of both. In its place comes a virtue of love. For Rose, love is exercise for life. Navigating the practices of lover and beloved as they conflict with and complement each other, an

always difficult process, is intense preparation for navigating the social world writ large, and for navigating political practices and institutions specifically.

It is only possible to work through love, through the inevitable conflicts between lover and beloved, with faith. I understand faith not as a belief in particular propositions but, like love, as a virtue, a disposition to remain committed to a project even when it seems as though all is going wrong. Faith is necessary for love, and, I contend, it is necessary for life in the political world. In this second chapter I tap the resources of Robert Brandom's account of social norms and practices, but move beyond it by noting the need for a supplement. Judith Butler offers desire as such a supplement. However, putting desire in this role, instead of faith, is an (in this case explicit) endorsement of supersessionist logic. I show how Gillian Rose's writings offer resources for developing a non-supersessionist account of the virtue of faith.

The Christian theologian Charles Mathewes has recently argued that cultivating the theological virtues in individuals makes them better citizens, because in political processes (for example, at a neighborhood association meeting or school board meetings) love, faith, and hope are necessary to get results.<sup>xvii</sup> Mathewes also argues that the more time Christians spend engaging in politics, the better Christians they become because participation in politics cultivates the theological virtues. I endorse and develop Mathewes' sentiment, but I see no reason that it needs to be understood as specifically Christian. Faithful and loving individuals make better citizens, and the duties of citizenship make individuals who are more faithful and more loving. But hope must not be included in this triptych of virtues. In Chapter 3 I demonstrate how political theorists who have praised hope, including Richard Rorty and Christopher Lasch, have really been talking about faith, about the commitment to persevere and continue negotiating the difficult world. The rhetoric of hope is potent, but it also quickly hypostatizes, causing slippage into a supersessionist logic.

The five chapters that compose Part II follow an arc that tracks the relationship of social norms and practices. These chapters progress from tradition, which I analyze as the strategic explication of social norms hollowed of practices, to liturgy, sanctity, and revelation, which I take to be means of stepping aside from (and gaining critical perspective on) social norms, and then to prophecy, which I take to be the integration of critique and tradition. While liturgy, sanctity, and revelation all involve a split between social norms and practices that has critical potential, they do not involve a space "outside" of social norms. To say that they involve stepping outside, living outside, and the outside coming in (for liturgy, sanctity, and revelation, respectively) would be to invoke exactly the supersessionist logic to which I am offering an alternative.

How can we make sense of stepping aside from social norms without stepping outside of them? To begin, practices and norms never perfectly match up. *Pace* some pragmatists, norms cannot simply be "read off" practices. This has been poignantly shown in Judith Butler's work: norms for "woman" involve an alignment of female anatomy, feminine behavior, and desire for men.<sup>xviii</sup> Yet there have been, are, and will be many individuals who inevitably fail to live according to these norms, individuals who meet only one or two of these components. To live outside the norm, as lesbians and transgendered individuals do, is not to live in a realm of absolute freedom. Quite the opposite, it is to continually feel the violence of the norm; that is, the reprimands with which the norm is enforced (and by which it is constituted).

We act as if there are norms: we praise and reprimand those who follow or do not follow norms. In other words, norms are not “really there”; rather, they are fictions that we live by, and that thus have real effects. They are social fictions: closing one’s eyes to them does not make them go away. We normally act as if there are norms; we can also act as if there are no norms. Acting as if there are no norms does not make us free, for we are still acting in relation to norms. We are constituted by norms; they are what makes us humans, and what makes us individuals. But we can act as if the bonds of the normative universe are loosened, as if it is somehow hollow, simulacral. To do so is not straightforward opposition to norms, for such opposition is coded as pathology, and the normal and the pathological are equally norm-governed. Butler’s work identifies parody as a means by which the pull of the normative can be loosed, that its ultimately fictional nature can be revealed. A woman wearing men’s clothes reminds us of the disconnect between practices and norms, and so frees us to understand gender norms less strictly, to imagine new possibilities for gendered life. I argue that liturgy, sanctity, and revelation, understood in the ways I present in Chapters 5-7, are practices that have a similar effect. In the moment of liturgy, the lifetime of sanctity, and the event of revelation, our relationship to norms is complicated in a way that opens new, politically potent possibilities.

In Chapter 4, I analyze tradition as a way of politically mobilizing norms. I develop this concept of tradition by reading the novels of the conflicted Jewish writer Franz Kafka in implicit opposition to recent partisans of tradition. There is an underlying contrast of Kafka’s *Amerika* and the account of the American democratic tradition provided by some of its recent partisans, such as Jeffrey Stout. Kafka’s work suggests a theopolitical account of tradition as norms untethered from practice. This effect is achieved through rhetoric which does more than explicate already existing practices of a community.

Liturgy, the topic of Chapter 5, is a space and time where it is as if social norms are suspended, allowing for politically potent critical reflection on the social world. I develop this understanding of liturgy by contrasting recent enthusiasm for liturgy from Christian theologians such as Catherine Pickstock and William Cavanaugh with the accounts of liturgy developed just a couple decades earlier, in the wake of the Second Vatican Council. I argue that, while recent enthusiasts claim a radical potential for liturgy, in fact it is earlier theologians of liturgy whose work escapes the logic of supersessionism and has theopolitical potential. Simone Weil’s account of attention, I suggest, resonates with the work of these earlier liturgical theologians.

In liturgy it is as if norms are suspended momentarily but repeatedly; in sanctity it is as if norms are suspended for a larger time and space. Sanctity involves acting as if the social world is irrelevant to one’s actions. I develop this analysis of sanctity in Chapter 6 through a reading of the Jewish writer-philosopher-mystic Simone Weil’s so-called spiritual writings. Weil performs a maneuver typical of sanctity to avoid entanglement in social norms: she decides that she will say yes to whatever she is asked (with sharply delimited exceptions). Instead of navigating the complexly textured social world, Weil carves out a space apart by imposing on herself a rule of acceptance -- acceptance that refuses political impotence.

In Chapter 7, I analyze revelation as an event when a space seemingly outside of social norms comes in contact with norms, forcing revision of those norms. My



discussion is informed by a comparison between the work of the Claude Romano and Alain Badiou, both of whom build philosophical projects around “the event.” Against this background, I turn to the short stories and essays of James Baldwin. In his work, I am particularly interested in the connection between paternity, theology, and law, and the role of the step-son as the locus of non-supersessionist revelation.

Prophecy, the topic of the final chapter, need not be understood as predicting the future or calling on the spirits of the past. I understand prophecy as calling out the gaps between social norms and practices that account for the tragic nature of social life, and marshalling the strategies of tradition, liturgy, sanctity, and revelation as means of coping with this tragic condition. Here, again, I turn to the work of James Baldwin, this time with emphasis on the figure of the father. I argue that putting the father under erasure is a precondition for prophecy. This is uniquely possible when the father does not serve as a proxy for the social, but represents a conflicting authority.

The conclusion examines the aspiration to represent ordinary life, which I understand to consist of navigating social practices and norms. This aspiration often goes wrong. In the films of Robert Bresson, the everyday is portrayed as obvious with the result that transcendence percolates through immanence -- and a supersessionist logic is entrenched. In a sense, Von Trier’s films offer a parody of Bresson’s style which highlights and undercuts Bresson’s serious religiosity. Another attempt to represent the ordinary, the recent sub-genre of American micro-budget films labeled “mumblecore,” turns the everyday into effective silence (into mumbles). I argue that these filmic attempts to represent the ordinary illustrate pitfalls which political theorists interested in the ordinary often meet. It is by paying heed to rhetoric that these pitfalls can be avoided.

Throughout the chapters I introduce certain concepts without explaining what I mean by them, for example enchantment, the hegemony of the visible, and the ordinary. I would like to think that the appendix functions as the obverse of a glossary. It is meant as a counterpoint to the text, glossing certain concepts that might otherwise seem to be used for purely rhetorical purposes by putting these terms together in a different, though perhaps equally difficult, way.

The focus of this work is on supersessionism as a political problem. My earlier book, *Law and Transcendence*, considered supersessionism as a philosophical problem. As I completed this project, a brilliant account of the cultural-theological implications of supersessionism appeared: J. Kameron Carter’s *Race: A Theological Account*. With broad and deep learning, Carter shows how Christians in late antiquity racialized Jewishness, and then constructed a theology that shut down that race. He demonstrates how blacks have replaced Jews as the victims of supersessionist theology, and he gestures towards a reconfiguration of black liberation theology that would focus on the lived experiences of the oppressed rather than the existential condition of blackness. This reconfiguration, he argues, undermines supersessionism, and thus offers the opportunity for true emancipation – in Christ.

Like Carter, I am a black American. I suspect the concern with supersessionism that Carter and I share has a common provenance. We both find in supersessionism -- in his case, theological; in my case, philosophical and political -- a logic that authorizes insidious forms of oppression. Unlike Carter, I have not written as a black American, or as a Christian. I have written about how we humans navigate our life together. There is

no shelter from the treacherous waters of this common life. Taking race or Christian commitment as organizing principles supposes such shelter. For me, overturning supersessionism does not offer relief; it exposes the messiness of the world from which there is no escape. Identity must be worked philosophically, employed rhetorically. Rhetoric brings with it the illusion of Grace. And rhetoric offers the only possibility of redemption.

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<sup>i</sup> Nietzsche, *Will to Power*, 250, 251.

<sup>ii</sup> Wolin, *Politics and Vision*, 490. Cf. Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo*, 144: “The concept of politics will have then merged entirely into a war of spirits, all power structures from the old society will have exploded – they are all based on lies.”

<sup>iii</sup> Schmitt, *Political Theology*, Chapter 3.

<sup>iv</sup> Lilla, *Stillborn God*.

<sup>v</sup> Gauchet, *Disenchantment of the World*; Taylor, *Secular Age*.

<sup>vi</sup> This point is made by Stout, “Modernity without Essence.”

<sup>vii</sup> Strauss, “Progress or Return?”, 123.

<sup>viii</sup> Brown, *Politics Out of History*.

<sup>ix</sup> See, for example, Glaude, *In a Shade of Blue*.

<sup>x</sup> Brown, *Politics Out of History*, 17.

<sup>xi</sup> Rose writes of “law”; I argue that this should be read as social norms in my *Law and Transcendence*, Chapter 1.

<sup>xii</sup> Rose, *Mourning Becomes the Law*, 2.

<sup>xiii</sup> Rose, *Mourning Becomes the Law*, 36.

<sup>xiv</sup> Lloyd, “On the Use of Gillian Rose.”

<sup>xv</sup> The percolation imagery is actually Rose’s, but she uses it to mean something rather different.

<sup>xvi</sup> See Boyarin, “A Broken Olive Branch.”

<sup>xvii</sup> Mathewes, *A Theology of Public Life*.

<sup>xviii</sup> Butler, *Gender Trouble*.