

## REVIEW

Primitivism, Eschatology,  
and the Politics of Time

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*Out of Joint: Power, Crisis, and the Rhetoric of Time* by Nomi Claire Lazar. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2019.

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If time-as-such is inaccessible to us, then there can be neither a correct measure nor a correct conception of time. And if time for us is experienced time, then we need to shape it and give it a form to make it usable (pp. 126-27). We need to mark it and measure it with time-shaping technologies. *Out of Joint* is a book about this marking, shaping, or construction of time for political purposes. The book is organized around two parts. The first (chapters 1-3) concerns the uses of time-shaping technologies from clocks and calendars all the way to constitutional preambles. It is a historical toolkit of the “marks and measures” (p. 4) of time which serve the legitimation of order. But, sometimes, the politics of time gives birth to disorder which leads us to the second part (chapters 4-5). This contains an analysis of the illusory, nihilistic, and ultimately self-defeating nature of primitivism—the postulation of an absolute ‘time before time’—in chapter 4, and eschatology—the postulation of an absolute ‘time beyond time’—in chapter 5. The book begins slowly, builds its case methodically ranging across a remarkably wide range of empirical evidence, and culminates in a clear-eyed and fiery critique of eschatological time-framing by contemporary radical left thinkers: Giorgio Agamben, Slavoj Žižek, and Alain Badiou. This, it turns out, is not only a book about the ordinary politics of time—the empirical *how* and *why* of time construction—but also a book about a certain kind of philosophizing about time.

Positioning herself on the side of progressive liberalism, Lazar comes out against contemporary eschatological and primitivist thought. These are failed efforts to shape time. Lazar shows convincingly how such narratives are impervious to political rationality (p. 147). Indeed, if it is true that we live *in* time, it follows that we live “between the event-free time of the primitive and of the eschaton” (p. 160). Hence, primitivist and eschatological thought is a manifestation of the delusion of “escape from time” (p. 131). No wonder then that these forms of thought boomerang on the left politics that thinkers like Agamben, Žižek, and Badiou stand for, which is necessarily mired in “event-oriented or chronotic time” (p. 137).

A quick perusal of the history of philosophy, however, shows that this time beyond time has been worth thinking about. By comparison, the Western tradition has consigned to relative obscurity the in-between time—e.g. the *saeculum* of the Christians—in which human beings are suppos-

edly mired in sin, alienation, or distortion of their ‘real’ selves. And, lest we think this a Western prejudice, a glance at Mesopotamian, Babylonian or Egyptian mythology among others shows humans perpetually ascending and descending ladders, staircases, mountains, rivers and trees to higher or lower spheres of existence. As Northrop Frye (1990a, p. 15) put it regarding images of the *axis mundi*: “about the *axis mundi*, we can say two things, first, that it is not there, and second, that it won’t go away.” Human beings, we have been told, ought to look to their untimely nature or end in order to make sense of the messiness of time.

Since the end of that tradition, however, the in-between time of events has been ‘brought back in.’ Nomi Claire Lazar joins this illustrious effort dedicated to the liberation of finitude from the chokehold of eternity. Working empirically, she elides the philosophical symbols of the ancient, medieval, and modern purveyors of a natural or redeemed time and considers what we actually do with our time. Since “time-itself” does not exist (pp. 21-24)—or, if it does, it remains inaccessible—hers is a search not for the meaning of time as a whole, but for meaning within time.

Let me, at this point, articulate an uneasiness while granting Lazar’s point on the politics of time. In her rejection of primitivism and eschatology, Lazar calls for “[harnessing] political order in the service of incremental improvement” (p. 145) instead. But can liberal progressivism be meaningful without asking that pesky, old question ‘where to?’ And does not that question require a vision of the human situation purged of the contingencies of time and space? Paradoxically, by reflecting only on the meaning of historical time, we come to the ahistorical view that the future is equal to the eternal recurrence of the same, incrementally improved, “capitalist [realist]” (Žižek 2011, p. viii) present. But, since this is a book about human capabilities, are we not incapable of heeding Nietzsche’s super-human call to imagine the future as a mere eternal recurrence of the selfsame present?

True, to talk of a time ‘before’ or ‘beyond’ time is to enter the realm of non-sense. But, if human societies historically have repeatedly relied on some vision of “stalled or undulating time” (p. 137), and the eternal recurrence of the same is too heavy a burden for us, is that not a plea for reasonable non-sense?

## I. TIME AND POLITICS

The first part of the book investigates the relationship between time and politics. Lazar observes that from constitutional preambles, to calendars and almanacs, politics is concerned with the active shaping of time. Leaders shape time through constitutional preambles; Lazar looks at the Hungarian Basic Law of 2012 and the Chinese constitutions of 1978 and 1982. But they do it also through calendar reform and Lazar focuses on Khubilai Khan’s reform of the Chinese calendar in the thirteenth century. Calendars are singularly effective because they reach particularly deep. By superimposing their time-construction on a pre-existing sense of natural time and penetrating our lives from the minutiae of everyday life to the symbolic frame that harmonizes the human with the natural or cosmic order, they raise a total claim on our time experience. Thus, they are a powerful tool in the overarching aim of time talk: to serve the project of legitimation. The key here is the necessarily restorative dimension of legitimacy; calendars do not merely “place ... events in shaped time” (p. 3), but, through their rotary movement, purge the order from decay and misuse (p. 62). In the end, calendars can draw from “both wells” (p. 217) which feed legitimacy: the more mundane politics of performance, or the political capacity to provide predictability and manage risk, and the more cosmological politics of alignment, which aligns the existing order with the natural firmament. The politics of time can potentially be a total politics insofar as it operates along all three dimensions of the political: the verbal or symbolic, the non-discursive or formal, and the eventual dimension. The potential totality of its claim means that it can also fail spectacularly by overshooting its mark; the revolutionary French decimal calendar, for example, trampled too haughtily on the pre-existing relationship of time with the divine as embodied in sacred holidays of rest (pp. 67-68).

Lazar grounds this analysis of the marks and measures of time on an analysis of meaning. Meaningful narrative must necessarily refer “beyond itself” (p. 4); for example, to broader temporal patterns, be they cyclical, progressive, declinist or presentist. The shaping of time thus becomes an attempt to intervene in this

larger and deeper reality. Lazar calls this “temporal-rhetorical framing” (p. 5). Time plays this role because it “*feels natural*” (p. 5)—its “marks and measures” can, for example, be “‘found,’ like the rising and setting of the sun, moon, and stars, the tides, cycles of dry and wet, hot and cold” (p. 4). As such, time technologies have the advantage of receding into the background; their “invisibility” makes them so much more effective (p. 43). If politics is necessarily implicated in the shifting realm of opinions, the uncertainty of persuasion and the flux of becoming, time technologies gesture beyond it, to the unchanging realm of knowledge, legitimation, and being. Hence, next to a politics of time, there is also a philosophy of time; indeed, Lazar’s text is peppered with remarks on the universal features of contingent efforts to construct time (cf. p. 19, p. 63, p. 176). It is this side of the time problem, as we will see, that awaits further development in the book.

Lazar’s discussion of the politics of time in this first part easily ranks among the best and most thorough in the literature. She displays a finely-honed sense for distinguishing kinds, uses, and ends of political actions to control the immense empirical materials on time-shaping techniques. As we move into the second part of the book, however, the nature of these materials changes from political to more philosophical reflections on time; although this change is subtle because the focus remains on political legitimation. Here I want to echo my initial uneasiness to reflect on the philosophical grounds of the analysis. “The great difficulty about time,” Frye (1990b, p. 157) says, “has always been that it is the primary category of experience, the most important and fundamental aspect of life, and yet apparently it does not exist.” This suggests that a direct approach to time framing techniques as if time was unproblematically *there* to be handled like a bar of soap, misses something of the delicate nature of the subject-matter. To frame time, Lazar rightly says, it must be put into a context, to achieve signification. Change the “neighboring specifics” (p. 62) of a thing, and you have changed its meaning, e.g. when we see a white coat worn by a grown-up in a hospital we behave very differently than when we see a white coat worn by a child holding a paint brush in a daycare center. But it seems to me that she does not frame her own discussion of time in two respects: first, our conception of time for us, today, is framed neither by alternative conceptions such as the Christian, the Greek, or the pre-Old Testament, nor by other cultural “neighboring specifics.” As a result, although we are told that we, human beings, “are always open to other time shapes” (p. 42), it remains unclear what our—late or post-modern—conception of time is and what it excludes, although the literature on this certainly is not lacking. Secondly, the discussion of “time-itself” stops dead on its tracks as she concludes that it does not exist (pp. 21-24). Indeed, it does not in the sense that a bar of soap does, but that is what makes it appropriate for philosophical speculation. This is not mere academic claptrap; Aristotle (1995, III, p. 6, 206a) for whom time definitely exists as one of the infinities, is very specific about existences made *not in* but *from* time. The polis, I think, is one of these (cf. Dragomir, 2017, pp. 63-70); and since these are the source of human subjectivity, they are of capital importance to a political analysis.

The upshot is that time itself is left unframed relative to its ‘neighbors’: the age-old, equally invisible subjects of philosophy like being, truth, nature, consciousness, and so on. As Eric Voegelin (1978) put it in a letter to G. H. Müller of the *International Society for the Study of Time*, it is precisely when time is reduced to empirical time that it ends up *becoming* something like an independent entity that we can handle this way or that, to suit our purposes. As a result, the nature of time as that which shapes us tends to drop out of view.

Let me say a bit more about the missing frames on our time. In what way do we stand relative to time? Here, Lazar gets oddly non-committal:

there always exists a multiplicity of times and time senses that people use depending on their aims. Though one conception of time may dominate in a particular context, it need not replace other conceptions useful in other contexts. A conception of time aptly captured by a mechanical clock easily coexists with one oriented toward nature-driven tasks (pp. 147-48).

As a result, the narrative tends to paper over differences between epochs. We read, for example, that risk mitigation is a modern concern (p. 109), but in the very next page that it “is as much premodern as it is mod-

ern” and it will continue in the “postmodern age” (p. 110). Or, that the thesis of the Marxist social historian E. P. Thompson’s that clock time facilitates capitalist domination is undermined by the tracing of public clocks in Europe in the Middle Ages (pp. 148-50). Sure, but it may make a difference if public clocks are marking, say, hours of worship or time in a factory. Be that as it may—and the critique of E. P. Thompson is illuminating indeed—it remains unclear what, if anything, is the distinguishing feature of one age from another. Does it make no difference to the politics of time, for example, that we have moved from hearing the perfect music of the heavenly spheres to seeing an indifferent, colossal, clunky mechanism high in the sky?

Time was famously split by Augustine in the *Confessions* between a temporal and an eternal dimension. Awkwardly naming the symbol as “flow of presence,” Voegelin (2004, pp. 213-4), who is referred to in this book, defines it as “neither time nor the timeless, but the flow in which time and the timeless meet [...] In this flow of presence, in-between, that is where all the [concerns] of man (*sic.*) are transacted.” The symbol gathers up from their dispersion the dimensions of external time—past, present and future—within an “indelible present” by way of which human beings participate in transcendence. That is why, I think, Frye says that time “apparently does not exist.” And yet it *is* in its effects; we feel its pulling, moving power as it invisibly gives shape to our subjectivity. We all feel it insofar as we project ourselves beyond what we are or have now. And human history, for as far back as the evidence reaches, is the story of men and women living beyond their visible physical and temporal circumstances. Time, as we experience it, in this account, is not simply intra-mundane or wholly worldly; it opens up beyond what is, “at every instant and from each moment to the next” (Coetsier 2008, p. 103). That is, not finitude but infinitude could well be the basic experience of time.

Crucially, time shaping is at the heart of Lazar’s phenomenology of time: “the narrative structures enabled by shaped time provide a means of transcendence” (p. 12). Temporal framing, she says in words that recall precisely the ‘flow of presence,’ “creates an intersection of connection between the meaning of an individual’s action at a point in time and a point of time in the lifespan of something more grand and lasting. It is the congruence of a point in our time with a point in political-historical time...” (p. 218). It goes without saying that contrary to an individual’s action, the ‘something more grand and lasting’ is not available in the manner of the bar of soap. By shaping time then we open up to what is beyond us; or, better, we exist in that opening insofar as we are never wholly reducible to the sum of our projects or doings, or wholly determined by our cultures or families.

Hence, time does not correspond to world-time. This doubled-up nature of time, as Giorgio Agamben (2011, p. 248), one of the three anti-heroes of Part II suggests, corresponds by analogy to politics:

life cannot coincide with itself and is divided into a life that we live (*vitam quam vivimus*, the set of facts and events that define our biography) and a life for which and in which we live (*vita qua vivimus*, what renders life livable and gives it a meaning and a form).

There is, indeed, an analogy to be drawn between the person’s transcendental relationship to time and the political relationship; that odd, ubiquitous, non-objective, yet ineluctable tension between the individual and the community. Lazar recognizes this in the concluding paragraph of her book. However, in the main text, she withdraws from the power of this insight. Bore deep down enough, according to Lazar, and one will find that all action is negative action; we are shaping time, for example, because “we will one day run out of time” (p. 11). The “inevitability of death” pushes us to action in the futile “desire to transcend death, this one objective fact about time” (Ibid.). Time-shaping then is a form of escapism or self-delusion; a bit like the primitivists and the eschatologists that are castigated in Part II. I am not convinced, but this is not a book about phenomenology. The importance of this phenomenology of radical finitude, it seems to me, is that it closes the door to taking seriously the transcendental dimension of time—how time shapes us—and reduces time politics to a series of immanent techniques of power as that which we shape. This has its obvious strengths—ours, after all, is an age that is incredibly inventive in power techniques—and the

book is at its best when considering time's power tools. But it comes at a cost, as we will see, when in Part II she moves to the relationship between time, politics, and philosophy.

## II. PRIMITIVISM, ESCHATOLOGY, AND TIME

According to a commonly held view, our contemporary experience resembles the manic-depressive who swings widely between the firm belief on inevitable and imminent catastrophe (for climatic, economic, biogenetic reasons, or an unforeseeable cocktail of some such) and euphoria about the coming age of justice (singularity, cognitive neuroscience, third wave civilization). The latter is admittedly harder to come by; but the broader point is that we experience ourselves as approaching, feverishly or with pallid dread, the end-times. And it is to this that the post-secular radical left anti-heroes of Part II respond with a philosophical politics designed to restore meaning to a time out of joint, spinning in circles and going nowhere.<sup>1</sup>

In Lazar's account, primitivism and eschatology are two sides of the same coin. Both are after a temporal beyond respectively prior to or after eventful or historical time. The limits demarcating the borders between these three 'epochs' are, of course, apocalyptic; not only can the eschaton be brought about only by "massive force with the capacity to stop time" (p. 165), but an unimaginable event has to occur that jolts human beings from their timeless state into time. Rousseau, whose *Discourse on the Origin and the Foundations of Inequality among Men* is the preeminent primitivist text, attributes it implausibly to natural events—immense, ferocious, and, of course, speechless—which "could have forced them to introduce differences into their ways of living" ([1755] 1997, §4, p. 162). Rather than transforming the species, these "massive applications of violence" (p. 172) actually transmogrify a natural species capable of merely tender, unagitated sentiment into another species altogether that is capable of speech, reason, and culture.

As I see it, the aim of these thought-movements is two-fold. Philosophically, they aim to provide human beings with a standard of judgment on history or time as a whole. Politically, as Lazar emphatically states the point, they aim to delegitimize the existing order—shot through as it is with domination, misrecognition, and injustice—and open up a radically free "space of nondomination" (p. 141) to come. Lazar zeroes in on this second aim and her critique of the political perspective of end-time thinking is, it seems to me, flawless. Using several examples, such as the Crying Indian from the Keep America Beautiful 1971 ad campaign (pp. 133-35), she shows that the generic marks of primitivism necessarily displace actual individuals and groups from our picture of reality. It is Lazar's great insight to note how primitivism, contrary to appearances, "can exhort, but it cannot act" (p. 138). The figure of the Crying Indian does not speak; it has merely to be there, to be seen, in order to fulfill its task of holding "a mirror of shame" (p. 142). This produces a politics of pure presence not unlike the speechless shouting, applauding and hurrahing of acclamation which serves to express the people as a "constituent power" in the theory of the Nazi legal scholar Carl Schmitt (1927, p. 32; cf. also Arendt 1990, p. 125 on the role of the "hissing or applauding galleries" of the French National Assembly in approving the worthless Constitution of 1791). The politics of sheer presence, as Lazar points out, may well be noisy but it is speechless and therefore anti-political.

Historical evidence has long put the matter of the noble savage capable only of "tender and sweet sentiment" (Rousseau [1755] 1997, §15, p. 165) to rest (e.g. Keeley 1996). Rousseau's text contains multiple examples of animals in the state of nature, such as beggos, mandrills, pongos and orang-outangs ([1755] 1997, note X.2-6, pp. 205-8) and of human beings who live in a state just above the natural, such as the Hottentots and the Caribs ([1755] 1997, inter alia note III.1 & VI.3, p. 190 & pp. 194-95); there is no hint, however, of natural humans. Lazar is right; pre- and post-history do not exist in the space-time continuum. It follows that primitivist or eschatological politics leads nowhere (p. 168).

If we turn to the philosophical aim, however—without Lazar's help, for she elides this perspective—we begin to get a different picture. If philosophy is to illumine the human drama, it must provide an overarching meta-history that represents all humans at all times unconditioned by the contingencies of space and time; an account such as that presented by Rousseau in the *Second Discourse*. According to Lazar's own view (p. 17), this gesture 'beyond time' makes the very real human drama meaningful. That is, Rousseau il-



lumines the meaning of time itself rather than meaning within time. True, as Lazar points out, he is unable to adequately answer the question of how human beings can live in a society without domination (p. 162). But that is a political question; its answer lies within time. What Rousseau, however, *is* able to do is to turn the tables on the Enlightenment prejudice about the progressive nature of the drama without slipping into the anti-Enlightenment camp. He, therefore, initiates that dialectical dissent within the Enlightenment that has given us democratic republicanism, romanticism, idealism, socialism, and, yes, even post-secularism (Maritain 1929, p. 112). That, I would say, is a direct philosophical contribution by primitivist thought to Lazar's cause of progress.

In the final chapter of the book, "A Dead End?", Lazar moves against contemporary, radical left, post-secular thought. Eschatological doctrines—from quietest Christian to violent totalitarian ones—all agree on the "inevitability" (p. 167) of eschatological redemption when time ceases to flow, politics is dissolved, and infinite justice reigns. Puritans have pictured it as a New Jerusalem here on earth, Marxists have called it communism, and Alain Finkielkraut (2014, p. 20), in a debate with Alain Badiou, has called it "pure kitsch." Contrary to the usual focus on past religious and totalitarian eschatological movements, Lazar's case-study of the post-secular radical left thought is of direct contemporary relevance. Thinkers such as Agamben, Žižek and Badiou have turned to the Apostle Paul for a critique of law or political regimes as such. In Lazar's account, each in his way aims to supersede law and initiate, in Agamben's words, "non-stat-al nonjuridical political and human life"; a formless "messianic community" (p. 199) to come. Emerging out of the trauma of the exposure of the grand narratives of the twentieth century left as political failures and theoretical follies, the Pauline left has come to accept important parts of the postmodern critiques of Marxism, positivism and grand narratives as such.

I am not sure that Lazar's eschatological reconstruction exhausts the issue. Giorgio Agamben (2011, p. 141), for example, clarifies that:

transcendence is never given by itself and separated from the world, as in Gnosis, but is always in relation to immanence. On the other hand, the latter is never really such, since it is always thought as an image or a reflection of the transcendent order.

Hence, the formless "messianic community" can in no way be made actual in the bar of soap sense. However, I would like to accept Lazar's interpretation, for certainly eschatological politics is present here and especially in Badiou. If we grant that the post-secular, eschatological left just as the religious, eschatological right is politically irrational, then we are obliged to raise the question of its fundamental significance. After all, it seems that we cannot do without it: eschatology has been with us continuously, at the very least since the rise of the monotheistic religions and symbolizations of eternal time have taken place well before that. Even the secularization of the Christian imagination in modernity did not wither away eschatological movements; on the contrary, arguably it may have intensified them (Voegelin 2000). It is thus based on a constant experience of our civilization, which has continuously engendered not only political and religious movements, but also philosophy, architecture, and art. Therefore, we cannot take eschatological thought as merely a gross misunderstanding that is localized in time—e.g. the post-communist, neo-liberal context—and space—the radical left in Western Europe.

If an experience is constant, it is unavoidably philosophical; and if it engenders philosophizing, then we are well-advised to ask: What is that engendering experience for the post-secularist thinkers adumbrated here? It is, I think, the experience of being *Zwischen den Zeiten*, or *Between Past and Future* as Hannah Arendt (1968, pp. 3-16) put it. In this in-between phase the techno-instituted future appears unimaginable and, therefore the past, with its Fordist economy, representative institutions, and emancipatory class and identity struggles, is, suddenly, of mere antiquarian interest. They—or rather, we—stand half-mute at the beginning of the new millennium as authority and "all that is solid melts into air" (Marx & Engels 1955 [1848], p. 13) with a political vocabulary constituted in the previous one. Consequently, there is a sense that our political and ethical responses are woefully inadequate to the situation in which we find ourselves. The

dramatic nature of this general experience is intensified by a secondary double whammy peculiar to the post-secular left: firstly, the experience of powerlessness that follows from the failures of the radical left in the twentieth century coupled with the political retreat of the moderate democratic left after the 1990s, and; secondly, the delegitimation of the search for new political forms by the philosophico-political thesis of the end of history.

The thesis is not to be dismissed as a will-o'-the-wisp. Its peculiar strength is drawn from the fact that it operates on two levels simultaneously: it is, at one and the same time, a political symbol and a philosophical idea. Philosophically, the end-time discourse can be found in almost every great philosopher of the last two centuries. It is against it that Badiou (1999, p. 121; 2012), for example, trains his philosophical sights. Politically and at the level of real history as it were, the argument was in operation long before being made famous by Francis Fukuyama; Calvin Coolidge (1926), for example, in a rousing speech dated it back to the US Declaration of Independence.

Working on both levels, the end of history links a shared experience with a powerful symbol thus allowing thinkers to move almost seamlessly between philosophical discourse and political rhetoric. That is, it produces a philosophical politics whose symbolism encourages a continuous process of reinterpretation. The end of history is “not an empirical idea waiting for confirmation but a regulative ideal, an *a priori* that [structures] the perception of the world for those ... in its grip” (Sluga 1993, p. 67)<sup>2</sup>; a very wide circle of political leaders, intellectuals and philosophers.

Now, of course, the ramblings of philosophers do not stop the world from spinning or freeze history in its tracks. The upshot is an ever-growing discrepancy between our conceptual political horizon, which seems to be stuck somewhere between 1776, Mill, and Marx, and the reality we face, which keeps changing with enormous problems generated by that very horizon. Hence, as Žižek (2011, p. x) puts it, we are “approaching an apocalyptic zero point” due to structural changes in that very environment—from ecology to social inequality—that we are no longer conceptually able to come to grips with. It is against this felt calamity that the post-secular left is in open rebellion: Žižek (2008, p. 1) against the claim that “the era of big explanations is over, we need ‘weak thought,’ opposed to all foundationalism ... in politics too, we should no longer aim at all-explaining systems and global emancipatory projects”; Badiou (2012, p. 2) against the urge that “we must adapt to this change or, in the world as it is, be but a mere shadow of ourselves”; Agamben (2000) against the possibility that life might coincide with a predetermined form thus reducing politics into biopolitics. These experiences and the books which respond to them are elided by Lazar, thus ignoring the first rule of hermeneutics: to begin by viewing the world with the eyes of the subject.

From a political perspective, the post-secular line of reasoning is, I think, as follows: while the vocabulary of really existing democracy is the single legitimate basis for political authority, political order has a symbolic character which real-existing democracy lacks precisely because of its frozen conceptual horizon. In other words, our political speech is unable to gesture beyond itself or, in Lazar’s terms, to become meaningful. The result is the accumulation of musty, old prejudices in all policy areas: from free market dogma and climate change to public discourse and the media. Hence, the post-secular remedy: introduce a gap between existing democracy and democracy *simpliciter* in order to bring politics (e.g. through struggles for emancipation) and philosophy (e.g. Badiou’s Platonism of the multiple, Agamben’s theo-political texts) back to life. They thus respond to the end of history crisis with something not unlike Jakob Burckhardt’s “theory of storms” (Sluga 1993, p. 43): “Crises ... are ... to be regarded as genuine signs of vitality. The crisis itself is an expedient of nature, like a fever, and the fanaticisms are signs that there still exist for men (*sic.*) things they prize more than life and property.”

But, Burckhardt adds, those living through a crisis are in no position to assess its true nature (Sluga 1993, p. 72-3). Post-secular thinkers, it seems to me, do not err in the undertaking of a philosophical reflection which necessarily requires, in Rousseau’s fashion, the positing of a fundamental situation freed from contingencies of space and time. Empirical shaped time has an end; but, from the perspective of the meaning of time itself, that end cannot be the last entry in a finite time series. If that were so, we would not raise the question of time at all but throw our hands up in front of the fatality of time. There is a place for Arcadia

and for Elysium, but that place simply happens to not be in the political, but in philosophical, theological or literary speculations about persons, time, and meaning.

The error then is in the place in which these thinkers introduce the gap in the real; in the political, instead of philosophical nature of the gap that would stage a distance between thinking and politicking, between the thinkers and the wholly legitimate experience of crisis in which they find themselves. This gap requires the disjunction of philosophy from politics. This, to be sure, is no easy task; the two have co-mingled since the Enlightenment with Bacon's submission of philosophy to the "relief of man's estate," through Fichte's (1968, p. 228) anti-Enlightenment task of philosophy "to save the existence and persistence of the German as such" all the way to Heidegger's pro-Nazi *Rektoratsrede* and Sartre's marrying of philosophizing with the class struggle. It is there in Badiou's call to organize the young in the *banlieue* with "political discipline" (Finkielkraut and Badiou 2014, p. 22) to destroy the established order in name of "a positive, universal destiny" (Finkielkraut and Badiou 2014, p. 22); in Žižek's condemnation of every actual movement of the left that immediately obscures the exact purity at its origin; and, to a lesser extent, in Agamben's vision of *homo sacer* where there are rights-bearing individuals. The catalogue of errors is lamentably long indeed. The differentiation between philosophy and politics, however, is also no will-o'-the-wisp; not only has it been there since the originary differentiation between truth and power, but it is already back in Žižek's (2019) late reversal of Marx's lapidary thesis: "The philosophers have only *interpreted* the world, in various ways. The point, however, is to *change* it."<sup>3</sup>

## NOTES

1. To our time thus belong W. B. Yeats' (1989, p. 187) verses in *The Second Coming*: "Turning and turning in the widening gyre/ The falcon cannot hear the falconer;/ Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold;/ mere anarchy is loosed upon the world/ The blood-dimmed tide is loosed, and everywhere/ The ceremony of innocence is drowned;/ The best lack all conviction, while the worst/ Are full of passionate intensity/ Surely some revelation is at hand;/ Surely the Second Coming is at hand..."
2. I draw on Hans Sluga's analysis of the "crisis" symbol in interwar Germany to decipher the "end of history" symbol.
3. Slavoj Žižek in debate with Jordan B. Peterson, Toronto, Sony Center, April 19, 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lsWndfzuOc4>.

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