

NOTES ON *METAPOLITICS*

CHAPTER 10: POLITICS AS TRUTH PROCEDURE

Insofar as the previous chapters are composed of B's critiques / commentaries on other thinkers, they require double duty as it were: I'd have to rework my knowledge of Arendt, Rancière, et al. in order to comment. So as both the better part of valor and just to keep the focus on B, I'll just comment here on Chapter 10, where B lays out his own position.

Politics is one of the four truth procedures that constitute the conditions of philosophy. So, just as philosophy is meta-ontology in relation to mathematics as ontology, philosophy is meta-politics. Philosophy's task, as we know from the *Manifesto*, is to think the compossibility, for an age, of the four truth conditions. A truly contemporary philosophy will have to think politics in terms of the generic, in order for it to be compossible with the mathematical truth procedures following the Cantor-event: the ZF axioms, Gödel's incompleteness theorem, and Paul Cohen's work on the independence of the CH with regard to ZF, as well as the notions of the generic and of forcing.

What are the conditions of a political event and its accompanying truth procedure? B lists 4, pertaining to: the material of the event; the infinite, the relation of the event to the state of the situation, and the numericality of the procedure.

The structure of the chapter is slightly misleading, in that B provides numbers for only the first three points. The discussion of numericality begins at the bottom of 145 in the English translation. The conclusion takes the form of a brief discussion of the term "democracy" (151-52).

FIRST NUMBERED SECTION: COLLECTIVITY AS THE MATERIAL OF THE EVENT

B begins: "An event is political if its material is collective, or if the event can only be attributed to a collective multiplicity." But this collective material nature of the event is not numerical, but means "immediately universalizing." It's not a matter of universal address, for all truths are so addressed. Rather, it's a matter of the type of thought (where "thought" = subjective aspect of a truth procedure). Politics is a thought such that everyone must be a "virtual" (= "potential") subject (or "militant") of that thought process, and it is the thought of that thought, IOW, the thought that everyone is equally able to think equality.

IOW, politics is "intrinsically required" to *declare* that its thought is universal, whereas the other procedures are "aristocratic," meaning that while they are addressed to all. The very being of politics, if I can put it like that, or at least its essence, is that it is *immediately* collective, i.e., universal. IOW, only politics needs to say that everyone is capable of becoming a political subject (= he who says that

everyone is equal), whereas love doesn't require that everyone be capable of love, and so on for science and art.

SECOND NUMBERED SECTION: POLITICS AND THE SUBJECTIVY INFINITY OF SITUATIONS

Due to the collective character of its event, politics "presents as such the infinite character of situations." IOW, it is "engaged in rendering explicit the subjective infinity of situations." As such, it is against assuming your finitude or taking up your "being-towards-death." [I didn't follow this, but we know from *Manifesto* and from *Ethics* that humanity is thought by B in terms of the capacity for the infinite, as opposed to our "animal substructure."]

While all situations are ontologically infinite, politics reveals the "subjective infinity" of situations. The key is that politics focuses on the open-ended nature of situations, such that "the possible affects its immanent subjective infinity." I take this to mean that politics must break with the supposed necessity of the state of the situation; things don't have to be the way they currently are; situations are (infinitely?) plastic. In politics, "deliberation about the possible ... [is] constitutive of the process itself."

THIRD NUMBERED SECTION: POLITICS AND THE STATE OF THE SITUATION

The state of the situation is re-presentation, the counting of the subsets of the situation (as opposed to the primary counting of the elements of the situation, or presentation). A key that we will track throughout the course is that "singularities" are presented but not re-presented (B refers here to Med. 8 of BE).

We know via the power-set axiom that the state of the situation always "exceeds" the situation. B reads this excess in terms of "power" and the state of the situation in terms of the State. This is the key to B's thought, this "analogy" (is that the right word?) of the power-set axiom as part of mathematical ontology and the "power of the State" in political terms.

B then says it's been "mathematically demonstrated that this excess is not measurable."

Following Hallward, we see that what's at stake is this: Cantor showed that while the first infinite (natural and rational numbers) is a "denumerable infinite," the set consisting of the real numbers (the "continuum" of points on a line) is a non-denumerable infinity. The continuum is thus infinitely larger than this first infinite set, the denumerable set of the natural and rational numbers. Now if you take the power-set of the first infinity (the natural and rational numbers), you find that you can put it into a one-to-one relation with the non-denumerable infinity of the continuum. So the power-set of the first infinite set is infinitely larger than that first infinite.

The "continuum hypothesis" (CH) of Cantor is that this power-set of the first infinite set is the "next largest" infinite. In other words, that in the realm of the infinite, the continuum (which we know is equivalent to the power-set of the first infinite) has a defined location, right next to, right "above," the first infinite. So that the non-denumerable infinity of the continuum is "tethered," as it were, to the denumerable infinity of the first infinite.

Now Cantor was unable to prove the CH, and while Gödel was able to show that the CH could be "consistent" with the ZF axiom system, Cohen was able to show that it could not be proved to be consistent starting from the axioms. In other words, the CH is "independent" or "undecidable" with regard to the ZF system.

The key is that Gödel limited himself to "constructible" sets, that is, those with a recipe for construction. In this well-ordered universe of sets, the CH holds and re-presentation (the power-set) has a fixed relation to presentation; it "follows" it immediately. But Cohen rejects that limitation, and his notion of a generic sub-set lets the gap between presentation and re-presentation be immeasurable.

In Badiou's terms, following Cohen, the state of the situation (the power-set) has no fixed relation to the situation; its power over the situation is "errant." IOW, the Cohen-sequence of the Cantor-event shows a wildness, a "freedom," of the infinite realm that horrified Cantor.

Back to *Metapolitics*. The excess of power of the state of the situation versus the situation, the excess power of re-presentation over presentation, is normally "errant." IOW, you tend to feel that you can't fight City Hall, because the State has armies at its disposal: an army of lawyers to beat you in court, or an army of legislators to pass a new law that will outfox you, or they can just plain call on the Army or police to arrest you or kill you.

Now State power tends not to have to show itself in the normal run of affairs, a non-showing that constitutes its mystique. (I think this feeling that you can't fight City Hall is the "alienation" B talks about at the bottom of 146.) But when politics, as the naming of universal equality, comes up, the State makes a show of its power. In one sense, that's just good old fashioned repression, calling out the cops to put down the riff-raff, "the empirical form of the errant superpower of the State."

But that's not the key. The key is that a political event "fixes the errancy and assigns a measure to the superpower of the State." This is a venerable axiom of the Left: "make the cops do their jobs." This reveals how strong the State is – and sometimes it's way too strong for continuing a direct confrontation (as Mao's Long March shows [148]). But at least then you know what you're up against. This is the "freedom" of politics: you're no longer guessing how strong the State is; you're free in that you have "put the State at a distance." This is "political prescription."

FOURTH (UN-NUMBERED) POINT: THE NUMERICALITY OF THE POLITICAL PROCEDURE

Each truth procedure has a numericality that singularizes the way it relates to its different multiples: the situation, the state of the situation, the event, and the subjective procedure. Lacan tried to do this with regard to love. For politics we have the following:

1. The simple infinite of the situation. Thus politics begins with the infinite; it has the infinite as its first term. Symbolized by σ (the Greek letter sigma).

2. When politics happens, the State appears. This is a second infinite in measureless excess over the first infinite of the situation. Symbolized by ε (the Greek letter epsilon), as in: $\varepsilon > \sigma$ [read as "the state of the situation exceeds the situation."]
3. The political function is "prescription" or fixing the superpower of the State by making it reveal its repressive force. This demystifies the State and allows you to put the State at a distance, thereby freeing up a space for thinking / naming the egalitarian collective. Symbolized by π (the Greek letter pi), as in $\pi(\varepsilon)$ [read as "politics fixes the power of the State."]

Equality is what politics is all about. Proclaiming equality is what is incompatible with a mystifying immeasurable superpower of the State. The contemporary name of that superpower is "economic necessity": "it's impossible" to provide "illegal aliens" with health care. [Here we see some of the strategies of B's own political practice: occupy a church with *sans-papiers* and make the state reveal itself.]

The figure of equality is the "1." Politics is making count as one what is not even counted. [We see here the stakes of B's claims in *Ethics* about the importance of insisting on the "same" rather than a pre-occupation with "difference."]

Politics requires local work, not abstract proclamation of principles. So political prescription is not just about measuring the power of the State, but involves doing so in order to "produce the same," that is, to "produce the Real in accordance with an egalitarian maxim." Symbolized by $\pi(\pi(\varepsilon)) \Rightarrow 1$ [read as "politics produces the 1 under conditions of freedom produced by fixing the power of the State."]

The singularity of politics versus the other truth procedures is that it begins with the infinite and ends with the same or the 1. Conversely, love goes from the 1 to the infinite by way of the Two. So that love begins where politics ends.

UNMARKED CONCLUSION: THE TERM "DEMOCRACY"

Democracy is the "always singular adjustment of freedom and equality." Freedom comes from political prescription that puts the State at a distance. Equality is the production of the 1 in the space created by distance from the State. So using our symbols, we see that adjusting freedom and equality is written as $[\pi(\varepsilon) - \pi(\pi(\varepsilon)) \Rightarrow 1]$. Spelling this out: freedom = fixing power of state = $\pi(\varepsilon)$ and equality = producing the 1 = $\pi(\pi(\varepsilon)) \Rightarrow 1$. Thus freedom is the condition of equality.

Each creation or production of democracy has its own name: "Soviets" or "liberated zones" to take the Bolshevik and Maoist examples.

Although politics and democracy are rare, they have existed, exist now, and will exist. Alongside it, we have philosophy as metapolitics, as the thought that declares what thought is. This is because thought is the subjective aspect of truth procedures, and politics as a collective truth procedure has to make explicit the universality of thought.