

At the Margins of Sovereignty:
An Expansion of the Implications of Political Theology

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Abstract: In this paper, I summarize Paul Kahn's proposal for a Schmittian political theology and contrast it with Bonnie Honig's politics of becoming, to argue that the role of the sacred in democracy and the Schmittian notion of "exception" does not solely rest in the authority of the state and decision makers. I put forth a Tillichian proposal that expands upon Kahn's political theology, where Tillich's concept of *Kairos* offers an entry point for a contested notion of the sacred in politics for those excluded and in the liminal, marginalized spaces of social existence. Exceptions are decided not only by those in authority, but by those who question authority as well.

I. Introduction

Within recent decades, the ranks of liberalism's critics have grown considerably to include many who still subscribe to the American democratic experiment. Instead of advocating for a radical change in government or the structure of social relations, some theorists instead have thrown into question the viability of liberalism's capacity to provide an apt description of the nature of democracy as it actually stands. Paul Kahn's recent work, *Political Theology*, puts forth an alternative model to liberal political theory by analyzing the character and substance of political discourse and activity. Kahn's work raises provocative questions about the precise machinations of a democratic society and the hidden forces that animate it. Working from Carl Schmitt's assertion almost a century ago that "all significant concepts of the modern theory of the state are secularized theological concepts," Kahn introduces not only a conceptualization but also a

methodology that displaces liberal political theories and discourses of the just exercise of the law.

Kahn argues that politics forms an experience of the sacred, though this experience has not often been named. I agree with Kahn that the notion of the sacred and our ultimate concerns are not separate from the state apparatus and the practice and exercise of law. Kahn's argument is compelling, illustrative, and, most importantly, opened-ended and discursive. However, although Kahn crafts a meticulous and precise rhetorical argument which allows for the production of new discourse and meaning by the interpolation of norm and exception, this equalizing dependency between norms and free acts closes the possibility of a cleavage in which free will can be exercised outside of or beneath the unity of sovereignty. By summarizing Kahn's political theology and contrasting it with Bonnie Honig's politics of becoming, I will suggest that political theology need not understand the sacred as embedded in the operation of the state and popular sovereignty. Both Kahn and Honig extrapolate the "co-implication of the right and the good, rather than the question of which is prior to the other."¹ However, I believe Honig's emphasis on agonistic politics and plural timelines will allow me to show that the role of the sacred in democracy rests not always in the idols and agency of the state and decision makers (democratic as they may be) but in another notion of exception: the enigmatic mystery of life, time and possibilities and the limitations of any human agency -- what Paul Tillich referred to as Kairos. This notion I believe does not negate Kahn's project, but offers an entry point for a contested notion of

¹ Bonnie Honig, *Emergency Politics: Paradox, Law, Democracy* (Princeton: Princeton U. Press, 2009), 45

the sacred in politics for those excluded and in the liminal, marginalized spaces of social existence.

II. The Norm and Exception in Political Theology

Kahn relies on Schmitt's famous phrase: "Sovereign is he who decides the exception." Sovereignty is not a designated product of political models; it is an existential condition that arises of its own volition and not as the product of consensus: "sovereignty is not the product of reasons. It has nothing to do with agreement."² For Schmitt, the existential situation of the modern nation-state is based on the fact that the state is always concerned with and confronting the possibility of its own death and finitude. "Political authenticity, as it emerges in a study of political theology, is that experience of the unity of being and meaning that marks the presence of the sacred. It is that leap of faith in the possibly that we can give up the finite and take on the infinite."³ While this statement may not encapsulate what Kahn deems essential in understanding the task of political theology, I believe it is evocative of both its strengths and its weaknesses. The unity of being and the taking up of the infinite which Kahn claims for the sovereign, both articulate what is valuable in political theology as well as its own rhetorical undermining, where the assumption of the infinite (which for Kahn principally takes on the form of sacrifice) in the end suggests that the exercise of sovereignty in politics is not the only model of sacral status or divinity in political culture.

² Paul W. Kahn, *Political Theology: Four New Chapters on the Concept of Sovereignty* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011), 19

³ Kahn, 152

Before describing in more detail Kahn's political theology, it must first be noted that it is not intended to be ethically or morally prescriptive; rather it is descriptive: "we should begin with a kind of phenomenology of the political, which is just what political theology must be today."⁴ It might be news to theologians outside of Kahn's project, but he posits that "theological inquiry today can only be a practice of phenomenology: to identify and describe the presence of the sacred, wherever it appears."⁵ Kahn searches to describe the emergence of the sacred in political reality, in its embedded and operative forms. Even though the parochial belief systems of western religion no longer serve as the operative theological bedrock of the state in an epoch of "no general tenor,"⁶ and the church no longer has an established privilege in legal discourse, Kahn maintains that religious devotion to the sacred and humankind's ultimate concerns are more than metaphors for the functioning of politics. This is politics. Any political order, whether in reality or only in theory, is based upon the normative understanding of the human and its place in the cosmos by those who participate or subscribe to it.⁷ Kahn presumes not that particular religious notions of the sacred necessarily dominate the "social imaginary," but rather that the sovereign and its exercise of power contain the aura of and demand the allegiance to a sacred authority. As individuals exist in a political order, the state always "remains a site of life and death; its territory remains sacred ground; its history a narrative of the self-revelation of the popular sovereign."⁸

⁴ Ibid, 21

⁵ Ibid, 25

⁶ Ibid, 120

⁷ Ibid, 116

⁸ Ibid, 105

At the heart of Kahn's concept of sovereignty is the distinction and mutual interdependence of norm and exception. Abstract rules do not exist, and the law does not represent an external normalizing standard as an apolitical refuge to judge competing claims. Norms hold no agency of their own over law: law is actualized and hence meaningful in its phenomenological reality, the actions and events in which the rule of law is exercised. Norms are that by which we systematize our experience: the exception arrives when the norm is thrown into question, where the chain of events is determined by a social actor who acts as the sovereign by merit of making a decision. The norm always precedes the exception; it is the precondition for determining what an exception really is.⁹

Liberalism is preoccupied with arriving through reason or deliberation at the definition of what the law is, establishing a consensus on a norm, which can exist neutrally and impart justice and social cohesion without prejudice. However, for Kahn there is no actual, existential resolution stemming from neutrality or the exercise of dispassionate reason because the "realization of the law'... is never resolved at the level of the norm itself, for the norm is indeterminate over some range of outcomes. "[Therefore] in law, we can't avoid the decision."¹⁰ Kahn believes that liberalism's mistake is that it doesn't understand politics as a play of friends and enemies. Kahn is not necessarily promoting disharmony and social antagonism, or suggesting that conflict is preferable over consensus. The decision does not upset or supplant the law or come from outside of it: it comes from outside of the norms

⁹ Kahn, 42

¹⁰ Ibid, 74

because the rule of law “is as much about decision as it is about norms.”¹¹ Exception and decision in the Schmittian context are usually conceived of as outside of normal politics, whereas for Kahn they are at the heart of politics as usual.

III. The Sociology of Concepts

In political theology, all secular concepts of the modern nation state derive their meaning from theology “not only because of their historical development—in which they were transferred from theology to the theory of the state, whereby, for example, the omnipotent God became the omnipotent lawgiver—but also because of their systematic structure, the recognition of which is necessary for a sociological consideration of these concepts.”¹² There are two essential components of political theology: first, it analyzes the current political order in light of a “contemporaneous theological model,” not a particular religious or doctrinal model.¹³ Secondly, it aims to conceptualize the “social imaginary” that is at work within the political order through a methodology which Schmitt names a “sociology of concepts.”¹⁴

The sociology of concepts departs from a standard sociology of law in that it rejects causality in analyzing either ideas or practices. What it purports to show is that neither free actions nor free thoughts cause the other, but rather that “social practices and ideas are in a reciprocal relationship” which is mutually enforcing. This is how Kahn forms his notion of a subject that acts as a moral agent, enabled to make decisions. “Imagination and function are bound together not because all roles are embedded in the logic of means-ends rationality, but because only as self-

¹¹ Ibid, 90

¹² Schmitt quoted in Kahn, 91.

¹³ Kahn, 91

¹⁴ Ibid

directed agents can we rely upon reach other...we direct ourselves according to our ideas of who we are and what it is that we can and should do...this is what it means to be a moral agent.”¹⁵ Kahn wrests this idea of reciprocal unity between idea and action as parallel to his explication that norms alone are not the causal agents in establishing and maintain a political order. Freedom for the sovereign or the moral agent is only possible when there is no determinative or coercive factor in the direction of thoughts and actions that would create what Schmitt refers to as a “caricature,” or what Kahn prefers to call reductionism, where either material conditions produce ideologies or vice versa.¹⁶ Just as Kahn breaks down norms as transcendent, supra-social determinants of political applications, so too are material and ideological causal explanations for political exercise a form of determinism that denies individuals and polities free will, the exercise of which constitutes the reality of politics.

The reciprocal relationship of ideas and practices is best understood “on the model of discourse.”¹⁷ For subjects, the “rule of law constitutes a way of living [which links them with their] practices in a single world of meaning.”¹⁸ What is the point of all of this? For Kahn, it is to engender an embodied idea of freedom for political agents in which neither they nor their faculties for thought are elevated into abstraction or bound to a dehumanizing predictability by their material and culturally normative determinants. Free acts are given meaning and distinguished from arbitrariness by dialogic encounter with others. Ideas emerge from discourse,

¹⁵ Ibid, 94

¹⁶ Kahn, 95

¹⁷ Ibid, 99

¹⁸ Ibid, 99

not predetermined or unalterable existing conditions, and meet practices in the imagination where the capacity for free exercise of thought and action resides.¹⁹

The wellspring from which the capacity for creative, autonomous thought and action derives is the social imaginary. In the sociology of concepts the method of assessing how the social imaginary constructs its meanings and purposes is genealogy and analogy. Genealogy is the narrative framework inherited by individuals that carries with it the embedded meanings stemming from a longer social history that “emphasize certain resonances among multiple possible meanings.”²⁰ The nature of our beliefs is rooted in rhetoric, not logic. We are persuaded to believe whatever we do by the narratives that speak to us and through which we arrive at our decisions to act one way or another in life.²¹ We exist as autonomous subjects because we are the subjects of our own narratives, agents imbued with meaning that we derive from these narratives. Narratives create free acts because without the structure of a narrative, meaning is impossible, and therefore any actions taken are arbitrary.²² In politics, we do not discover, deduce, or arrive at truths, but we construct them through the act of rhetorical interpretation and free discourse with others: “performing the act of interpretation, we do not discover truth. Rather, we make those truths when we freely see the world one way rather than another.”²³ Freedom is a process of co-creation in which we are not hindered by others but act with and through one another. “If freedom is

¹⁹ Ibid

²⁰ Ibid, 106

²¹ Ibid

²² Ibid, 107

²³ Ibid, 109

realized in discursive engagement, then its condition is mutual recognition.”²⁴ Free agents do not repeat past formulas or “state what is implicit in what has been said,” but rather engage, respond, and reshape ideas and practices within a community, whether amicably or antagonistically.²⁵

Analogy allows interrogation of conceptual models held within the social imaginary by seeking relational points and counterpoints, not by seeking an a priori truth.²⁶ There are always many arguments to be made: the outcome of a decision is never implicit in that decision. The only existential factor is the act itself. Novel political concepts are held against the norm as analogy, not as a determining cause. “We ask where they come from and how they are held together in patterns of analogical coherence than maintain a universe of meaning.”²⁷ In Kahn’s political theology, the sovereign is democratic first, but not deliberative or neutral: first committed to the common project that popular sovereignty would demand, yet looking “for metaphysical analogies to support our political practices and beliefs.”²⁸ This metaphysical, analogical space within the social imaginary from which we build our democracy is not a theocracy or a hierarchical description of objective truth. In political theology this discourse and rhetoric are the “source of meanings that steps into the place of the sacred” in distinction from deduction of a normative theory.²⁹ At root, Kahn is attempting to illustrate the true dynamism of political reality even in times of normality.

²⁴ Kahn, 103

²⁵ Ibid

²⁶ Ibid, 111

²⁷ Ibid, 120

²⁸ Ibid, 117

²⁹ Ibid, 121

The manner in which Kahn privileges the existential exercise of will as a theological referent in politics is one way of looking at things. However, by contrasting it with Honig's "politics of becoming," I would like to propose another, more negative existential role for the theological in the political, one more grounded in confounded hope and abiding faith in the Unconditioned as described in the theology of Paul Tillich.

IV. The Politics of Becoming

By reading "imaginative constructions into material reality," Kahn throws into question the meaning of the law and conflict in society.³⁰ Through Schmitt, Kahn constructs an existentialist account of the manner in which liberal theory refuses to see "the modern political community as a source of meanings that steps into the place of the sacred [and is] forced to condemn much of our political practice as simple pathology, as if the aim of a political practice is to satisfy some normative theory."³¹ With both resonances and strong distinctions, Bonnie Honig's politics of becoming offers a way of looking at democracy agonistically instead of theologically, and one of the most important aspects of this perspective is a rejection of the "chrono-logic of rights," namely the liberal western assumption of progressive human achievements of equality and universal rights. Like the multiplicity of chronologies informing the social imaginary for Kahn, Honig creates an argument for plural timelines in understanding the emergence of new rights. She criticizes democratic theorists like Jürgen Habermas who premise their notion of democracy upon a founding mythology (the iconic Paris or Philadelphia) and see democratic

³⁰ Ibid, 11

³¹ Ibid, 121

history as a chronological movement from the founding to progressive realization across generations. Dialectically, democracy and democratic norms expand justice to include the Other so that forms of life and group identities previously hidden or purposefully excluded clamor their way into the registry of justice.³²

This inclusion of the Other into “the people” is problematic for Honig as she states that “the people” are elusive, they don’t exist as something that is nameable in its own right, but rather represent a notion that is called into being,

rhetorically and materially, while acknowledging that such calls never fully succeed and invariably also produce remnants... No member of the community can yet be said to possess the needed perspective, which can only come post hoc, to form the rules or identify or advocate for a collective good by which the people need to have already been acculturated in order to not be a ‘blind multitude’ but a ‘people’ capable of the autonomous exercise of popular sovereignty.³³

For Kahn, popular sovereignty is based on his affirmation that the proverbial “we” have chosen what we have become in the discursive space of the social imaginary: it is derived from neither a codified set of super norms nor a deterministic historical trajectory. “That we live in one legal order rather than another cannot be the result of some set of super norms. It is, rather, as if we decided to create ourselves. We are the product of our own decision.”³⁴ This existential act that is so essential for Kahn is for Honig a post hoc conceptualization, which would require the subsequent act of naming of what has already taken place. Whether or not the formation of rules or the advocacy for a good are an existential fact, the naming of this existential action as sovereignty within a decisionistic frame is problematic for Honig.

³² Honig, 31

³³ Honig, 19

³⁴ Kahn, 52

Instead of a chrono-logic of rights, Honig proposes of politics of becoming: new rights-claims and new identities emerge as something completely novel instead of extensions of the normative ideas of justice upon which a society already operates. The chrono-logic of rights is always backwards-looking, seeking to affirm whatever new position or subjectivity has claimed justice and then regressively declaring this new expansion of human rights a success of the system. This is part of the paradox of politics. How can a group whose rights have been denied always or whose existence has been heretofore unacknowledged claim inclusion in that very social fabric or “social imaginary” that has produced this exclusion? Perhaps they cannot, but instead they speak with a new subjectivity outside of the governing structure. The backwards-looking gaze must be rejected, and a politics of becoming suggests that this gaze is that of the spectator, or the liberal conception of the state, while a politics of becoming is the voice of the social actor. “Those who see rights-claims as claims to membership in the universal will judge rights-claims in relation to the past (an already established universal as ground) or future (a universal whose promise is in place whose realization has yet to be brought about) or both.”³⁵

Agitators and agents of change, however, do not necessarily reflect or desire to embody and participate in a universal because their experience and their claims are particular. The chrono-logic of rights demands normalization, “stasis in the identity it already harbors.”³⁶ The challenge to the chrono-logic idea of temporality is not a suggestion of an alternative geometric metaphor, but rather a denial of the predictability of the past and future and a suggestion of plural timelines. “With

³⁵ Honig, 48

³⁶ Honig, 49

heightened speed and plural tempos come new dangers but also new possibilities. We lose the guarantees of a single time sequence in which what comes later is unambiguously better or worse than what came before, but on the other hand we don't have to work so hard to maintain those guarantees either."³⁷ While they both reject the idea that the right comes before the good, Honig's agonism may seem to pose an agnosticism in distinction to the theology that Kahn presumes is always operative in conceptualizations of the good.

For Kahn new possibilities hinge on creativity, a "free response to a proposition."³⁸ Analogical coherence and recourse to the genealogy of the social imaginary are the way in which inquiry is taken and new meaning created. Kahn calls this an "analytic of the imagination."³⁹ The success of this endeavor is the ability to persuade others, and to inspire faith, not simply intellectual assent. Kahn here is referring not to the individual's capacity to invent a heterodox conception of the good, but to the polity assuming the mantle of the popular sovereign creating the state, which, through persuasion hangs in the imagination of the subjects that confers authority to the decision.

This act is much more than the use of discretionary power in political society. Kahn rejects a Kantian notion of a "transcendent condition of law" which the exercise of transcendent reason ought to arrive at. Rather, it is the act of the decision, "the moment of will [which] grounds reason."⁴⁰ Kahn rejects the transcendent character of norms or the deontological status of a subject that

³⁷ Ibid, 50

³⁸ Kahn, 101

³⁹ Ibid, 125

⁴⁰ Ibid, 48

exercises reason, but reverses the liberal conceptualization and states that norms only exist in mutual interdependence through the exercise of will. Decision takes place within reference to the norm and without this reference it would be arbitrary or chaos.

Konig might agree with Kahn when she states that liberals are “attempting to rescue law and proceduralism from implications in the phenomena they are entrusted to constitute and regulate.”⁴¹ However, in contrast Honig sees “neither deliberation nor decision as such; we get a politics, in which plural and contending parties make claims in the name of public goods and seek support from various constituencies and wherein the legitimacy of outcomes is always contestable.”⁴² Kahn does well at undercutting the normativity and determinism of the liberal theory of politics. However, his tight, interpolating dichotomy of norm and exception does not leave open a “cleavage” for the inrush of something fundamentally different and destabilizing, an exception that stands outside the norm but does not represent an arbitrary action. I’m not talking about a disaster, but something along the lines of Honig’s new rights claims which should be understood as emerging out of a different conception of time altogether, though possibly containing their own genealogy distinct from the dominant one at large. “Democratic politics would do well to replace its faith in a pure general will with an acceptance of its impurity and an embrace of the perpetuity of a political contestation made necessary by that impurity.”⁴³ This embrace of impurity would

⁴¹ Honig, 26

⁴² Honig, 37

⁴³ Ibid, 38

seem to oppose the existential fact of sovereignty. The considerable degree of power that Kahn places in his notion of the sovereign who decides the exception (thought clearly discursive and open-ended in his sociology of concepts) is still based on a very unitary notion of the sacral state whose existence constitutes the faith of the people. Kahn states that the “fundamental character of the relationship of citizen to sovereign is not contract—as in the social contract—but sacrifice. To be a citizen is to imagine the possibility of the sacrificial act.”⁴⁴ However, this investment of one’s life and potential death in the state is not sacrosanct, because as Honig notes “popular sovereignty is always haunted by heteronomy, [and] the people are always undecidedly also a multitude.”⁴⁵

Furthermore, Kahn does not address the sacrificial logic of the non-consenting oppressed and those who suffer at the expense of the sovereignty of the state. Of these people whose social imaginary is confined outside of the margins, in the “remnants” of popular sovereignty, I believe Honig accounts for them in her politics of becoming by rejecting that Others are redeemed in the narrative of progressive incorporation into democracy. Kahn wouldn’t buy into this narrative either. He simply eclipses those at the margins with his “sovereign.” In a sense Kahn is arguing for legitimacy to be conferred upon a group or a new rights claim only when it is able to muster an analogical exercise of will to the triumphalist theistic sovereign. I don’t think that Kahn is deliberately exclusionary or triumphalist, but he might do well to ponder Honig’s suggestion that “we should be imagining and

⁴⁴ Kahn, 121

⁴⁵ Honig, 20

assessing a world, the world that might be opened by [a] new right, and the plural timelines, circles and forks that might be ushered in with it.⁴⁶

In the politics of becoming, the agent in question isn't necessarily the one who wields authority, but rather it is the one (or the many) who disrupt the norms. This disruption will necessarily provoke a reaction from the legal apparatus, whose decision or judgment on a given matter might not be the most socially persuasive in a democratic context. The decisionistic act, Honig's agonistic democracy leads me to think, might be less inspiring of faith in the long run as compared to the disruptive intrusion of a new rights claim or identity that comes from outside of the norms. "Reluctance and panic are markers of a disquieting awareness that we are in this moment partition a new time, creating a new world."⁴⁷

V. The Sovereign and the Infinite: A Tillichian Proposal

I earlier quoted Kahn saying: "Political authenticity, as it emerges in a study of political theology, is that experience of the unity of being and meaning that marks the presence of the sacred. It is that leap of faith in the possibly that we can give up the finite and take on the infinite."⁴⁸ However, Kahn's sociology of concepts and what I have called his interpolation of norm and exception mean that the political referent for the theological is the sovereign. This leap of faith and the taking on of the infinite in place of the finite he describes as the citizen's allegiance to the popular sovereign (not necessarily the government, of course). What Honig's politics of becoming might have opened up for us that Kahn's political theology has

⁴⁶ Ibid, 53

⁴⁷ Honig, 53

⁴⁸ Kahn, 152

not is the space for a theology of the political that stands in contradistinction to the exercise of authority and judgment, and seeks instead the divine in human affairs when the symbolic ordering of things loses its meaning.

Paul Tillich was also an existentialist concerned with theology, living in the same period as Schmitt in the same region of the world. As opposed to the Schmittian existential notion of the imposition of pure will, Tillich saw the existential experience of the divine in human politics as those moments in which the objects of human trust lose their ability to serve as guideposts. It is then that we come into contact with the "Unconditioned." He was also well aware that "a legal pattern does not possess the power to make itself an actually existent body if it is not supported by actual living forces."⁴⁹ However, for Tillich, the ultimate with which he was concerned, opened up "new possibilities for the self not by confirming but by confounding human hopes...a model of historical existence in which the necessity for ethical decision arose from the enigmatic fatefulness of life at least as often as from human planning."⁵⁰ Instead of a decisionistic act, he considered that all time "receives its meaning from its relation to eternity, to the Unconditioned."⁵¹ The Unconditioned cannot be an object among objects, nor a subject among subjects, and hence will not make a decision. Tillich is at once more atheistic than Schmitt, by denying the sacred status of the existential act of deciding, and perhaps less secular, by articulating an encounter with the sacred that transcends politics by nature of the fact that it is negatively constructed. Tillich embraces the conception of *Kairos* as

⁴⁹ Paul Tillich, *The Religious Situation*, trans. H Richard Niebuhr (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1932), 91

⁵⁰ W. Clark Giplin, *A Preface to Theology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 129

⁵¹ Tillich, xvi

a notion of “fulfilled time, a moment of time which is invaded by eternity.” This not a perfection or an eschatological ending to time or history, but rather, when “consciousness of the relation [to the ultimate] arises only when sacred symbols which have lost their symbolic character as pointers and have come to claim meaning in their own right or the social structure and forms of civilization which have become self-sufficient are subjected to an ultimate criticism.”⁵² It is here that the “relation of all existence to the ultimate source of meaning and existence become apparent in judgment, [and] the consciousness of Kairos and the responsibility of man come to their climax.”⁵³ Instead of a phenomenology of determining what is sacred, Tillich’s emphasis on the Unconditioned allows for the sacred to exist in the negative spaces of political reality. “There is not only judgment, but also challenge to create such forms, such a culture and religion as will express the meaningfulness of all reality.”⁵⁴

VI. Conclusion

Ultimately, Kahn’s political theology may not be radically discontinuous from what I am putting forth here. The difference is that Tillich’s humanism is existential but his idea of faith is still transcendent, whereas Kahn and Schmitt have a fully existential conception of faith in political theology. In Kahn’s conceptualization of unity and coherence “we can see the state as a product of a free act—our own—or we can see it as a structure of power that acts upon us. If we take up the former interpretation, we write a narrative of creation: the myth of popular sovereignty. If

⁵² Ibid, xvii

⁵³ Ibid

⁵⁴ Ibid

we take up the latter, we ask who has succeeded and who has failed in the marketplace of political power.”⁵⁵ I find this difficult in the context of existing multiplicities who, in this construct, are perhaps blamed as victims for the inability to act within the myth of popular sovereignty. There is an exclusion here (those Honig sees as participating in the politics of becoming), and the subjectivities that Kahn excludes from the social imaginary comprising the political theology he puts forth are left in a liminal space of non-meaning. For those in the liminal space of exclusion from sovereignty, jostling agonistically for recognition and existential status in political society, it is the lack of idols, the experience of *Kairos*, and not sovereignty, that may comprise their political theology. A political theology will indeed look to high places for the manifestation of the sacred in the political. But it ought to look in the lowest ones as well to find the enunciations of the encounter with the ultimate in our political lives where new possibilities open up.

⁵⁵ Kahn, 132

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