**The state is inevitable – the role of the ballot is to provide the most ethical engagement with the political**

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(William Paul, “The Third: Levinas' theoretical move from an-archical ethics to the realm of justice and politics,” Philosophy & Social Criticism November 1, 1999 vol. 25 no. 6 83-104, dml)

Levinas argues for a place for both ethics and politics, or, to employ his metaphor, a place for both the Jewish tradition of ethics and responsibility and, along with it, the Greek tradition of language, justice and politics. This section will analyze the mutual necessity of both ethics and politics. According to Levinas, ethics and politics can both be needed only if there is separation, that is, if each has its own justiﬁcation. Neither ethics nor politics should be taken to their extremes; each must be moderated by the other. ‘I think there’s a direct contradiction between ethics and politics, if both these demands are taken to the extreme.’ 56 Ethics must temper the political because politics unbounded leads to tyranny, absolute power of the strongest. Politics ignores the individuality of each citizen, treating each as a cipher, a member of a species. Further, without a norm outside of the scope of the said, there is no standard to judge political regimes. The call for a standard by which to judge regimes is what Levinas means by a return to Platonism. Plato, in the Republic, had used the good beyond being as his standard. A return to Platonism would be necessary to restore ‘the independence of ethics in relation to history’ and trace ‘a limit to the comprehension of the real by history’. 57 Levinas ﬁnds a standard in the ethical relationship with the Other. The norm that must continue to inspire and direct the moral order is the ethical norm of the interhuman. If the moral-political order totally relinquishes its ethical foundation, it must accept all forms of society, including the fascist or totalitarian, for it can no longer evaluate or discriminate between them. The state is usually better than anarchy – but not always. In some instances, – fascism or totalitarianism, for example – the political order of the state may have to be challenged in the name of our ethical responsibility to the other. This is why ethical philosophy must remain the ﬁrst philosophy. 58 At the same time, ethics needs politics. To reach those others who are far away, ethics must be transﬁxed into language, justice and politics. ‘As prima philosophia, ethics cannot itself legislate for society or produce rules of conduct whereby society might be revolutionized or transformed.’ 59 Although this universalization distances the ego from the Other, it must be done to reach the others. We must, out of respect for the categorical imperative or the other’s right as expressed by his face, un-face human beings, sternly reducing each one’s uniqueness to his individuality in the unity of the genre, and let universality rule. Thus we need laws, and – yes – courts of law, institutions and the state to render justice. 60 Further, politics is necessary because there are those who will refuse to heed the new law, ‘Thou shall not kill.’ Levinas is well aware that this commandment is not an ontological impossibility. Many will take Cain’s position and shun the responsibility for the Other. Thus, politics is necessary to prohibit murder, in all its forms. ‘A place had to be foreseen and kept warm for all eternity for Hitler and his followers.’ 61 Both ethics and politics have their own justiﬁcation. The justiﬁcation for ethics is found in the face-to-face relationship with the Other. The justiﬁcation for politics is to restrain those who follow Cain’s position and ignore the responsibility for the Other. Politics does not subsume ethics, but rather it serves ethics. Politics is necessary but it must be continually checked by ethics. Levinas calls for a state that is as ethical as possible, one which is perpetually becoming more just. Levinas calls for the liberal state.

### XT: Solves Racism

#### Our discussion of public policymaking is the best way to create decision-making skills and knowledge about government policy that is essential to effective local resistance to violence and inequality

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Makani, July 31, Colorlines, Changing the Rules: What Public Policy Means for Organizing, Vol 3.2)

“This is all about policy," a woman complained to me in a recent conversation. "I'm an organizer." The flourish and passion with which she made the distinction said everything. Policy is for wonks, sell-out politicians, and ivory-tower eggheads. Organizing is what real, grassroots people do. Common as it may be, this distinction doesn't bear out in the real world. Policy is more than law. It is any written agreement (formal or informal) that specifies how an institution, governing body, or community will address shared problems or attain shared goals. It spells out the terms and the consequences of these agreements and is the codification of the body's values-as represented by those present in the policymaking process. Given who's usually present, most policies reflect the political agenda of powerful elites. Yet, policy can be a force for change-especially when we bring our base and community organizing into the process. In essence, policies are the codification of power relationships and resource allocation. Policies are the rules of the world we live in. Changing the world means changing the rules. So, if organizing is about changing the rules and building power, how can organizing be separated from policies? Can we really speak truth to power, fight the right, stop corporate abuses, or win racial justice without contesting the rules and the rulers, the policies and the policymakers? The answer is no-and double no for people of color. Today, racism subtly dominates nearly every aspect of policymaking. From ballot propositions to city funding priorities, policy is increasingly about the control, de-funding, and disfranchisement of communities of color. Take the public conversation about welfare reform, for example. Most of us know it isn't really about putting people to work. The right's message was framed around racial stereotypes of lazy, cheating "welfare queens" whose poverty was "cultural." But the new welfare policy was about moving billions of dollars in individual cash payments and direct services from welfare recipients to other, more powerful, social actors. Many of us were too busy to tune into the welfare policy drama in Washington, only to find it washed up right on our doorsteps. Our members are suffering from workfare policies, new regulations, and cutoffs. Families who were barely getting by under the old rules are being pushed over the edge by the new policies. Policy doesn't get more relevant than this. And so we got involved in policy-as defense. Yet we have to do more than block their punches. We have to start the fight with initiatives of our own. Those who do are finding offense a bit more fun than defense alone. Living wage ordinances, youth development initiatives, even gun control and alcohol and tobacco policies are finding their way onto the public agenda, thanks to focused community organizing that leverages power for community-driven initiatives. - Over 600 local policies have been passed to regulate the tobacco industry. Local coalitions have taken the lead by writing ordinances that address local problems and organizing broad support for them. - Nearly 100 gun control and violence prevention policies have been enacted since 1991. - Milwaukee, Boston, and Oakland are among the cities that have passed living wage ordinances: local laws that guarantee higher than minimum wages for workers, usually set as the minimum needed to keep a family of four above poverty. These are just a few of the examples that demonstrate how organizing for local policy advocacy has made inroads in areas where positive national policy had been stalled by conservatives. Increasingly, the local policy arena is where the action is and where activists are finding success. Of course, corporate interests-which are usually the target of these policies-are gearing up in defense. Tactics include front groups, economic pressure, and the tried and true: cold, hard cash. Despite these barriers, grassroots organizing can be very effective at the smaller scale of local politics. At the local level, we have greater access to elected officials and officials have a greater reliance on their constituents for reelection. For example, getting 400 people to show up at city hall in just about any city in the U.S. is quite impressive. On the other hand, 400 people at the state house or the Congress would have a less significant impact. Add to that the fact that all 400 people at city hall are usually constituents, and the impact is even greater. Recent trends in government underscore the importance of local policy. Congress has enacted a series of measures devolving significant power to state and local government. Welfare, health care, and the regulation of food and drinking water safety are among the areas where states and localities now have greater rule. Devolution has some negative consequences to be sure. History has taught us that, for social services and civil rights in particular, the lack of clear federal standards and mechanisms for accountability lead to uneven enforcement and even discriminatory implementation of policies. Still, there are real opportunities for advancing progressive initiatives in this more localized environment. Greater local control can mean greater community power to shape and implement important social policies that were heretofore out of reach. To do so will require careful attention to the mechanics of local policymaking and a clear blueprint of what we stand for. Much of the work of framing what we stand for takes place in the shaping of demands. By getting into the policy arena in a proactive manner, we can take our demands to the next level. Our demands can become law, with real consequences if the agreement is broken. After all the organizing, press work, and effort, a group should leave a decisionmaker with more than a handshake and his or her word. Of course, this work requires a certain amount of interaction with "the suits," as well as struggles with the bureaucracy, the technical language, and the all-too-common resistance by decisionmakers. Still, if it's worth demanding, it's worth having in writing-whether as law, regulation, or internal policy. From ballot initiatives on rent control to laws requiring worker protections, organizers are leveraging their power into written policies that are making a real difference in their communities. Of course, policy work is just one tool in our box.