

Profanity: A Guide to Agamben's Use of Religious Language

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My thanks to Joseph Spencer and Jason Kerr.

## Abbreviations

- CK Agamben, Giorgio. *The Church and the Kingdom*. Translated by Leland de la Durantaye. Calcutta: Seagull Books, 2012.
- CC ——. *The Coming Community*. Translated by Michael Hardt. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001.
- HP ——. *The Highest Poverty: Monastic Rules and Form-of-Life*. Translated by Adam Kotsko. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2013.
- HS ——. *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*. Translated by Daniel Heller-Roazen. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998.
- KG ——. *The Kingdom and the Glory: For a Theological Genealogy of Economy and Government*. Translated by Lorenzo Chiesa with Matteo Mandarini. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2011.
- N ——. *Nudities*. Translated by David Kishik and Stefan Pedatella. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2010.
- OD ——. *Opus Dei: An Archeology of Duty*. Translated by Adam Kotsko. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2013.
- RA ——. *Remnants of Auschwitz: The Witness and the Archive*. Translated by Daniel Heller-Roazen. New York: Zone Books, 2002.
- SL ——. *The Sacrament of Language: An Archeology of the Oath*. Translated by Adam Kotsko. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2011.
- SE ——. *State of Exception*. Translated by Kevin Attell. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005.

- TR ——. *The Time That Remains: A Commentary on the Letter to the Romans*. Translated by Patricia Dailey. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005.
- CH ——. “Thought Is the Courage of Hopelessness: An Interview with Philosopher Giorgio Agamben.” Interview by Jordan Skinner. Verso Books (blog), June 17, 2014, <http://www.versobooks.com/blogs/1612-thought-is-the-courage-of-hopelessness-an-interview-with-philosopher-giorgio-agamben>
- WA ——. *“What Is An Apparatus?” and Other Essays*. Translated by David Kishik and Stefan Pedatella. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009.
- UG Agamben, Giorgio and Monica Ferrando. *The Unspeakable Girl: The Myth and Mystery of Kore*. Translated by Leland de la Durantaye and Annie Julia Wyman. Calcutta: Seagull Books, 2014.

## Introduction

I needed the philosophical equivalent of an exploded view diagram. I needed one of those technical drawings that, because it labels all the parts with arrows and suspends each exploded screw in line with its threaded slot, shows you how to take your toaster apart and put it back together again. I needed something like this, something clean and abstract, but I needed it for Giorgio Agamben. In particular, I needed an exploded view diagram of Agamben's treatment of messianism. What, exactly—in its full, operational, Agambenian context—is the messianic?

But I couldn't find anything like this. A lot of the power of Agamben's books derives from how he grounds them in rich genealogical investigations of his source material. The downside, though, is that Agamben only ever gives you bits and pieces, here and there, of the theoretical machinery that organizes his interests and readings. How do angels, singularities, monastic poverty, impotentiality, chronogenetic time, werewolves, bans, *homo sacer*, irreparability, sovereignty, glossolalia, biopolitics, blasphemy, faith, and *zoē* all fit together to shape his account of the messianic? Can they be sorted and shoehorned into a single schematic, a unified theory of Agamben?

More, the secondary literature doesn't offer much help because, as good readers of Agamben, its authors tend to admire and replicate the kind of work Agamben does. The literature tends to read Agamben the way Agamben would. Take something like *The Agamben Dictionary*. In their introduction, Alex Murray and Jessica Whyte spend a lot of time worrying about the legitimacy of their own project:

The image of the lexicographer as sovereign, committed to restoring the order that would

enable the application of a fixed body of rules, provokes us to question the wisdom of devoting a dictionary to the thought of a thinker whose work has consistently challenged the desire for purity, order and authority that underpinned the first significant attempt to systematise the English language. (2)

Hoping to avoid too many rules or impose too much order, their dictionary instead “seeks to trace both the philosophical lineages of Agamben’s terms, and their development throughout his *oeuvre*” and, “in doing so, it aims not to stabilise terms by referring them back to the authority of an origin, but to reveal new possibilities for use” (5). The dictionary makes good on this promise. With two editors and twenty-five different authors, there’s no risk of generating too much stability. The dictionary’s tentative, scattershot approach has a lot to offer but an exploded view diagram it is not.

This general problem with the secondary literature is compounded by how the available scholarship is, like the dictionary, almost universally rigorous and responsible. And, in its rigor, it tends to be local and narrowly focused. I, on the other hand, needed a technical treatment of Agamben’s work that was willing to be both global and ruthless. I needed something curt and unilateral and sovereign. Unable to find such a book, I was moved to write my own.

In what follows, my intention is to organize all of Agamben’s work around a single formal schema in order to pinpoint what he means by the messianic. This schema repeats in four genres—a political schema, a metaphysical schema, a linguistic schema, and a temporal schema—and it consists of three elements arranged in three figures. These schemas are my own invention. In deciding how to formulate them, I was guided by a desire for simplicity. And, unlike Jacques Lacan’s famous and powerful mathemes, I wanted the schemas to be reproducible

with a standard keyboard. In organizing the elements of the schemas, the basic rule was alignment rather than identity. For example, political sovereignty, metaphysical impotentiality, and linguistic performativity need to line up in substantial and convincing ways, especially in terms of their respective roles in the structures of the schemas, but this alignment doesn't need to be flawless. Finally, it should be noted that these schemas are meant to be heuristic. They are scaffolding and, in order to be of much use, they assume some familiarity with Agamben's work.

The remainder of this book breaks into two parts: (1) an overview of the organizing schemas, and (2) a full glossary that offers tightly interlocking definitions of key terms organized around Agamben's treatment of the messianic. The glossary can be used in piecemeal fashion but, given the book's brevity, I recommend just reading it from front to back. Either way, I strongly recommend that readers look at the book's overview of the organizing schemas before exploring the glossary. Also, it should be noted that the glossary frequently and necessarily paraphrases Agamben's own descriptions and formulations. For the sake of concision and clarity, I eschew direct quotations but, to compensate, each entry includes a list of all the passages both consulted and paraphrased in its composition.

## Schemas

### 1. First Approach: A Naïve Overview

Before introducing the technical details of the formal schemas, I want to sketch a gut-level summary of what Agamben means by the messianic. I want, initially, to be naïve.

Agamben's messianism addresses a common human problem: failure. Aiming to be smart, strong, graceful, skilled, beautiful, admired, generous, etc., we fail. We succeed, at best, in part. We don't fully actualize our potential. We lose the game, we don't get the girl, the job goes to someone else, we fail the exam, we lie, we get sick, our children lose their way. And, regardless of what success may come, a nagging gap remains between the ideals we hoped to flawlessly embody and the living bodies that we imperfectly are. These failures are local, intimate, and deeply personal. They hurt. We feel guilt and shame. We feel anger and fear. And then, caught between a guilty past and a frightening future, we struggle, dissatisfied.

But, despite its intimacy, this open wound is also profoundly public. This wound is political. While our living bodies are private and particular, the ideals we fail to embody are shared. These ideals are, among others, religious, professional, aesthetic, ethical, legal, and cultural. Even when they are idiosyncratic, our ideals draw on the kind of shared traditions and are shaped by the kind of shared languages that, alone, allow them to function as ideals. This public, political dimension is, fundamentally, linguistic. Language trades in generalities and idealities. Language makes politics possible. The political animal is the linguistic animal.

Being human means living at these crossroads. A human being is a particular body imperfectly overwritten by often competing systems of general ideals. A human is this partial coincidence of life and languages. Or, better: to be human is to *perform* some part of life as an

expression of the laws and languages that compel us. Performing life as an expression of these ideals allows life and law to partially coincide. But, because life is not ideal—because it must struggle to *perform* our ideals rather than simply *being* those ideals—this coincidence can never be complete. The eclipse is only ever partial. Performance, while powerful, both joins and disjoins our actual lives from their ideal potentials. And so, at least in part, we continually fail. In light of these persistent failures, a human way of being in the world—a way that is defined by life’s incomplete performance of the law, by life’s incomplete actualization of the law’s potential—coalesces around this open wound. The human is this wound.

Messianism addresses this failure. It addresses our humanity. But a number of responses to this failure are possible and only one of them aligns with what Agamben means by the messianic. A typical response to what is human, to life’s failure to coincide with our ideals and projected expectations, is to redouble our commitment to enshrining the priority of these ideals and, in the process, redouble the blame heaped on living bodies for their inability to flawlessly perform them. In this case, the power of performance is leveraged by the law as a means of sovereignly compelling greater alignment of life with law. The point of life is obedience to the ends of the law and success is defined by the extent to which lives can wholly identify with the ideals that overwrite them. Success is the full actualization of potential. However, as we’ve already indicated, complete actualization is impossible. Some remnant of unfulfilled potential always remains. Though life can perform parts of the law—and becomes human by doing so—life can never be law. Thus, rather than addressing our humanity as such, this default response doubles down on the priority of the law by trying to liberate us from the weakness of life.

A second response to what is human, a second version of messianism, recognizes the hopelessness of absorbing life into law and tries to solve the problem by uncoupling life from

law. This second response opts for a kind of antinomianism that suspends the law and excepts us from its jurisdiction. Anarchic, ungoverned by law and language, it reduces what is human to the raw, mute performance of life. This state of exception leaves what is human exposed to the sovereign power of performance without the protection of law and language. As a result, what was human becomes inhuman. What was human becomes animal. All that remains is a kind of bare life, denuded of language, that, in the best case scenario, is preoccupied with the consumption of local pleasures and, in the worst case, aims only at survival.

Agamben's messianism is often confused with this state of exception. However, unlike either of the two previous scenarios, Agamben's messianism does not try to save us from what is human, either by absorbing life into the law or by uncoupling life from the law. Rather than saving us *from* the human, Agamben's messianism aims to save what *is* human. Agamben sees the messianic as the power to let humans be human, as the power to let them be irreparably hamstrung between life and law without forcing the one in favor of the other. This messianic power depends on a forbearance that, shouldering our weakness, can perform what is human just as it is—though, this time, with the slightest difference.

What is this slight, messianic difference? The following passage from *The Coming Community*, drawing on Walter Benjamin and Gershom Scholem, is a touchstone in Agamben's ongoing account of the messianic:

There is a well-known parable about the Kingdom of the Messiah that Walter Benjamin (who heard it from Gershom Scholem) recounted one evening to Ernst Bloch, who in turn transcribed it in *Spuren*: "A rabbi, a real cabalist, once said that in order to establish the reign of peace it is not necessary to destroy everything nor to begin a completely new

world. It is sufficient to displace this cup or this bush or this stone just a little, and thus everything. But this small displacement is so difficult to achieve and its measure is so difficult to find that, with regard to the world, humans are incapable of it and it is necessary that the Messiah come.” Benjamin’s version of the story goes like this: “The *Hassidim* tell a story about the world to come that says everything there will be just as it is here. Just as our room is now, so it will be in the world to come; where our baby sleeps now, there too it will sleep in the other world. And the clothes we wear in this world, those too we will wear there. Everything will be as it is now, just a little different.” (CC 53)

The difference is small. It turns on enacting a small displacement. And this messianic displacement is accomplished when we perform what is human *for its own sake* rather than, as we normally do, for the sake of identifying with some ideal. It is accomplished when we perform what is human out of love for the human. Ideals remain in play, but they no longer govern the work. Instead of performing life as an example of some governing ideal, the messianic performs what is human as a singular example of itself. The messianic displaces our human failures in relation to themselves by allowing our wounds to exemplify what it means to be to be irreparably caught between life and law.

Sidestepping an anarchic state of exception, Agamben’s messianism depends on enacting a state of exemplarity that transfigures our failures by displaying them. It transfigures them with care. As in the antinomian state of exception, the human power of performance takes center stage. But, rather than trying to identify with life to the exclusion of the law, this state of exemplarity identifies its performance with the irresolvable *impasse* of life and law that both

holds us open and makes us human.

Love is this gesture of messianic solidarity with the human condition, a gesture that cares for its troubles instead of escaping from them. The messianic depends on embracing a form of life that artfully repeats what is human as something that, for its own sake, is worth the trouble of repeating. It depends, as Elizabeth Bishop puts it, on a willingness to practice “the art of losing.” Agamben’s messianism is this human, all too human, art of losing. It is a kind of profane religious practice that performs our human losses and failures as an art and, in doing so, displaces them just enough to transfigure them.

## 2. Second Approach: The Technical Schemata

My ambition is to produce a unified theory of Agamben that, aligning all the major theoretical elements of his project, will allow us to identify precisely what he means by the messianic. In order to produce this kind of operational outline, it will be necessary, at least at first, to be shamelessly reductive. Given this aim, it’s preferable to have Agamben himself to frame that reduction. Happily, in a useful essay called “What Is an Apparatus?,” Agamben offers just this kind of reductive heuristic. I recommend the whole essay, but the passage in question reads like this:

I wish to propose to you nothing less than a general and massive partitioning of beings into two large groups or classes: on the one hand, living beings (or substances), and on the other, apparatuses in which living beings are incessantly captured. On one side, then, to return to the terminology of the theologians, lies the ontology of creatures, and on the

other side, the *oikonomia* of apparatuses that seek to govern and guide them toward the good. (WA 13)

Take this as a starting point. There are two basic elements in the world: (1) substances, and (2) apparatuses. Substances are beings that, like human bodies, can be captured and governed by formal systems. An apparatus is, in turn, a formal system that can capture and govern substances by assigning essences and guiding them toward designated *teloi*. Agamben's account of the term "apparatus" is expansive:

I shall call an apparatus literally anything that has in some way the capacity to capture, orient, determine, intercept, model, control, or secure the gestures, behaviors, opinions, or discourses of living beings. Not only, therefore, prisons, madhouses, the panopticon, schools, confession, factories, disciplines, juridical measures, and so forth (whose connection with power is in a certain sense evident), but also the pen, writing, literature, philosophy, agriculture, cigarettes, navigation, computers, cellular telephones, and—why not—language itself, which is perhaps the most ancient of apparatuses—one in which thousands and thousands of years ago a primate inadvertently let himself be captured

(WA 14)

All apparatuses have a political dimension but if there is an ur-apparatus, it is language.

Language provides a basic template for the composition and operation of an apparatus.

On the basis of these two elements, substances and apparatuses, Agamben then introduces a third, composite term: "To recapitulate, we have then two great classes: living beings (or

substances) and apparatuses. And between these two, as a third class, subjects. I call a subject that which results from the relation and, so to speak, from the relentless fight between living beings and apparatuses” (WA 14-15). Substances, apparatuses, and subjects: these three. When substances are captured by an apparatus, a subject results.

This is the basic setup. However, without an additional element, this schema can’t do much work. There’s nothing very original about the moves Agamben has made thus far. They are, in many respects, canonical in Continental philosophy. To put this schema to work, we must also be able to distinguish between different *kinds* of subjectivity, between different configurations of the elements that compose subjects, and to do that we need to make an additional distinction. In my view, the bulk of Agamben’s corpus is dedicated to making and exploring this one additional distinction. This distinction concerns the internal structure of an apparatus.

Names for the constitutive elements of an apparatus vary but in the political version of the schema an apparatus is composed of two parts: (1) law, and (2) sovereignty. Where law is defined as a formal system of legally binding norms, sovereignty is defined as the extra-legal power which both constitutes those norms and manages their application to living bodies in the production of subjects. In this way, sovereignty is the point of passage between law and life. It can manage this passage because the relationship between law and sovereignty is structured as an exception.

Agamben defines an exception as an inclusive exclusion. Sovereignty, as what constitutes the law, must preexist the law. Preexisting the law, sovereignty must have some extra-legal standing. But because it constitutes the law, it must also have some relation to the law. From the perspective of the law, this kind of boundary crossing (both legal and extra-legal) status takes the form of an exception: sovereignty is legally *included* within the scope of the law as what is

*excluded* from the jurisdiction of the law. This structure of exceptionality—a structure that is mirrored in Agamben’s treatment of exemplarity as an exclusive inclusion—is fundamental to all the schemas.

A similar distinction structures the linguistic apparatus. Law and sovereignty clearly run parallel to the linguistic distinction that Agamben continually makes between (1) the predicative dimension of language, and (2) the performative dimension of language. What, in a political apparatus, is called the law is, in a linguistic apparatus, called predication. And what, in a political apparatus, is called sovereignty is, in a linguistic apparatus, called performativity. In the same way that sovereignty actively applies legal norms to living bodies to produce subjects, performativity actively applies *langue* (the formal system of linguistic norms) to *phonē* (vocal or written bodies) to produce *parole* (concrete and meaningful speech acts). However, the political and linguistic cases are more than parallel. In crucial respects, they bleed into each other. Insofar as every political apparatus is, at root, a kind of linguistic apparatus, both are describing aspects of the same phenomena, just along different lines of sight and on different scales.

More, law and sovereignty run parallel to the metaphysical distinction Agamben makes between (1) potentiality, and (2) impotentiality. Law and *langue*, for instance, both name the formal dimension of an apparatus and this formal dimension exists as a potentiality until that potentiality is actualized in a particular subject or concrete speech act. Similarly, impotentiality functions as the point of passage between potentiality and actuality in the same way that sovereignty manages the application of law to life in the production of a subject or performativity manages the application of *langue* to *phonē* in the production of a speech act. Impotentiality is Agamben’s signature metaphysical term. Impotentiality is the power to *not* do something. It is the sovereign power to not pass immediately over into actuality, the power to

hold potentiality in reserve as potentiality. In this way, impotentiality is the point of passage between potentiality and actuality: it holds them in relation even as it keeps them apart. Now, again, these political, linguistic, and metaphysical cases are more than parallel. In order to properly understand sovereignty, we must understand how Agamben defines sovereignty both as a kind of performativity and as a kind of impotentiality. And, more, in order to understand any of the three, we must understand their status as exceptions to the formal systems they actualize.

These political, linguistic, and metaphysical schemas are also tightly intertwined with a temporal schema. In this schema, the temporal apparatus is also composed of two elements: (1) the future, and (2) the *arché* (i.e. the origin or governing source of action). The future and the *arché* jointly compose the temporal horizon that overwrites the substance of the past in order to constitute a new, composite present. On one side, the future aligns with law, predication, and potentiality as a formal system of possibilities that may be actualized in a particular subject, speech act, or historical moment. On the other side, *arché* aligns with sovereignty, performativity, and impotentiality. Temporally, the *arché* is slippery: it is neither past, nor future, nor present. Rather, it is the exception that joins and disjoins all three. It is the point of passage between them. Agamben describes the *arché* as “that part within the present that we are absolutely incapable of living” (N 17). The *arché* persists in the present as a kind of time within time that structures the present, the future, and the past: (1) it can be included in the constituted present only as an exception to it, (2) it holds the future in reserve, preventing it from passing immediately into actuality, and (3) it haunts the present with unrealized and uncaptured remnants of the past.

In summary, there are four homologous schemas: a political schema, a linguistic schema, a metaphysical schema, and a temporal schema. Each schema articulates, in its own register, the

relationship of an apparatus to a substance, and each apparatus is itself composed of two elements: law and sovereignty, predication and performativity, potentiality and impotentiality, or future and *arché*.

So much for apparatuses. However, before examining the different configurations of these schemas, it is important to reflect for a moment on the third element that must be included in each schema: the substance upon which the composite apparatus acts.

In the political schema, the substance that is overwritten and governed by the apparatus is life. In particular, this substance is *zoē*. *Zoē* is a name for natural life or reproductive life. It is life as it might exist in a hypothetical “state of nature” prior to the introduction of an apparatus. However, *zoē* never shows up as such. Rather, it only names what must be presupposed as the raw material for an apparatus. Considered in relation to the work of the apparatus, this presupposed substance has a kind of mythological status. Only the finished product, the subject, is delivered for inspection and the substance that underwrites this subject can only appear as a kind of shadow, a remainder that is both included in but excluded from the life of the subject.

Heuristically, this is fine. But we can, I think, clarify much that might otherwise remain obscure if, from a diachronic perspective, we adopt the following maxim about the status of a substance. Let’s maintain the following: *every substance is a subject*. In other words, there are no “pure” substances. Every substance will have always already entered into relationship with some kind of apparatus and, thus, will have already been constituted as some kind of subject. Substance is a name for a subject when that subject is in the process of being overwritten (again) by an apparatus.

This qualification makes good sense, especially given how the term substance functions in the metaphysical and temporal schemas. In the political schema we have a special term, *zoē*, to

designate a kind of hypothetical, pre-political form of life. But what, in the metaphysical schema, plays the role of substance? What must potentiality overwrite in order to become actual? The obvious answer is actuality itself. The previously constituted actuality must be overwritten by potentiality in the constitution of a new actuality. Every previous actuality (i.e. every substance) was once a present actuality (i.e. a subject). The same follows with the temporal schema. The substance in a temporal schema is the past, though the past is itself just a former present that has now been overwritten in the process of constituting the current moment. We might even say the same for the linguistic schema. The substance overwritten by *langue* in the production of a concrete speech act is something like *phonē*. But *phonē*—pure sound as it might exist prior to the introduction of any apparatus—has the same mythological status as *zoē*. The operation of the apparatus must presuppose some substance in its production of a subject but all we ever actually see are subjects.

These, then, are the homologous elements operative in each of the four schemas:

|                            | <b>Substance</b> | <b>Apparatus (1)</b>           | <b>Apparatus (2)</b> | <b>Subject</b>                |
|----------------------------|------------------|--------------------------------|----------------------|-------------------------------|
| <b>Political Schema</b>    | <i>Zoē</i>       | Law                            | Sovereignty          | <i>Bios</i>                   |
| <b>Linguistic Schema</b>   | <i>Phonē</i>     | Predication<br><i>(Langue)</i> | Performativity       | Speech Act<br><i>(Parole)</i> |
| <b>Metaphysical Schema</b> | Prior Actuality  | Potentiality                   | Impotentiality       | Actuality                     |
| <b>Temporal Schema</b>     | Past             | Future                         | <i>Arché</i>         | Present                       |

The *kind* of subject that results when an apparatus captures and overwrites a substance depends on how the relationships between the substance and the elements of the apparatus are configured.

Agamben treats three different configurations, three different figures of subjectivity: (1) the normal subject, (2) *homo sacer*, and (3) the messianic subject. Each of these figures is organized by both an exception and a gesture of appropriation/identification.

Privileging the political schema as a template, let's generically designate all substances with the letter "Z" (for *zoē*), the first element of each apparatus with the letter "L" (for law), and the second element of each apparatus with the letter "S" (for sovereignty). Further, let's use a backslash to indicate that a relationship is structured by an exception and an equals sign to indicate a gesture of appropriation or identification.

In the first figure of subjectivity, the normal subject, sovereignty is an exception to the law, the law aims to overwrite and appropriate life, and sovereignty, as an exception, mediates the law's appropriation of life. These relationships might be formalized as follows:

$$(L / S) = Z$$

For the normal subject, life is dominated by the essences and *teloi* assigned to it by the law. Life is dominated by the imperative to identify more and more perfectly with the essences that overwrite it and to realize more and more completely the *teloi* that govern it. In short, essence aims to appropriate existence. This politically and culturally conditioned form of life is called *bios*. Linguistically, predication dominates and the performative dimension of language withdraws, optimally, into transparency. Metaphysically, the relationship between potentiality and actuality is structured by a gesture of identification that aims, as with law and life, to erase any difference between the two and impotentiality functions simply as a door for the unimpeded and inevitable flow of potentiality into actuality. Temporally, the present moment is captured and

overwritten by the future. Joy is understood to be the future-tense product of a finally successful gesture of identification. However, the trouble with this should be obvious. The normal subject is structured by a gesture of identification that is itself mediated by an exception that perpetually hamstring that act of identification. Structured by this exception, the normal subject is split between law and life. In fact, the normal subject *is* this irreparable impropriety—i.e. the impossibility of wholly converting life into property—and this impropriety then grounds each subject in a structurally unavoidable experience of failure, alienation, guilt, and shame.

In the second figure of subjectivity, the configuration shifts. Sovereign power, rather than being an exception to the law, is itself generalized as the norm and, in this generalized state of exception, the law, as a normative force, becomes the exception. Further, sovereign power aims to complete the gesture of identification and accomplish what the law could not: a complete appropriation of life.

$$(S = Z) / L$$

This second figure emerges in the biopolitical scenario and in this scenario bare life is revealed in the figure of *homo sacer*. *Homo sacer*, rather than experiencing sovereign power in terms of the constraining but often constructive application of norms and *teloi*, experiences sovereignty as a process of desubjectification. The biopolitical situation is a state of exception. The legal norms have been suspended and sovereign power now acts directly on living bodies without those norms coming into play. Sovereign power continues to apply but it no longer mediates on behalf of any normative content and as a result *bios*, without reverting to the mythical innocence of *zoē* (a kind of un-subjectified life), is reduced to bare life (a kind of de-subjectified life).

Linguistically, the referential connection is broken. A subject's capacity for language and predication is compromised and they are left with nothing but the performative power of a scream that isn't quite human or animal. Metaphysically, a subject's horizons of potentiality are foreclosed. Impotentiality, rather than mediating the relationship between potentiality and actuality, imposes its power to not act in a raw, unproductive fashion on the present moment itself. The same follows with the temporal schema: the future is excluded, temporal horizons collapse, and a powerless finality is imposed on the present. Agamben's lengthy discussions of *homo sacer*, concentration camps, the Muselmann, biopolitics, and political states of exception all revolve around the confluence of these political, linguistic, metaphysical, and temporal figures.

The third figure of subjectivity is the messianic figure. In this figure, the elements of the schema, rather than devolving from normality into a generalized state of exception, align to produce what I will call a generalized state of exemplarity. For Agamben, exceptions and examples form a correlative pair of limit structures. Exceptions are defined as inclusive exclusions. Examples are defined as exclusive inclusions. Where an exception is included in a set by way of its formal exclusion from that set, an example is excluded from a set by virtue of being included in that set in an exemplary way. In other words, where exceptions belong to a set by explicitly not belonging, examples never quite belong to the set they represent because, by exemplifying what it means to belong, they no longer belong in a normal way. Normal members of a set do not display their belonging, they just belong.

The messianic subject is exemplary. Foregrounding sovereignty and performativity, it displays the performative character of subjectivity itself. And, by displaying the performative character of subjectivity itself, it displays the irreparable impropriety that structures it. In this

scenario, the gesture of appropriation and identification is still performed, but now it is performed in such a way that the messianic subject appropriates its own impropriety as what is most decisive for it. More, in this case, the relation between law and life is inverted: rather than life being subordinate to the law, the law becomes a servant to life.

$$S = (Z / L)$$

In the original figure, life was subordinate to the law's predicates and *teloi*. In the second figure, life was stripped of its predicates and *teloi*. But, in this third figure, life's predicates and *teloi* are rendered inoperative *as objects of identification* and, thus, liberated. They are made available for life to use as it sovereignly decides. In this way, the messianic subject enacts what Agamben calls form-of-life: actions are performed for their own sake, for the sake of displaying what they are, rather than for the sake of an assigned end. Linguistically, this third figure unfolds as a kind of glossolalia that foregrounds the performative dimension of speech. The priority of predication is suspended and language functions primarily as an exhibition of what is at stake in language. Metaphysically, impotentiality is foregrounded but, rather than subordinating potentiality to actuality or barring access to potentiality, impotentiality holds them together in their disjunction. Temporally, the present moment, the messianic "time of the now," is opened by a reconfiguration of the relationship between the present, the past, and the future. The future, rendered inoperative as a repository of governing *teloi*, acquires a kind of completion and opens onto a period of sabbatical rest. The past, rather than appearing final and complete, reveals itself as available for redemption and mercy. And the present is empowered as a moment inviting action. The present, no longer constrained by chronology, is revealed as kairotic.

These three figures of subjectivity, then, move through three corresponding states: a state of normalcy, a state of exception, and a state of exemplarity.

|                            | <b>State of Normalcy</b><br>$(L / S) = Z$ | <b>State of Exception</b><br>$(S = Z) / L$ | <b>State of Exemplarity</b><br>$S = (Z / L)$ |
|----------------------------|---|--|--|
| <b>Political Schema</b>    | <i>Bios</i>                               | <i>Homo Sacer</i>                          | Messianic Subject                            |
| <b>Linguistic Schema</b>   | <i>Parole</i>                             | The Scream                                 | Glossolalia                                  |
| <b>Metaphysical Schema</b> | Universality                              | Particularity                              | Singularity                                  |
| <b>Temporal Schema</b>     | <i>Chronos</i>                            | Temporal Collapse                          | <i>Kairos</i>                                |

The key to defining what Agamben means by the messianic is to distinguish, with operational precision, the state of exception from the state of exemplarity. These figures, while similar in crucial respects, are ultimately different in fundamental, structural ways. More, the key to substantially distinguishing the biopolitical state of exception from the messianic state of exemplarity is to identify the basic elements at play in their composition (e.g., law, sovereignty, and life) *together with* all of their political, linguistic, metaphysical, and temporal correlates. If we fail to recognize that Agamben’s engagement with issues related to political sovereignty converge with his investigations of linguistic performativity, metaphysical impotentiality, and a temporal *arché*, then we will fail to grasp how his messianism involves a very specific and simultaneous transformation of our relation to each.

## Glossary

### ACTUALITY

Actuality (as prior actuality) names, on the one hand, the substance upon which an apparatus acts. In this case it aligns with *zoē* in the political schema, *phonē* in the linguistic schema, and the past in the temporal schema. On the other hand, actuality names the composite subject that results from the operation of an apparatus on a substance. In either case, actuality must be thought in relation to the two elements that jointly compose the metaphysical apparatus itself: potentiality and impotentiality.

(HS 28, 44-48, N 8)

### ANGEL

Angels are messengers. They are bureaucrats who work on behalf of the apparatuses (the divine *oikonomia*) that govern the world's affairs. Angels help order the world's affairs in relation to goals and ends that promise eventual completion and repair. They work to keep each existing thing lined up with its assigned essence and tied into its array of governing predicates. Angels are agents of sacralization. Because the mechanism of sacralization is separation, an angel's job is to introduce this separation. Angels separate substances from themselves by putting them into relation with their assigned essence rather than with their own existence. These angelic powers can, however, be countered by a messianic force that suspends the normative power of these essential predicates and puts substances into relation with their own existence.

(N 4-8, 35, KG 159)

## APPARATUS

Agamben partitions beings into two classes: substances and apparatuses. An apparatus is a formal system that produces subjects by capturing and overwriting substances. More, insofar as an apparatus embeds subjects in specific classes and points these subjects toward specific *teloi*, it also governs them. Apparatuses both capture and govern. Overwritten by an apparatus, a substance becomes a subject. In the process of producing a subject, systems of predication and relations of power become concrete.

In relation to the political schema, an apparatus is jointly constituted by the law and the sovereign. In relation to the linguistic schema, it aligns with language itself as co-constituted by its predicative and performative dimensions. In relation to the metaphysical schema, it is jointly constituted by potentiality and impotentiality. In relation to the temporal schema, it aligns with the horizon of intelligibility co-constituted by the future and the *arché*.

Politically, apparatuses are composed of two elements: law and sovereignty. An apparatus consists of the law (as a normative force that captures substances and organizes them into systems of predication) held in tension with sovereignty (the power that, because it is responsible for constituting the law as a normative force, is also an exception to the rule of that law). Apparatuses are structured internally by this state of exception. This position of sovereign exception, though sometimes occupied by a specific subject like a king or president, is not an accidental or correctable feature of the system. Rather, this structure of exceptionality is itself an essential feature of an apparatus.

Insofar as the imposition of an apparatus on a substance aligns with the imposition of language on a living being to produce a speaking being, every subject of an apparatus is a split

subject. Every subject is split between its being a living being and a speaking being. Apparatuses are the wedge at the heart of being that both separate subjects from themselves and make it possible for subjects to be in relation to themselves. They open life to both alienation and messianism.

(WA 5-7, 11, 13-17)

## ARCHÉ

*Arché* names the third element in the temporal schema. It is the point of origin or governing source of action. Together with the future, it jointly composes the temporal apparatus that overwrites the substance of the past in order to constitute a new present. It aligns with sovereignty in the political schema, performativity in the linguistic schema, and impotentiality in the metaphysical schema.

*Arché* names the present moment insofar as that present cannot be wholly assimilated by the present. It names the part of the present that we are incapable of living. As an inassimilable remnant, the *arché* is an event that never stops taking place. It not only leaves a mark in the past (because the past was once the present) but always remains contemporary. The *arché* is, by definition, live. Consider seafloor spreading. Molten rock wells up between two plates and pushes them apart. Exposed to ocean water, the rock cools and hardens at the lip. As more molten rock wells up, the process repeats and previously cooled rims of rock get pushed out and away from the live heat, from their point of origin. The more this process repeats, the farther the earliest layers get pushed from their point of origin. It is possible, and perhaps traditional, to think of the *arché* as a point of origin that is fixed in the past such that, with each passing year, the present gets pushed farther away from that original heat and light. But, Agamben argues, it is

also possible to think of the *arché* as fixed in the present such that, with each passing year, it is the past that gets pushed farther and farther away from its continually contemporary source. In this case, the present is the origin. It is the present that is forever welling up.

It follows then that, as a remnant of the present that cannot be lived, the *arché* cannot be situated within chronological time. But, too, it cannot be excluded from chronological time. It is neither atemporal nor metahistorical. Rather than being assimilable by time or positioned outside of time, the *arché* is a kind of time within time. The *arché* is a remnant of time that puts time in relation to itself. It is the messianic “time of the now.” It is the door through which the Messiah never ceases to enter.

(HS 109, N 17, CK 12-13, SL 10-11, CH, WA 50-51)

## ARCHEOLOGY

Archeology is the work of accessing the present. It is a name for the work of being contemporary. The archeologist’s job is to step sideways into the parahistorical space of the *arché* and then reread time’s line from a typological rather than a chronological perspective. Archeology doesn’t retreat into the historical past but returns to that part of the present that we are incapable of living. The basic archeological operation is citation, an operation that gathers figures, ciphers, types, or signatures from across history’s span in order to render them relevant again. These signatures are organized according to a “secret index” and this secret index is keyed to the *arché*, to that common but unlivable dimension of each previously present event. When gathered, these signatures form typological “constellations” that can reconfigure time, free the future, and redeem history.

(TR 77, N 17, SL 10, OD 91, CH, WA 50-51, KG 4)

## BAN

Ban is associated with sovereignty in the political schema, with performativity in the linguistic schema, and with impotentiality in the metaphysical schema. In the political schema, sovereignty names the power that, because it is responsible for constituting the law as a normative force, is also an exception to the rule of that law. As an exception to the law, sovereignty is situated as an inclusive exclusion: it is included within the scope of law as something that is legally excepted from the law's jurisdiction. This exceptionality bears directly on the role of sovereignty as the law's point of application to life. Sovereignty, both inside and outside the law, constitutes the law as normative and binding by bridging the gap between (1) the law's formal system of norms, and (2) the extra-legal life that this system seeks to overwrite. Ban is a name for this sovereign application of legal norms to what is presupposed as extra-legal. It names the power to posit a relation with what is presupposed as nonrelational. Ban is the force of simultaneous attraction and repulsion that ties together the two poles of the sovereign exception. In the normal political situation, sovereignty is subordinate to the law and, as a result, the role played by the ban remains implicit. But when the rule of law is suspended and sovereignty presents itself as naked force (as in the camp), then the ban becomes explicit. Ban names this sovereign being in force without (normative) significance.

In the metaphysical schema, ban aligns with impotentiality. Where impotentiality names potentiality's power to *not* pass over into actuality (and, thus, remain potential), ban similarly names the law's potential to maintain itself in its own privation. In other words, ban is the potential of the law to apply in no longer applying. Here, again, both the structure of the ban and the structure of impotentiality display the structure of the exception.

In the linguistic schema, ban aligns with the performative dimension of language. Ban is the pure form of reference to something in general. It is the gesture that posits a relation between word and world. It posits a systematizable relation with what falls outside the formal system. By imposing a relation with language, the ban separates a substance from itself and, simultaneously, allows that substance to be put in relation with itself. Ban, as a being in force without significance, corresponds epistemologically to the transcendental object: it is not itself a real object but the idea of a relation.

(HS 28, 29, 51, 52, 59, 109, 110, 112)

## BARE LIFE

In the political schema, bare life is the second of three figures of subjectivity. The structure of each subject depends on the particular configuration of three terms: life (*zoē*), law, and sovereignty. In the normal subject, (1) sovereignty is subordinate to the law, and (2) life is overwritten by the whole of the law/sovereign apparatus. In bare life, however, (1) the rule of law is suspended (as in the camp), and (2) life itself comes into direct relation with sovereignty. If *bios* is a name for the normal subject (i.e. for *zoē* as it is overwritten by the law), then bare life is a name for what happens when *zoē* comes into direct relation with sovereign violence without the mediation of the law. If *bios* is the political subject, bare life is the biopolitical subject.

Avatars of bare life include *homo sacer*, the Muselmann, and the refugee. As *homo sacer*, bare life is displayed as sacred life, as life that has been wholly sacralized because it has been entirely separated from itself. Sacralization works by way of separation. Bare life is sacred life because, without the law but exposed to sovereignty, life has been separated from its horizon. It

has collapsed into immanence. It has collapsed into raw existence without access to essences, predicates, or *teloi*.

In the normal subject, *zoē* is included in the polis by being excluded from it, by being an exception to it. In bare life, the rule of law becomes exceptional as sovereign power tries to make *zoē* itself the political rule. Here, the process of social recognition is suspended and identity comes to depend instead on biological facts (e.g. biometrics) that, despite their intimacy, cannot bear an identity. Though horrific in itself, bare life may still have a beneficial side effect: it may help bring the messianic subject into view. Because it excludes the possibility of a subject properly identifying with social categories and predicates, bare life is adjacent to a third, messianic figure that is subordinate neither to the law (as in the normal subject) nor to the sovereign (as in bare life) but is, instead, put into direct relation with its own existence in such a way as to render the whole array of predicates that formerly governed it common and available for use.

(HS 4, 6, 7, 9, 65, 107, 124, 128, 140, 148, 153, 159, 179, 182, 185, RA 69)

## BEING-IN-LANGUAGE

Being-in-language aligns with the performative element of the linguistic schema, with sovereignty in the political schema, with impotentiality in the metaphysical schema, and with the *arché* in the temporal schema. Being-in-language is the non-predicative property par excellence. It is the constitutive aspect of language that is subtracted from (and thus an exception to) the authority of language. Whereas predicates function within linguistic systems and are defined by their intra-linguistic relationships, being-in-language functions performatively to connect predicates with what is presupposed as extra-linguistic. Being-in-language names that point of

exposure where language is open (1) to what is non-linguistic, but also (2) to itself. On the one hand, being-in-language belongs to each member of each particular class as the element that makes belonging to any class possible. But, on the other hand, being-in-language simultaneously undermines the possibility of any member's simple identification with that class because it forces the inclusion of an element that is not proper to the class itself: the bare gesture of belonging, of being-in-language in the first place. Being-in-language is what is common to everything that has been overwritten by language. As a result, being-in-language names the possibility of being put into relationship not just with any particular linguistic predicate but with language itself. While the former possibility is religious, the latter possibility is messianic.

(CC 10, 73-77, 95, 96)

#### BEING-SUCH or BEING-THUS

In the metaphysical schema, being-such is associated with the third configuration of actuality, potentiality, and impotentiality. Where the first configuration is universal and the second configuration is particular, this third figure is singular. Being-such is the same thing as whatever-being. It is existence insofar as that existence has been reclaimed from its belonging to this or that essence or predicate. It is not existence shorn of its predicates (in which case it would be particular rather than singular), but an existence that is no longer subordinate to its predicates. Predicates get negated as properties—that is, as something “proper,” as something that can be owned or identified with—but predicates remain in play and available for use. A singularity is neither this nor that but *thus*. A singularity transcends toward itself, toward its own being such as it is. More, because it no longer aspires to fully identify with some saving array of predicates that could eventually complete or repair it, being-such is returned to the present liveliness of its own

irreparable existence. Being-such is irreparable. In the political schema, being-such aligns with the messianic subject. In the linguistic schema, it aligns with glossolalia. In the temporal schema, it aligns with *kairos*.

(CC 1, 2, 28, 35, 39, 67, 92-94, 96-97, 100, 106)

## BIOS

*Bios* aligns with the first form of subjectivity in the political schema. In the linguistic schema, it aligns with *parole*. In the metaphysical schema, it aligns with the universal. In the temporal schema, it aligns with *chronos*. *Bios* is life insofar as the substance of that life has been overwritten by an apparatus. It is qualified life, a conditioned life, a particular way of life. *Bios* is the living being become a speaking being. It is the normal political subject, life overwritten by and subject to norms and predicates. *Bios* identifies its existence with its projected essence.

(HS 1,2, 9)

## BIOPOLITICS

Biopolitics aligns with bare life, the second figure of subjectivity in the political schema. Biopolitics is bare life as seen from the perspective of the apparatus. In biopolitics, the rule of law has been suspended and biological life (*zoē*) comes into direct relationship with sovereign violence. Biopolitics marks the entry of *zoē* itself into the sphere of politics. Where *zoē* originally named that aspect of life that could be included in the polis only by way of its exclusion, in biopolitics *zoē* is included outright in the political sphere. *Zoē*, when directly subject to sovereignty without the mediation of law, is bare life. The avatar of bare life is *homo sacer*.

*Homo sacer* is a name for the biopolitical subject. In its most extreme form, the site of biopolitics is the camp and the biopolitical subject par excellence is the Muselmann.

Agamben views the political declaration of rights as a key moment in the shift from politics to biopolitics. Rather than being rooted in subjectivity, rights get rooted in birth and nativity and, as a result, rights mark an initial inscription of natural life in the political order. In relation to rights, the biological is immediately political. Agamben then traces a growing inclusion of *zoē* in the mechanisms and calculations of power as, more and more, one's identity no longer depends on social recognition but, instead, on biological data (birth certificates, fingerprints, biometrics of all kinds, etc.). Because biopolitics increasingly isolates living beings from any identification with the social horizons constitutive of a speaking being, the biopolitical subject gets shorn of its linguistic predicates and reduced to bare existence. The biopolitical subject's access to potentiality is barred. As a result, the biopolitical subject, separated from itself, is condemned to an inhuman immanence.

(HS 3, 6, 119-122, N 50, RA 156)

## BLASPHEMY

Blasphemies and oaths are symmetrical. Oaths do not concern the predicative content of a statement but are, instead, meant to guarantee the referential efficacy of that statement. They are meant to address a weakness endemic to language itself: the difficulty of passing from word to thing, from overwriting apparatus to overwritten substance. As a result, oaths operate at the level of this passage, at the level of being-in-language, rather than at the level of predication. They are performative. Insofar as every speech act involves this performative dimension, every speech act implies an oath, a good faith promise, that the reference can hold. Blasphemy occurs when this

promise is broken and words are uttered in vain. Agamben claims that, in monotheism, the name of God is so closely associated with this performative guarantee that God *is* the oath.

Blasphemy is what happens when God's name is taken in vain. It indicates the breakdown of language's performative passage from formal system to non-formal element. Because blasphemy occurs as a break in the religious work of claiming, overwriting, and sequestering substances, it is potentially messianic. As the breakdown of predication, blasphemy can open onto either *homo sacer's* scream or the messianic subject's glossolalia. If it opens onto glossolalia, then blasphemy is an act of profanation.

(SL 4, 8, 11, 40, 41, 46)

#### CALLING or KLESIS

Calling or *klesis* names the operation whereby a messianic subject is put into relation with its own existence rather than subordinated to the array of projects and predicates assigned to govern it. In the political schema, *klesis* aligns with the third figure of subjectivity, the messianic subject. In the metaphysical schema, it aligns with singularity. In the linguistic schema it aligns with glossolalia. In the temporal schema, it aligns with *kairos*.

Agamben's account of *klesis* is rooted in his reading of Paul's "as not" (*hos mē*) in 1 Corinthians 7:29-32: "But this I say, brethren, time contracted itself, the rest is, that even those having wives may be as not having, and those weeping as not weeping, and those rejoicing as not rejoicing, and those buying as not possessing, and those using the world as not using it up. For passing away is the figure of this world. But I wish to be without care" (TR 23). Agamben reads Paul's messianic vocation as a calling of the calling. Rather than urging subjects to identify with the predicates that define their worldly callings, the messianic vocation suspends this act of

identification so as to put subjects into relation with the performative dimension of being-called. Messianism puts subjects into relation with the calling itself.

Politically, *klesis* transforms our relation to the law. *Klesis* transforms every juridical condition and every predicative norm. It freezes or renders inoperative the predicative part of a referential gesture without destroying the gesture itself. Rather, by rendering the predicative part of the gesture inoperative (by rendering it as though it were not), *klesis* reveals the performative dimension of that gesture. More, in revealing the performative gesture and freezing midstream a subject's normal work of owning or identifying with the predicates that overwrite it, *klesis* renders these predicates common rather than proper and makes them available for use.

Temporally, *klesis* operationalizes that dimension of the present, that remnant of time, that can be neither lived nor exhausted. It interrupts the normal flow of chronological time. *Klesis* doesn't bring time to an end but, rather, frees the present from its paralyzing subordination to a horizon of future goals and past decisions. Time's dialectical movement is immobilized by *klesis*. What follows is not pure immobility but a kind of movement in place, a messianic dance that moves playfully, festively, for its own sake. Everything finished becomes unfinished and everything unfinished becomes complete. Here, the messiah has already come but the world hasn't ended. Everything is both perfect and irreparable. It becomes impossible to contemplate the world in light of a future salvation. Instead, salvation comes into view only to the extent that subjects lose themselves in the present, in what cannot be saved, in what is unfinishable, unlivable, irreparable. This is what makes *klesis* so difficult. Dwelling in *klesis* means dwelling in the irreparable. It means loving each irreparable thing as just whatever it is.

(TR 22-24, 26, 28, 30-31, 41, 68)

## CAPITALISM

Capitalism is an apparatus and, in its contemporary form, it is closely aligned with biopolitics. In biopolitics, the rule of law is suspended, *zoē* comes into direct relationship with sovereign violence, and subjects, rather than being defined in relation to their social horizons, are defined in terms of their biological or animal elements. Insofar as it alienates subjects and encourages them to identify, by way of consumerism and mass hedonism, with animal needs (food, drink, sleep, sex), capitalism is pivotal to the constitution of the biopolitical apparatus. Agamben describes capitalism as the fiercest of all religions because it exemplifies an extreme form of the processes of sacralization and separation that define religion in general. In capitalism, everything gets sacralized and separated out as proprietary. Everything becomes property. Capitalism is an especially dangerous form of religion because its extreme form is so resistant to atonement, to a messianic jubilee of profanation that could suspend propriety, render things common, and make them available again for use.

(HS 11, CH, WA 19)

## CHRONOGENETIC TIME

Chronogenetic time is complex. The constitution of any given moment, of any given time image, requires a synthesis of temporal horizons: the substance of the present must be brought into relation with both the future and the past. However, this synthesis is not itself instantaneous. The synthesis itself takes some amount of time, however short, to complete. The time it takes to generate a time image is called operational time and this time cannot be immediately included in the image itself. Any inclusion of operational time would itself take additional time. Rather, operational time persists in the completed image as a disjointedness, a temporal remnant, an

unlivable lapse or delay implied by time itself. In this way, operational time, like the *arché*, refers to that dimension of the present moment that cannot be included in our linear representations of time. Operational time is the performative dimension of time.

Chronogenetic time, rather than being linear, is three dimensional. In chronogenetic time, operational time is accounted for and the genesis of a time image, in the form of an irreparable lack of completion, is cast back onto the time image itself. This allows for the time image to be grasped both in its process of formation and in its state of having been constructed.

Chronogenetic time aligns with messianic time and it is accessed by way of archeology.

(TR 65-67)

#### CHRONOS or CHRONOLOGICAL TIME

Chronological time refers to time as an already accomplished image. It presents time as linear and two dimensional. In chronological time, the present appears as the inevitable product of past events and projected ends. Subjects of chronological time experience time as impotent spectators, as onlookers who, rushed along by time's inexorable march, are separated from themselves. Without any relation to the *arché*—that exceptional dimension of time that cannot be immediately included in our representations of time—subjects are unable to grasp the time that remains available to them. As a result, chronological time curtails action and obscures the messianic.

(CK 12, TR 65-67)

#### CIPHER

The passage of time etches into each thing not only the predicates assigned to it by a governing apparatus but the mark of the live process that performed the assignation. This mark can function as a cipher, figure, type, or signature of the *arché*. The job of the archeologist is to read these ciphers or signatures. Divining the *arché* from these marks, the archeologist can grasp time typologically rather than chronologically.

(N 37, 38, OD 87, KG 4)

## CITATION

Citation is a messianic operation that gathers what is past and renders it contemporary. It names the kind of work performed by an archeologist. The work of an archeologist is to render the past contemporary by ignoring chronology and focusing typologically on the *arché*. All constituted things bear the stamp of their origin, their *arché*, and this point of origin is perpetually present. With an eye to the performative stamp left by the *arché*, the archeologist can cite something from the past and make it relevant again. Citation allows every manifestation of the *arché* in the past to function as a prefiguration of its manifestation in the present. Such citations allow history to be read and reconfigured in surprising ways. They allow time itself to be broken, reordered, and redeemed. In short, citations are messianic because they make time itself available for use.

(N 16, 18, WA 50, 53)

## COMING COMMUNITY

The coming community is a messianic community. It is a community of singularities. It is not mediated by any condition of belonging but by belonging itself. Rather than being bound

together by their belonging to any particular class of predicates, its members are bound by the performative dimension of predication. In the coming community, identity politics have no traction because the legitimacy of any particular gesture of identification is suspended in order to display the performative character of the gesture itself.

(CC 18-19, 65, 85)

## CONSECRATION

Consecration is, in general, a name for the work performed by an apparatus in relation to a substance. The essence of consecration (of making sacred) is separation. To consecrate a substance is to separate it out as belonging to the gods. Consecrated substances exit the human sphere and are, as a result, removed from free use. Consecration is accomplished by way of sacrifice. In the general operation of an apparatus, the existence of a substance is sacrificed to its assigned essence. These essential predicates then mark that substance as belonging to this or that class, governed by this or that god. In this sense, every apparatus is, fundamentally, religious in character. And, more, it is in this sense that capitalism should be understood as an extreme form of religion: by subordinating substances to certain properties, by consecrating them, apparatuses render that substance proprietary.

(WA 17-18)

## CONTEMPORARY

Messianic subjects are defined by their capacity to be contemporary. They are capable of arriving in the present. Such contemporaries, however, are present in a peculiar way: they are present because they neither coincide with their time nor adjust themselves to its demands. They

are, ironically, present in a way that is irrelevant and anachronic. This irrelevance puts them at ease. Rather than anxiously addressing themselves to the governing predicates of their age, contemporaries address themselves to that dimension of the present that remains obscure and unlivable. They address themselves to the *arché* that, instead of belonging to the frame of chronological time, is at work within that time as what urges, accomplishes, and disjoins its constitution. Out of phase with chronological time, contemporaries are in a position to grasp their time by way of citation: they can displace elements of the past and the future into the present and, thus, open the door to messianic time.

(N 11, 13-18, WA 40-41, 44, 52)

## EASE

Ease refers to the space that exists between each thing and itself. This space results from the internal disjunction that gives each thing room to move freely in relation to itself. This space is what compromises identity and makes free use of the proper possible. Ease depends on the existence of a remnant that cannot be neatly included in any image, predicate, essence, or representation. This remnant displaces a substance in relation to the properties that tend to capture and dominate its existence and, as a result, it prevents any substance from completely coinciding with the predicates that define its identity. The tiny displacement characteristic of messianic ease depends on this remnant. Those who are contemporary can grasp the present and move freely in relation to it because they live slightly out of phase with the present moment's representation of itself.

(CC 25, 54, N 16)

## EKKLESIA

*Ekklesia* is a name for the messianic community. As with the coming community, this community is composed of singularities. *Klesis* (being called) is the key to *ekkleisia* (being called-out): a messianic vocation calls subjects away from the work of identifying with their worldly callings and, instead, puts them into community with the calling itself.

(TR 33)

## ESCHATOLOGY

Eschatology deals with the end of things. Agamben advocates against a deferred, future tense account of the eschaton and argues instead that the world's redemptive end should be understood in terms of a present tense messianism. On Agamben's account, the life that begins after the messiah has come will simply be a human life. After the end has already come and gone, after a bone-deep hopelessness has mercifully set in, everything will finally be whatever it is. Everything will be, irreparably, itself. Everything will be profane. This is the messianic difference. Before the end arrives, everything is aimed at becoming something else. The present is incessantly captured by the future and relentlessly determined by the past. But, after the end passes, everything that remains will have no choice but to be itself. Everything that remains will be set in relation to itself. Messianic time treats this end as if it has always already arrived. The messianic vocation is to live your life as if it were already over, as if the end had passed but life continued regardless, as if the law's force and the world's claims were already satisfied. This profane eschaton is redemptive but it is redemptive in a strange way. Rather than redeeming things from themselves, it redeems them for themselves. Here, the disjunctive impropriety that

sets each thing in relation to itself, that prevents each thing from coinciding with itself, must be confessed and witnessed rather than overcome.

(CC 7, 54, TR 57, CK 19, HP 143, KG 240)

## EUAGGELION or GOSPEL

*Euaggelion* is the good news. It is the announcement of the messiah's arrival. This announcement is glossolalic in form: it involves an experience of language where the announcement itself is at every point indistinguishable from the thing announced. In other words, it involves an experience of language whose content wholly coincides with that content's linguistic performance.

(TR 89-91, HP 46-47)

## EVIL

Evil is a failure to witness the irreparability of things. It is what happens when potentiality and impotentiality are treated as deficient forms of actuality. Evil is what happens when people find themselves incapable of their own impotence. Clearly, impotence is linked with evil, but the connection is only collateral. Impotence is not evil—but our flight from impotence is. Regarding potentiality itself as a fault to be repressed, people drive away rather than love those who show weakness. But only impotence makes love possible. We flee from this impotence when we look to take shelter in the work of identifying with an array of essential predicates. Identifying with our predicates, siding with essence against existence, evil follows when the performative taking-place of things is reduced to a predicate like any other.

(CC 14, 31-32, 35, 44)

## EXAMPLE and EXCEPTION

Examples and exceptions are the two correlative and fundamental structures of the schemas that align Agamben's work across political, metaphysical, linguistic, and temporal platforms.

Metaphysically, examples are crucial because they escape the antinomy of the universal and the particular. The example is a particular case but it is a particular case that, in its particularity, is exemplary of an entire class. The example shows its belonging to a class but for this reason it also steps out of that class. Ordinary members of a class just inconspicuously belong to it, they don't display the fact of their belonging. This is to say, the example ends up excluding itself from the normal case because a class cannot include its own paradigm. Neither simply particular nor simply universal, the example is, as a result, singular. Examples are singularities.

Linguistically, exemplarity highlights the performative dimension of any particular act of predication. Examples show what it means to be called a particular kind of thing by foregrounding the fact of their performatively *being-called* that thing. In this way, examples both preserve and suspend the predicates assigned to them. An assigned predicate persists in applying to an example because that predicate is the very thing that the example exemplifies. But, in exemplifying that predicate, the example suspends the priority of that predicate by subordinating it to its own performance. Examples display being-in-language itself.

Politically, examples also display a key feature of the messianic. In an example, as in the messianic subject, what is improper to a subject as a member of a class gets assumed and appropriated as that subject's own manner of being. As exemplary of a given class, an example fails to properly belong to that class. But, more, this failure to properly belong, this impropriety, is also what gets appropriated as they very thing that constitutes an example as such.

Exceptions and examples play symmetrical roles. Exceptions, like examples, are the means by which a class or set tries to found and maintain its own coherence. Both exemplarity and exceptionality come into play every time a class or community is defined. Also, exceptions, like examples, both do and do not belong to the sets that they help to found. Where exceptions belong to sets as inclusive exclusions (the exception is included in the set precisely as what must be explicitly excluded from the jurisdiction of the rules that govern it), examples belong to sets as exclusive inclusions (the example is excluded from the set by the fact that it exemplifies what it means to be included in the set). However, the difference between exceptionality and exemplarity is unstable and, under some circumstances, they may be structurally indistinguishable.

(CC 9-10, 29, TR 104-106, HS 7, 17-19, 21-22, 24-25, 37, HP 95)

## EXPOSURE

Exposure names a thing's being-such or being-thus. It names a thing's being just whatever it is. In this way, exposure is not a real predicate. But it is also true that exposure is not something other than a predicate. Where real predicates express relationships *within* language, exposure expresses something about a thing's being in relation *to* language.

(CC 68, 97)

## FAITH or PISTIS

Faith is a sovereign capacity to carry out good works independent of the law. It aligns, in general, with the role played by sovereignty in the political schema. Like sovereignty, it both defines and is defined by its relationship to the law. Faith refers variously to the promissory

dimension of the law, the prelaw foundation of the normative law, and the constituting rather than constituted dimension of the law. Faith, in this sense, is clearly structured in relation to the law as an exception. Faith is an inclusive exclusion: it is included in the law as a legal exception to that law. Because faith founds the law, it has a legal dimension, but because it preexists the law, it eludes the rule of that law. Both founding and elusive, faith names the performative rather than predicative dimension of the law. Faith is the law's point of performative passage, its site of application, to what is extra-legal. This application is possible only by way of the good faith of those involved.

This performative dimension of faith is especially crucial for Agamben's reading of Paul. Here, faith names a zone of indistinction between the performative announcement of the good news—the *euaggelion*, the law of faith—and the predicative content of that announcement. The law of faith foregrounds a disjunction in the law itself between its normative and promissive elements. More, the law of faith demonstrates that it is possible to fulfill the law's promise while suspending its normative force. The law of faith sets a non-normative figure of the law in relation to the normative figure. In other words, the law of faith is what the law looks like when the law is in a state of messianic exception: faith accomplishes justice without the law, it observes the law without the law, it fulfills the law without any obligation having been imposed by the law. Faith is, again, this sovereign ability to accomplish good independent of the law. (TR 90-91, 95, 104, 107, 113-114, 116, 118, 121, SL 52, 65-66)

## FESTIVAL

Festivals, feast days, Sabbaths, and holidays are models for the third figure of time in Agamben's temporal schema. During the festival, work is suspended and, instead, rest becomes

the order of the day. Such festivity models messianic inoperativity. During the festival, ordinary activities are neither neglected nor abolished but approached in such a way as to exhibit the character of their performance. Ordinary activities are performed, but not for ordinary ends. The relation between the activity and its end is suspended and then, joyfully, these activities are performed for their own sake. The feast, Agamben claims, is first and foremost a deactivation of the world's reigning values, powers, categories, and apparatuses. To the extent that all apparatuses are religious in character, every festival is profane and turns on enacting the nullification and profanation of these essences and ends.

(N 104-106, 111-112)

#### FORCE OF LAW

Force of law refers to a state of exception, an anomic space where the normative or predicative dimension of the law has been suspended while the sovereign, performative dimension of the law remains in force.

(SE 39)

#### FORM-OF-LIFE

Form-of-life is a key messianic term. It defines the messianic subject, the third figure in Agamben's political schema. Form-of-life is a life that is inseparable from its form. It is life lived in such a way as to exemplify what it means to be alive. It displays life's being irreparably whatever it is. In this way, it is a life that performs and exemplifies its own form. As a result, form-of-life is structured as an example. It is structured as an exclusive inclusion. As an example, form-of-life both exemplifies what it means to be included in the class of living things

and evades belonging to that class because, normally, members of a class do not exemplify their belonging. The logic of the example, because it exemplifies the general rule that structures a class, does not coincide with the application of that general rule. Rather, it evades the grasp of the law because it exemplifies the fulfillment of that law.

Agamben takes monasticism as a model for form-of-life. Monastic life is shaped by an attempt to live life as a total and unceasing liturgy. Taking seriously the injunction to pray without ceasing, it attempts to perform all of its ordinary work as a kind of prayer. Uncoupling these ordinary tasks from the plans and *teloi* that normally govern them, monastic life performs them for their own sake. It enacts them as a celebration of just whatever they are. Life itself is presented as art: what poetry does with words, form-of-life does with life. St. Francis exemplifies what is at stake. Francis didn't want to read or interpret the gospel, he wanted to *live* it.

Where religious gestures separate the sacred from the profane, form-of-life performs the profane as the substance of the sacred. Rather than sequestering certain aspects of life as special and proprietary, it lives a common life. In a common life, the banality of things is revealed as irreparable and life is never given as property. The use of bodies is never substantiated into an appropriation.

Common life, by identifying itself with the rule, abolishes and cancels the rule. The rule is suspended and held in reserve. It's rendered inoperative by its fulfillment. A rule that applies to the whole of life cannot be easily recognized as a rule, nor the life as a life. As a result, the rule enters into a zone of indistinction with respect to life. By shifting the ethical problem from the level of the relation between a universal norm and a particular action to the level of life itself, form-of-life calls into question the difference between rule and life, universal and particular, necessity and liberty, being and beings. Neither universal nor particular, neither being nor

beings, things are singularities. The monks work a reversal of the state of exception: what for others is normal becomes an exception for them, and what is an exception for others becomes for them a form of life. They bring ordinary life to an end and then, in the profane space that remains, exemplify what it means to be alive.

(HS 52-53, 188, HP xi-xiii, 5, 7, 22-26, 33, 57, 61, 69, 71-72, 93-95, 110-111, 143-144, KG 251)

## GLORY

A body becomes glorious when it becomes inoperative. Normally, bodies are overwritten by apparatuses and subordinate to the essences, predicates, and *teloi* assigned to govern them. When these apparatuses, through profanation, are suspended and the performative dimension of the body and its gestures are foregrounded, then a body becomes glorious. Here, the dominance of actuality is nullified so that potentiality shines as such. A body displays its glory when it displays its irreparability, when it shows itself as just whatever it irreparably is. As a result, only mortal bodies, impotent bodies, irreparable bodies, are capable of glory.

(CC 92, N 98-99, 102-103, KG 249)

## GLOSSOLALIA

Glossolalia is the third figure in Agamben's linguistic schema. It aligns with the messianic subject in the political schema, with singularity in the metaphysical schema, and with *kairos* in the temporal schema. Glossolalia refers to what Paul calls speaking in tongues. When speaking in tongues, the speaker speaks without knowing what is said. The speaker occupies, in a pure way, the position of the subject of enunciation. Speaking in tongues, being-in-language is performed but the predicative content of that performance is suspended. In this way, glossolalia

radicalizes and displays the desubjectification implicit in all speech acts. In order to speak, the individual must, at least in part, cease to occupy their own position and, instead, submit to occupying the position of the subject of enunciation. The price of admission to the linguistic apparatus is being overwritten by that apparatus. The irony is that, once the speaking subject is constituted by an individual's participation in discourse, the individual is lost and can no longer speak. Both the individual (the living being) and the subject of enunciation (the bearer of the performative dimension of language) are silenced and only *langue* speaks. An insubstantial predicative chatter displaces and disjoins the living being and speaking subject. However, in glossolalia, the predicative dimension of language is itself silenced such that, in the subject of enunciation's raw performance of being-in-language, the existence of the living being is witnessed. It differs from the scream in that, unlike the scream, its relation to predication is only suspended rather than obliterated.

(SE 62, RA 114-116, 128)

## GOD

God is a name for the world as irreparably profane. God, as the embodiment of supreme power, must be capable of everything. He must be capable not only of brandishing power but of bearing impotence. Impotence is the real test. God, as God, must be capable of his own irreparability. In this sense, the name of God models what it means for something to be messianic.

As a name for transcendence, God is not a supreme entity above all entities but, instead, the taking-place of each entity. God is in everything as the place where everything is. God is a name for the disjunction that gives each thing space to be whatever it is. God makes ease possible.

Accordingly, God may also be described as the innermost exteriority of a thing or as the non-latency of a thing. God is a thing's exposure to the world, its being irreparably in the world, and this irreparability is precisely what transcends and exposes every entity. Exposed in this way, communities of singularities can coalesce on the basis of belonging itself rather than any particular gesture of identification.

Linguistically, God is a name for the event of language. Insofar as oaths align with the performative dimension of language, God is the taking of an oath. To swear an oath, to perform a speech act, is to swear by the name of God. As a result, God has no semantic content. God's name doesn't belong to the predicative dimension of language. Rather, God's name suspends predication in order to witness a thing's being-in-language as such.

(CC 14-15, 35-36, 90-91, TR 42, 97, HS 17, SL 46, 53, 65)

## GUILT

Guilt doesn't refer to a particular transgression of the law but to the pure force of the law. It follows from the fact of an individual's being overwritten by an apparatus, from its inscription in the order of the law, not from the particulars of that overwriting. To become a speaking being, to become human, is to be consigned to something that cannot be assumed and, thus, to bear the guilt that follows from this impossibility. Overwritten by an apparatus, existence is subordinated to essence and life must, from that point forward, measure itself in relation to the predicates and *teloi* assigned to govern it. However, regardless of the predicates or *teloi* in play, existence and essence cannot coincide because their relationship is structured by an exception. Their relationship is mediated by the displacement and disjunction that make being-in-language possible in the first place. Thus, shame is the originary structure of subjectivity.

This point is essentially Pauline. The aim of the law is to bring existence in line with its assigned predicates but, ironically, this rapprochement cannot be accomplished by way of the law. A remnant will always remain and guilt will always result. The law cannot be fulfilled by way of the law. The law can only be fulfilled by way of faith. The law's jurisdiction must be suspended so that each thing is free to performatively assume the irreparability and impropriety of its own existence as what is most proper to being such as it is. The law must be rendered inoperative so that each thing can become whatever it is and, thus, fulfill the law. Religion is bent on sacralizing the world, but sacralization always leaves a remainder. Only profanation is messianic. The irreparable is capable of love because it is beyond the law. It is beyond good and evil.

(CC 6, HS 27-28, N 21, 30, 78, RA 107, 109, 128)

## HABIT

Habit aligns with impotentiality in Agamben's metaphysical schema and with sovereignty in the political schema. Habit is the operator that effects the passage from a generic potential (a capacity for doing something) to an effective potential (actually doing that thing). In habit, potential and act are separated but maintained in relation. In accomplishing this passage, habit is what engenders being from one's own manner of being.

However, only insofar as habit is a habit of privation, only insofar as it aligns with impotentiality, can potentiality endure and have mastery over itself without always already losing itself in action. Habit, in order to align with the potential to do something, must be defined by its ability to *not* actualize that potential. It must be able to hold that potential in reserve as potential. It must be able to render that potential inoperative and suspend its passage to activity.

A capacity for inaction and passivity is, therefore, the foundation of human habit. In this way, the strength of a habit depends on the degree to which it is capable of impotence. It must have the strength to remain irreparably what it is.

(HP 16, OD 93-94, 98)

## HALO

Halos name the glory that shines at the limit of a thing. They appear in the showing of a thing beside itself. They are a manifestation of the displacement and disjunction that structure a thing's taking-place. More, appearing at the limit of a thing, they mark the indetermination of that thing's limits. They signal exposure. Temporally, halos are a supernumerary mark of completion. Or better, they are a gratuitous supplement added to an already finished, already perfect thing. They manifest the aura of a thing that, though it has already come to an end, persists nonetheless. In this messianic space, the halo names a kind of potentiality that, because it comes only *after* the act, is not subordinated to the accomplishment of that act. It names a kind of matter that, no longer subordinated to form, surrounds that form with a material halo. Surrounded by this profane halo, a thing slides from perfection into singularity and enjoys there an incorruptible fallenness.

(CC 40, 54, 56, 101)

## HOMO SACER

*Homo sacer* names the second figure in Agamben's political schema. This figure aligns with particularity in the metaphysical schema, with the scream in the linguistic schema, and with a collapse of horizons in the temporal schema. *Homo sacer* is the avatar of bare life. Bare life is

neither natural life (*zoē*) nor social life (*bios*). *Zoē* names life insofar as it has not been overwritten by law and sovereignty. *Bios* names life insofar as life has been overwritten and normalized by law and sovereignty. Bare life is a name for what happens when the rule of law is suspended and life becomes immediately subordinate to sovereignty. Where *bios* names life subject to politics, bare life names life subject to biopolitics.

*Homo sacer* is the “sacred man” whose life is included in the juridical order only in the form of its exclusion. Because he has been banned, he has passed beyond the limits of the law and left the community of the living. On the far side of life, he now stands exposed to death and to sovereign violence. In an important sense, *homo sacer* mirrors the position occupied by the sovereign. Like the sovereign, *homo sacer* has been separated from his political context, has become an exception to the rule of law, and has survived his own death. More, the figure of *homo sacer*, while horrific, is only a hair’s breadth from the figure of the messianic subject. The difference is that, unlike *homo sacer*, the messianic subject maintains a relationship with the law. Rather than being simply excluded from the rule of law and exposed to violence, the messianic subject’s relationship to the law has been suspended in such a way that the law can now be fulfilled. Where *homo sacer* has been stripped of his horizons and predicates and reduced to the immanence of a raw existence, the messianic subject has been put into relation with his own existence in such a way as to render his predicates available rather than tyrannical. Where *homo sacer* is in a state of exception, the messianic subject is in a state of exemplarity.

(HS 8, 84, 97, 99, 100)

HOPE

Hope, as a matter of course, is pegged to the accomplishment of certain *teloi*, the actualization of unrealized potentials. Such hope is, however, ultimately hopeless: an individual can never completely realize any of the predicates that overwrite it. An irreparable remnant, in inassimilable remainder, always persists. This remnant cannot be expunged or overcome because it structures the relationship between each individual and its predicates. It makes that relationship possible in the first place. As a result, we can only have hope in what is without remedy, in what persists as incomplete even after the end of things. We can only have hope in the irreparable. Thought is the courage of hopelessness.

(CC 102, CH)

## HUMANS

Human beings are capable of their own impotentiality. They are capable of being impotent and irreparable, of making their impropriety what is most proper to them. Nothing is proper to the human way of being than its lack of an intrinsic essence. Lacking an intrinsic essence, human life is graced with a purposelessness, an inoperativity, that is uncannily operative.

A human being is a speaking being and a speaking being is a living being that has been overwritten by law and language. Humans are hybrids with a disjunction at their heart. This disjunction perpetually displaces human beings in relation to themselves and prevents them from coinciding with the predicates and *teloi* assigned to them. Striving to mask this disjunction by ardently identifying with their predicates and displaying their achievements, human beings hope to fabricate personas. The key to masking impotence and creating a persona is social recognition. This desire to be socially recognized is inseparable from being human and by acquiring a mask or persona, an individual acquires a role and social identity. That is, they become a person.

But local success on this score cannot cure the constitutive split that makes us human. Some remnant always remains. Some remainder always resists. Human beings are always in excess of themselves and, as a result, human beings are even capable of surviving themselves. This is the definitive human capacity: humans are capable of impotentiality because they are capable of surviving themselves. Their existence persists beyond any claims made by the predicates or *teloi* that govern their lives. Humans can survive their identifications and successes. The messianic subject—that is, the human subject—is the subject who can stay with what is human beyond both the personal identity that defines a normal subject and the kind of identity without personhood that punishes a biopolitical subject. The messianic subject discovers a way of being human beyond both personhood and biometric *facies*. The messianic subject is someone who, rather than identifying with their masks, plays with them. Rather than sequestering everything as property, they make everything improper and, thus, available for use. Rather than constructing a community on the basis of some particular criterion of belonging, they gather a community of singularities on the basis of belonging itself.

(N 44-47, 54, SL 11, 69-71, RA 133-135, UG 44, 47, CH, WA 16-17, KG 245-246)

## IMPOTENTIALITY

Impotentiality is the third element in Agamben's metaphysical schema. Structurally, it aligns with sovereignty in the political schema, with performativity in the linguistic schema, and with the *arché* in the temporal schema. Impotentiality is potentiality squared. It is potentiality put in relation to itself, potentiality itself treated as a potential. In this way, impotentiality is the power to *not* be actual, to not do something, to remain potential. As the power to not pass immediately over into actuality, impotentiality constitutes potentiality as such. It constitutes potentiality as

something other than a deficient mode of actuality. Being-in-language—and, thus, being disjoined by language—is what makes impotentiality possible for humans. A specifically human kind of freedom is opened by this power to not do something. Impotentiality is closely aligned with key terms such as inoperativity, impotence, irreparability, nullification, and suspension. For example, rendering the law inoperative or impotent requires the law to be simultaneously (1) held in reserve as an available potential, and (2) blocked from being actually in force. This is impotentiality. Impotentiality is the key to understanding what Agamben means by form-of-life and messianic use.

(CC 35-37, 56, HS 45-46, N 43)

## INOPERATIVITY

Inoperativity is closely aligned with impotentiality, impotence, and irreparability. It is the key to messianicity. The messianic renders predicates inoperative without submitting to or opposing them by suspending identification with them. This deactivation of predicates doesn't annul them but conserves them in potentiality. In fact, this deactivation makes these predicates available for use precisely because it holds them in reserve. The messianic gives potentiality back as potentiality in the form of inoperativity. As a result, inoperativity must not be seen as either the absence of work (because it actively works *not* to do something) or as a useless form of negativity (as in Bataille). Rather, inoperativity activates potentiality by deactivating actuality.

Inoperativity is the key to festivity. It makes a sabbatical jubilee possible. Inoperativity uncouples actions from the *teloi* that govern them and, thus, makes them available for use. Inoperativity doesn't prevent the performance of an action, it prevents the performance of an action for the sake of some other end. In fact, inoperativity heightens and foregrounds the

performance of the action itself. In this respect, it doesn't abolish an action's former use but preserves that use in an exhibition of the action itself. Inoperativity performs an action in such a way as to undo it in the very act of performing it. Festive, you do things joyfully for their own sake. You eat but not for the sake of being fed, you run but not for the sake of winning a race, you write but not for the sake of communication. Inoperativity is this special kind of work that puts to rest all other work.

(TR 97-98, HS 56, 61-62, N 99-100, 102, 105-106, 109-111, SE 64, CH, KG 251)

## IRREPARABILITY

Irreparability is closely aligned with impotentiality, impotence, and inoperativity. It names how the world is forever structured, without remedy, by a reserve of unactualizable potentiality. Recognition of this irreparability induces a neutrality with respect to any ultimate salvation and this neutrality liberates people from the impossible work of identifying with the predicates and *teloi* assigned to shepherd them to redemption. These predicates and *teloi* aren't destroyed by a recognition of their irreparability but rendered inoperative in a way that foregrounds the impossibility of taking shelter in them from our exposure to existence. The actualization of any specific *teloi*, however desirable or possible, cannot save us from the raw fact of exposure itself. Where *teloi* treat every potential as an unactualized actuality, irreparability treats these same potentialities *as potentialities*. Irreparability takes up existence, in light of impotentiality, as irreparably potential. In short, impotentiality empowers irreparable beings to take up their potentiality as such. It empowers them to be capable of not not-being.

By arresting our identification with the goal to actualize every potentiality, the irreparable exposes people to just what they are. The irreparable exposes the world's being such as it is. It

exposes a world whose existence is no longer governed by *teloi* or judged in light of the aspirations and essences assigned to it. In this way, the irreparable exposes a world that is beyond the law and, thus, beyond guilt. It suspends judgment and allows the world to be not not-innocent. It allows the world to take up its impropriety as what is most proper to it. That is, it allows things to be singular without identity. This irreparability, always already available, is the root of all pure joy and sadness.

(CC 14, 38-40, 64-65, 90-91, 106, TR 42)

## KAIROS

*Kairos* is messianic time. As the third figure in the temporal schema, it is the time of the now, a time that is full of potential and open to action. *Kairos* displays that unlivable dimension of the present moment, that remnant of time, that cannot be grasped by or included in the past, present, or future. Rather, in order to grasp the relationship of the present to both its past and future horizons, you must instead occupy the space created by this temporal displacement. Messianic inoperativity is the key to occupying this sabbatical space. Kairotic time can grasp time's span because it can read the whole of history typologically in light of the common element (the *arché*) that chronogenetically withdraws from but leaves its mark on the constitution of each moment. In this sense, *kairos* is a contracted and abridged form of *chronos*.

(TR 61, 69, 74, N 18, CK 8, KG 247)

## LANGUE

*Langue* is the third element in Agamben's linguistic scheme, one of two elements that compose the linguistic apparatus. *Langue* names the pure potential to signify. It refers to the

formal, structural dimension of language as a system of predication. Combined, by way of performance, with a set of sounds or signs in a specific context, *langue* produces figures of concrete discourse (i.e. *parole*). To the degree that the predicative dimension of language obscures the performative, the messianic is occluded.

(SE 36-37, RA 115-116, 145)

## LANGUAGE

Language is the ur-apparatus. In a crucial sense, every apparatus—whether legal, political, cultural or otherwise—is a linguistic apparatus. Language, then, names one of the two basic classes of beings. Language, overwriting the substance of a living being (*zoē*), produces a speaking subject (*bios*). Language itself consists of two elements: the predicative and the performative. The predicative dimension of language aligns with law in the political schema, potentiality in the metaphysical schema, and with the future in the temporal schema. The performative dimension of language aligns with sovereignty in the political schema, with impotentiality in the metaphysical schema, and with the *arché* in the temporal schema. The performative dimension of language is structured as an exception in relation to the predicative dimension of language.

Normally, the speaking subject is governed by and subordinate to the predicates that overwrite it. But, overwritten, human beings can be frustrated by their failure to coincide with the predicates assigned to them. This frustration is produced by a linguistic ban. The ban structures the relationship between life and language in terms of an exception that allows their mediation but forbids their coincidence. This ban produces shame and frustration to the extent that its exceptional character remains hidden and implicit. That is, life is banned by language to

the extent that humans have always already entered into language without noticing it and, thus, fail to recognize the irreparability that results.

In order for the messianic to be manifest, the irreparably performative dimension of language must be revealed. The performative dimension of language is what links pure predicative potential to its concrete expression. In other words, enunciation is what lies suspended, by way of the ban, between *langue* and *parole*. In order to enact the messianic, the predicative dimension of language must be nullified without being ruined. If the predicative dimension is ruined outright, then the speaking subject becomes the Muselmann. But if the predicative dimension is only suspended and held in reserve as pure potential, then the performative dimension of language can be foregrounded and being-in-language can itself come into view. The key is to follow the mediation performed by enunciation back toward *langue* itself rather than out toward its instantiation in *parole*. The messianic depends on this performative doubling of language that takes being-in-language as the object of language. Examples of this performative doubling include glossolalia and poetry.

(HS 20-21, 50)

## LAW

Law is the third element in Agamben's political schema, one of two elements that compose the legal apparatus. Law, paired with sovereignty, overwrites life and produces specific figures of subjectivity. Where law names the formal, systemic, and normative dimension of the legal apparatus, sovereignty names the performative dimension that mediates the application of the law to what is extra-legal. Just as language presupposes the nonlinguistic and must maintain a relation to it, so the law presupposes the nonjuridical (*zoē*, the state of nature, chaos) and must

maintain a relation to it. This relation is structured by an exception. Sovereignty, as a constituting power that founds the constitution of normative law, must be situated as an exception to that law. As an exception to the legal norm, sovereignty itself both does and does not have a legal status: it is included in the law as what has been legally excluded from it as an exception. Sovereignty names the law's being in force.

In a normal political situation, this force is subordinate to and mitigated by the normative content of the law. Similarly, political subjects are themselves overwritten by and subordinate to this normative content. Their subordination to the law is what prevents these subjects from entering into the open. Other scenarios, though, are possible. In a state of sovereign exception where the normative content of the law has been cancelled and sovereign power imposes itself directly on life, biopolitics results. The legal apparatus imposes itself with greatest force when, as a pure gesture of sovereign power, it prescribes nothing. When this happens, law and life enter a zone of indistinction—a law that has no content becomes indistinguishable from the life it captures—and the normal political subject is reduced to the status of *homo sacer*. Messianic life, however, reverses this relationship between life and sovereignty. Sovereignty, rather than absorbing life into biopolitics, bears witness to life. Sovereignty, rather than structuring the law's passage from a normative potential to an actualized application, holds the law's normative prescriptions in reserve as a well of potentiality that is, as potentiality, at life's disposal. The result is that messianic life, though it fulfills the law, is no longer lived under the jurisdiction of the law. Messianic life cannot be conceived in juridical terms.

(TR 27, 49-50, 91, 95-96, 104, 107, 114, 118, HS 20-21, 28, 49-50, 56, N 30, CK 40, SE 31, 37, HP 143)

## LOVE

Love is never directed toward this or that predicate. But, too, love is never neglectful of these predicates in favor of a bland generality. Rather, love is always directed toward the singularity of the beloved's being just whatever it is. Love is directed toward the beloved's being-such. In other words, love comes into play when things are seen as being irreparably what they are. When we fail to own our own irreparable impotence, when we fail to make that impropriety proper to us, we lose what makes love possible. Love circulates among irreparable beings when their relationships are mediated by belonging itself rather than by any shared identification with a particular class of belonging. In this practical and unsentimental sense, love is the key to the coming community.

(CC 1, 32, 106)

## MEDITATIO

In monastic life, *meditatio* is an attempt to take literally the injunction to pray without ceasing. To pray without ceasing, a monk or nun must undertake every activity, no matter how mundane, as if it were a prayer. An activity is undertaken as a form of prayer when that activity is performed for its own sake. Uncoupled from the *teloi* that typically govern it, the performative dimension of the activity is foregrounded. *Meditatio* is this hybridization of manual labor and prayer, of life and time, that models what Agamben means by form-of-life.

(HP 23-25)

## MESSIANIC

The messianic refers to the third figure of subjectivity in Agamben's political schema. In the linguistic schema, the messianic aligns with glossolalia, in the metaphysical schema with singularity, and in the temporal schema with *kairos*. Politically, the messianic is an attempt to master the problem of the law. Insofar as every apparatus, legal or otherwise, works by way of sacralization and sequestration and is, thus, religious in character, the messianic is, at root, also an attempt to master the problem of religion. The messianic names the point at which religious experience (1) passes beyond itself, and (2) calls itself into question insofar as it is law. In order to both pass beyond and fulfill the law, the messianic must render the law inoperative. The key to rendering the law inoperative is Paul's account of *klesis* or calling. In 1 Corinthians 7:29-32, Paul describes the peculiar structure of this messianic calling in terms of the "as not" (*hos mē*): "But this I say, brethren, time contracted itself, the rest is, that even those having wives may be as not having, and those weeping as not weeping, and those rejoicing as not rejoicing, and those buying as not possessing, and those using the world as not using it up. For passing away is the figure of this world. But I wish to be without care" (TR 23). Paul's "as not" transposes all of the juridical-factual conditions imposed by the law into a zone subtracted from the law's jurisdiction. It neither opposes nor submits to these conditions. Rather, it suspends each of the callings imposed by the law in order to foreground the performative fact of the call itself. No longer identifying with its predicates, this suspension gives the messianic subject room to move in relation to these predicates without forcing their disavowal or the creation of an alternate identity. Without identification or appropriation, these predicates are held in reserve. These expropriated predicates are returned to the messianic subject in the form of potentialities. In this way, the messianic opens a passage toward fulfilling the law. It opens a passage toward justice because it makes the law available for use.

(CC 53-54, TR 10, 24, 26, 51, 69, 97, HS 56-59, CK 8, HP 46, 143, RA 159)

## MESSIANIC TIME

Messianic time is the third figure of time in Agamben's temporal schema. Messianic time is kairotic time, the time of the now (*ho nyn kairos*). It displays that chronogenetic remnant of time (operational time) that cannot be included in a given time-image because the construction of such images does itself take some amount of time. In this way, messianic time is the time it takes to bring time to an end, to bring a representation of time to completion. It is the time required to grasp a time-image. Messianic time also displays the *arché*, that dimension of the present moment that cannot be included in our representations or lived in our experiences. Eternity, as what eludes chronology, shows itself in this remnant.

Messianic time is a by-product of the interface between life and language. Humans, as speaking beings, produce this remnant. We have no other way to experience time than by saying "I" and "now." Split between life and language, displaced from ourselves by our inability to coincide with the predicates assigned to us, unable to account for the time that the construction of a time-image requires, humans suffer the effects of a temporal disjunction. As a result, a human experience of time is structured by the halting presence of a time within time. This remnant measures the span of our disconnection from time. If messianic time is occluded by the time-images it produces, then this disconnection can lead us to experience our own lives as impotent spectators. We may feel as if we always arrive only *after* the present moment has been constructed and imposed. Chronological time can leave us feeling as if no time remains, as if there is no time left to act.

But this need not be the case: if the performative, chronogenetic dimension of time is itself foregrounded, then it is possible to discover the time that human beings *are*. It is possible to occupy this remnant of time and grasp the past, present, and future as full of potential, as actionable. The present, rather than being structured as a static image by an *arché* locked in the distant past and by *teloi* hovering out of reach in an asymptotic future, becomes dynamic. The *arché* can be rediscovered as a perpetually live element of the present moment. This dynamic quality extends beyond the present moment to include both the past and the future. Messianic time is neither the completion nor the incompleteness of time. Rather, it is the inversion of both: what appeared finished and irrecoverable is reinvested with potential and what appeared distant and ungraspable is delivered as perfect and complete just as it is. Messianic time makes it possible for the past to be forgiven and for redemption to arrive.

(TR 1, 3, 42, 61-68, 70-76, 97, 100, CK 4-5, 11-12, HP 18, 19, 22, RA 159)

## MESSIANIC VOCATION

A messianic vocation is a revocation of every vocation. It is a vocation that takes the performance of vocationality itself as its only proper vocation. A messianic vocation does not have any specific content because it renders inoperative the predicates that normally define a person's vocation. This inoperativity, however, does not cancel these vocations outright, it holds them in reserve as a potentiality. A messianic vocation continues to perform a subject's properly assigned vocations, but it performs them now as nicknames, as improper names. It performs them without trying to identify with them. It allows their impropriety to become what is most proper about its vocation. In other words, by foregrounding the performative rather than the predicative aspect of these vocations, a messianic vocation sets these terms in relation to

themselves. In doing so, it undermines their referential function and allows them to be performed for their own sake.

(TR 23-24, 26, 28, 30-31, 41)

## MIRACLE

Agamben suggests that miracles offer a theological paradigm for the state of exception. A miracle is only miraculous to the degree that a situation's laws exclude its possibility. Miracles, then, are included in a situation only as an exception to their exclusion. Structurally, every miracle is a kind of included exclusion.

(KG 277)

## MUSELMÄNNER

Muselmänner names the second figure of subjectivity in Agamben's political schema. The Muselmann, like *homo sacer*, is an avatar of bare life. Muselmänner names the occupant of a concentration camp whose exposure to the violence of pure sovereignty is not mediated by legal norms. The Muselmann's socially constituted predicates have not been deoperationalized for the sake of their performance as with the messianic subject. Rather, they have been voided outright. Nothing natural or common is left in them. Instinct and reason have both been canceled. The Muselmann occupies a position of absolute indeterminacy between life and law. As a result, the Muselmann is an indefinite being, an object of violence, for whom, at the extreme limits of pain, nothing remains but the raw conditions of space and time.

(HS 185, 188, RA 41, 120, 133-134, 152-153)

## MYSTICAL or MYSTERY

A mystical experience is one where, because there is nothing left to say on the discursive level, thought and vision coincide. Language and life blur in a way that foregrounds their mutually constituted performance of appearance. Agamben claims that ancient mystery cults were intended to initiate their participants into this kind of ecstatic, mystical experience. They were intended to expose their initiates to the joyful silence that follows when the predicative chatter that overwrites our living is rendered inoperative. This silence does not expose the initiate to an experience of life outside of language. It does not involve a kind of irrational ecstasy. Rather, it depends on exposing the initiate to the stillness that arises when language is held in reserve as a potentiality.

The mystery at the heart of this kind of mystical experience cannot be revealed because it is not itself a thing. It is the act of revelation. The mystery can be performed but it cannot be predicated. It can be enacted as a gesture so long as that gesture is no longer subordinate to reference. Humans differ from other animals in that, as speaking beings, we must be initiated into the secret of our own lives. To enact the messianic, life must be lived as an act of initiation not to a doctrine but to life's own irreparability.

(SE 39, UG 12-13, 30-31, 37-39, 47, KG 251)

## NICKNAME

Nicknames are not proper names. They are, rather, improper names. This impropriety is characteristic of the messianic. The messianic separates proper names from their bearers, renders them inoperative, and then returns them to the bearers as nicknames. Nicknames, unlike

proprietary names, are available for use. The messianic subject takes up the impropriety of its nicknames as what is most proper to it.

(CC 59-60, TR 10)

## OATH

Oaths work to guarantee the efficacy of a referential gesture. Oaths, rather than addressing the semiotic or predicative dimension of language, address the performative dimension of language, the passage from *langue* to *parole*, from potentiality to actuality. Oaths address a weakness endemic to language itself: the state of exception that structures the relationship between language and world. This state of exception is problematic because the passage it opens between language and world is also what prevents them from coinciding. Oaths address this problem. In this sense, to speak is to swear. To speak is to put the weight of your good faith behind the linguistic gesture you're making. Agamben claims that, in monotheism, the name of God is so closely associated with this performative guarantee that God *is* the oath.

(SL 4, 8, 11, 40-41, 46, 53, 65, 69)

## OIKONOMIA

*Oikonomia* refers to the divine economy that governs creation. It names divinity insofar as the divine is manifest in the order and operation of the created world. *Oikonomia* is divinity as apparatus. Given that the work of sacralization and sequestration performed by every apparatus is religious in character, *oikonomia* aligns with religion rather than with the messianic. More, *oikonomia* is of theological consequence because it testifies to the existence of a fundamental

split or disjunction implicit in divinity itself between the divine substance and the divine apparatus.

(WA 11, KG 139)

## OPEN

The open refers to a thing's being-such or being-thus. It names being insofar as it is being. The open aligns with singularity, whatever being, and exposure. In order to enter into a messianic space one must be able to enter into the open.

(WA 17)

## OPERATIONAL TIME

Operational time is the time it takes for the mind to realize a time-image. Every time-image, every representation of the present moment, does itself take a certain amount of time (however small) to construct. This temporal remainder cannot itself be included in the time-image. However, despite this impossibility, this remainder persists as a kind of time within time, a temporal displacement internal to the time-image itself. In this way, operational time is implicated in every time image. This implied remnant of time is what creates that unlivable dimension of the present moment called the *arché*.

Operational time is analogous to the time lag suffered by star light. Star light, as seen from the earth, is not contemporaneous with the light being now emitted from that star. Even traveling at the speed of light, star light can take millions of years to reach us. Given this lag, many of the stars currently visible in our night sky may no longer exist. More, because the universe is expanding at a rate that exceeds the speed of light, many stars may be moving away from us at

such great speed that their light, though always traveling toward us, will never reach us. This lag, though on a much grander scale, models what is at stake in operational time. However, operational time must not be understood, as Agamben reads Derrida, as a supplementary time added onto chronological time, infinitely deferred, infinitely postponed. Rather, operational time is always now, always already present, always near, as a time within time. Messianic time, displaying operational time, involves an actual transformation of the experience time.

(TR 65-67, 70-71, 73, N 14-15, RA 162)

## PEOPLE

Traditionally, the term people refers to the poor, the disinherited, the refugee, the excluded. As such, the people constitute a remnant that an apparatus has failed to include and, so, must treat as an exception. Treated as an exception to normative predication, the people are especially vulnerable to being reduced, by biopolitics, to bare life. However, the term people may also refer to the whole of the political body. As a result, the term fundamentally refers not to a unitary subject but to a dialectical oscillation between two opposite poles: the people as a whole political body and the people as inassimilable remnant of bodies reduced to bare life. This dialectic oscillates between a stifling inclusion that claims to be total and an exclusion that, though it makes the initial claim possible, is clearly hopeless. This oscillation is inevitable only when belonging to a people is mediated by some particular set of predicates rather than by the performance of belonging itself.

(HS 176-179, RA 163)

## PERFORMATIVE

The performative is the fourth element of Agamben's linguistic schema and the element that, together with the predicative, constitutes the linguistic apparatus. The performative aligns with sovereignty in the political schema, with impotentiality in the metaphysical schema, and with the *arché* in the temporal schema. Though all language involves a performative dimension, performatives also constitute a special class of speech. As a special class of speech, performatives occur when language, rather than describing a state of affairs, produces or actualizes a state of affairs. Oaths model this kind of performativity. As in a wedding vow, oaths, by declaring something to be the case, cause that thing to be the case (e.g. "with this ring, I thee wed"). As a result, performatives have a peculiarly self-referential structure: they are what they say they are. This self-referentiality is only possible through the suspension of predication. In the performative, language suspends predication in order to found its existential connection to things, just as in the state of exception the law suspends its own application in order to found its being in force. In this way, performatives foreground a universal dimension of language that, when reference and predication dominate, is merely implied: every predication, in order to bridge the gap between *langue* and *parole*, must be performed. Every predication is, at root, accompanied by an oath. Performative utterances, rather than being signs, are signatures and, because every act of predication implies an oath, every predicative sign bears the mark or signature of the linguistic performance that actualized its signifying potential. These signatures mark every sign with a remnant of its having been performed.

(CC 74, SL 54-56, 58, KG 181)

PLAY

On the Sabbath, in the context of a festival or jubilee, play is possible. Sequestered by law and economy into valuable, tradable, proprietary commodities, things lose their usefulness. As a result, use must be freed from its own value. The messianic task of freeing use from value, of profaning what had been consecrated and sequestered, is the task of play.

(CC 36, N 114, SE 64)

## POETRY

Poetry models the kind of messianic play that can suspend the work of predication and foreground the performative dimension of language. Poetry holds predication in reserve in order to store up a reservoir of linguistic potential. It accomplishes this suspension by caring more about how words sound than what they mean. In this way, poetry, as a form of glossolalia, models messianic inoperativity.

(TR 87, RA 119, CH, KG 251)

## POLITICS

Politics begins when life enters the polis. In the polis, life is overwritten by law and language and transformed into the good life, the conditioned life, the qualified life. In the polis, *zoē* becomes *bios*. Living beings have language in the same way that *zoē* dwells in the polis: as an exception. Humans dwell in the polis by allowing *zoē* (the state of nature) to be excluded from it. From the start, political life is structured by an inclusive exclusion. As political animals, humans both separate themselves from their own lives and maintain themselves in relation to those lives. This is the figure of the normal political subject: a figure of subjectivity that, on the one hand, is dominated by the linguistic, legal, cultural, and economic apparatuses that assign its governing

predicates and *teloi*, and, on the other hand, remains perpetually exposed to the creeping threat of sovereign violence and biopolitics.

Messianic politics displays the exception that structures its own existence. In doing so, it performs the coming community, a community that, rather than being mediated by a subject's belonging to any particular set of predicates, is mediated by belonging itself. In this way, the coming community enacts a new relationship to the sovereignty that constitutes it. Sovereignty is the point of application, the site of passage between law and life. It mediates the law's actualization in life. Messianic politics displays the exception that structures this mediation. It shows life in its nonrelation to law and law in its nonrelation to life. In doing so, it opens a space between law and life for human action. That is, it makes room for political action. Contemplation and inoperativity are the operators of nonrelation that liberate human lives from their biological and social destinies and assign them instead to the dimension of politics, the common work of the coming community.

(HS 7-8, SE 88)

## POTENTIALITY

Potentiality is the second element of Agamben's metaphysical schema. It aligns with law in the political schema, with *langue* in the linguistic schema, and with the future in the temporal schema. Normally, potentiality is defined in terms of actuality. In this case, potentiality has as its object a certain act and it exists only in passing to that determinate activity. Agamben argues that we need a new ontology of potentiality. We need an ontology of potentiality that is not founded on the primacy of actuality and that can, instead, give an account of potentiality as such. The key to such an ontology is impotentiality. Impotentiality is the power to *not* do something, the power

to hold potentiality in reserve without its passing over into an act. Here, the passive subject becomes active with respect to its own passivity, it actively holds itself back from being actualized. Impotentiality, by holding potentiality in reserve, constitutes potentiality as such, independent of its passage into actuality. Impotentiality is a kind of potentiality that takes potentiality itself as its object. It is potentiality put into relation with itself. Potentiality maintains some relation to actuality in this scenario, but it does so by not passing over into actuality.

(CC 36, HS 44-45, 47-48)

## POVERTY

Poverty, as a monastic practice, separates ownership from use. In this way, poverty models an important aspect of form-of-life: (1) it renders improper what was proprietary, and (2) it then performs this impropriety as what is most proper to it. Insofar as capitalism is an extreme form of religion, monastic poverty is a paradigmatic act of profanation.

(HP 113-115, 143)

## PROFANITY

Profanity takes what is proper and makes it improper. It is a way of conducting hand-to-hand with apparatuses. Profanity is a counter-apparatus. Where an apparatus sacralizes and sequesters substances by assigning predicates and *teloi*, a counter-apparatus liberates what was thus captured and makes it available for common use. Profanity, however, doesn't destroy the apparatus it opposes. Rather, it counters that apparatus by repurposing the apparatus itself. It counters the power of an apparatus to appropriate substances by suspending the gesture of identification that normally motivates a subject's performance of its assigned predicates. The

predicates continue to be performed, they continue to be just whatever they are, but now without any attempt at appropriation. Profanation is another name for the basic messianic operation. This is what the messiah does: the messiah profanes. The messiah puts an end to appropriation. He preserves and displays that remnant of impropriety that cannot be incorporated into any identity and, in doing so, he shows how to take up that impropriety as what is most proper to us. Those who despair over the world's profanity are just as impious as those who try to make the world sacred again.

(CC 90-91, WA 17-19, 24)

## PROPHET

In *The Time That Remains*, Agamben contrasts the figure of the prophet with the figure of the apostle. Where prophets are religious because they predict the chronological accomplishment of future *teloi*, apostles are messianic because they are kairotically oriented toward the good news of the *arché* as an unlivable dimension of the present moment. Paul is an apostle rather than a prophet. He doesn't predict a future messiah, he announces the present arrival of a messianic age.

However, in *Nudities*, Agamben contrasts the figure of the prophet with the figure of the angel. In this case, where angels are agents of the divine economy, bureaucrats charged with managing apparatuses, prophets are agents of the divine substance. Where angels are avatars of the power of creation, prophets are avatars of the power of redemption. Prophets tirelessly retrieve, undo, and arrest the progress of creation in order to complete and redeem all created things. Agamben notes that prophets disappear early in Western history and that, in the time that follows, those who want to link themselves to the prophets do so by interpreting scripture. Hermeneutics replaces prophecy. Hermeneutics is weak rather than strong, but this weakness is

appropriate to its messianic task. Hermeneutics, like poetry, relies on the humble, material, performative openness of the word.

(TR 59-61, N 1, 2, 4, 5-8, WA 53)

## PSEUDONYM

Pseudonyms, like nicknames, are improper names. Profanation turns every proper name into a pseudonym. Or better, profanation reveals the impropriety at the heart of every attempt to identify with a name as something proper to you. Pseudonymity structures subjectivity. Subjectivity results when the substance of a living being is overwritten with names and predicates by a linguistic apparatus. However, this process can only ever be partially successful: a remnant of life always remains that cannot coincide with the names that govern it. This remnant prevents the definitive appropriation of the names being performed. As a result, every proper name, insofar as it names a living being, is a pseudonym. The messianic vocation is to perform these names *as* pseudonyms, to display them as just what they are, rather than forever trying to close this gap of impropriety between life and language. In this way, the messianic does not evade names altogether in favor of a mute, mystical transcendence. Rather, it preserves them as pseudonyms. This transmutation of names into pseudonyms is what defines the messianic capacity to speak in tongues. Pseudonymity is the key to glossolalia. In glossolalia, the predicative content of an enunciation is suspended in order to display the position occupied by the speaking being, the “I” that is enunciating that content. This “I” that speaks, this “I” that occupies the position of enunciation, is the primal pseudonym. Glossolalia doesn’t abandon this “I” but performs it as such without any attempt to identify with it. It elevates its pseudonymity to

the second power so as to display the speaker's own impropriety as a crucial element of what it means to be human.

(CC 59-60, RA 131-132)

## PURE VIOLENCE

Pure violence (or divine violence) is a term borrowed from the work of Walter Benjamin. Violence is another name for sovereignty, the third element of Agamben's political schema and the element that, together with the law, composes an apparatus. Violence names that sovereign, extra-legal power that constitutes the law as normative and then applies that law in particular cases. This sovereign power is the point of passage between law and life. When the *teloi* that structure legal norms are canceled and this sovereign power is applied directly and violently to *zoē*, biopolitics results and bare life appears. In this scenario, sovereignty is deployed as pure means without regard to human ends, the horizons that structure life in the *polis* collapse, and, as a result, the city becomes the camp.

Pure violence is a messianic variation on this biopolitical nightmare. Pure violence names a kind of pure sovereignty that displays the founding relation between life and law. It displays the performative character of sovereignty by suspending rather than abolishing the *teloi* that typically animate the application of the law. Rather than being a means to something other end, pure violence holds itself in relation to its own status as a means. Rather than evaluating violence in light of the transcendent end it is pursuing, this messianic variation hopes to proceed by identifying a criterion immanent to the sphere of means themselves. In this way, pure violence is like the glossolalia characteristic of pure language: it raises sovereignty to the second power and, thus, puts this power in relation to itself so that sovereignty can witness the impropriety that

structures the relation of law to life. Or, pure violence is like impotentiality: suspending the relation between potentiality and actuality, it holds potentiality in reserve so as to define potentiality in relation to itself rather than in relation to actuality.

(HS 65, SE 61-62)

## RELIGION

Insofar as the aim of every apparatus is to sacralize and sequester substances, all apparatuses are religious in character. The basic religious operation is that of consecration. Consecration is achieved through sacrifice. By way of sacrifice, substances become sacred. In sacrifice, substances are separated from what is common and designated as the property of particular gods. In the same way, apparatuses separate substances by assigning them to particular classes of predicates and sequester them by subordinating them to some governing *teloi*. Through separation and sequestration, apparatuses aim to convert the open-ended potentiality of a substance into the well-defined actuality of a realized subject. To accomplish this, apparatuses must perpetually capture potentiality and inscribe that potentiality in the defined space of a separate, sacred sphere: the sphere of worship and liturgy.

The messianic doesn't oppose this religious operation but repeats it with a twist. Rather than trying to rescue lives from the liturgical apparatuses that overwrite and sequester them, the messianic aims at a form-of-life in which life and liturgy become indistinguishable and coextensive. As in the attempt to pray ceaselessly or practice poverty, liturgy becomes a form-of-life where, rather than being a specialized activity, it saturates every ordinary activity. As a result, this form-of-life causes what was separate to become common and what was sacred to become profane. Rather than life being a means to some separate religious or liturgical end, the

whole of life, being such as it is, is performed profanely for its own sake. This poetic, liturgical performance of potentiality as potentiality is the messianic gesture.

(HS 78, N 112, SL 59, 61, 65, CH, WA 17-18)

## REMNANT

Exceptionality and exemplarity are the fundamental structures that align Agamben's schemas across political, ontological, linguistic, and temporal genres. Remnants are the inevitable product of such structures. Remnants are neither universal nor particular. They name neither the all nor the part. Rather, remnants name the excess of the whole with respect to the part and of the part with respect to the whole. Because of remnants, neither parts nor wholes can coincide with themselves. And because of remnants, neither parts nor wholes can coincide with each other. Remnants are, rather, the non-coincidence of part and whole. Where the whole is the all and the part is the not-all, remnants are the not-not-all.

Remnants open a space of ease between each identity and itself. They are the source of the impropriety that structures human subjectivity, political belonging, metaphysical passage, and our temporal horizons. Because they make self-relation possible, they make self-identity impossible. The persistence of this remnant makes a human life both possible and irreparable. Where religious life tries to achieve salvation by sorting, absorbing, and ending the remnants that escape it, messianic life aims, instead, to perform their irreparability as what is most properly human. In this sense, remnants are the key to the soteriological machine. They are the unredeemable that make salvation possible. The *arché* is the paradigmatic remnant.

(TR 52, 55-56, 83, 106, RA 159, 162-164)

## RESEMBLANCE (WITHOUT ARCHETYPE)

Resemblance (without archetype) is a term that describes the appearance of a singularity. It describes a thing's being-such, its irreparable appearance as just whatever it is. Resemblance names what a body looks like when the appearance of that body is no longer subordinate to the predicates and archetypes assigned to it by an apparatus. These predicates remain in play but in a form of suspension that prevents them from claiming any definitive identity with the body they accompany. A body, irreparably itself, unanchored from its theological model, still bears a resemblance. But such a body, put in relation to its own existence, now resembles itself.

(CC 48, 50)

## RESURRECTION

Resurrected bodies model key elements of a messianic body. Resurrected bodies are identical to mortal bodies save for two differences: (1) their death has already passed, their end has already come, and yet they continue to live, and (2) they bear with them a kind of supernumerary glory or messianic halo. As a result, the resurrected body is the sabbatical body. In resurrection, the body keeps all of its organs for breathing, eating, defecating, and reproducing but these organs lack purpose. As part of a resurrected body, they now function perfectly, but, as part of a resurrected body, they no longer have any prescribed function. The resurrected body is the body whose functions are no longer executed for the sake of some other end. Rather, these functions are now performed for the sake of themselves, for the sake of displaying what they are. In this way, the resurrected body is an inoperative body: all of its predicates are present and functional *and* all of its predicates are held in reserve, inoperative, to display their power and potential. Because its organs are useless, the resurrected body is perfectly available for use.

(CC 92, N 90, 96, 98-99, 102)

## RULE or REGULA

Monastic rules model a messianic relation to the law. Rules are what laws look like from a messianic perspective. Rules are laws rendered inoperative, suspended as legislation meant to govern the particulars of one's behavior so that they can be performed, instead, as a form-of-life. Rules effect a shift of the law from the level of behavior to the level of life. Rather than striving futilely to coincide with the law's demands through identification and obedience, rules fulfill the law by way of faith. Rules, as a form-of-life, are powerful because they are faithful to life's being such as it is. More, monastic rules, as a form-of-life, cannot be imposed in the form of a law because Christian life cannot be conceived in juridical terms. Christian life proceeds as an exception to the law that, rather than canceling the law in a fit of sovereign, biopolitical antinomianism, addresses itself to the irreparability of human existence and, thus, fulfills the law through love. Witnessing the irreparable, owning this impropriety as what is most proper to the human, addressing oneself to the singular—this is the essence of love. Monastic rules enact love because they performatively realize the life they are meant to regulate. Of particular note is how, in this performance, rule and life enter into a zone of indistinction that reveals, messianically, a third thing: use.

(TR 27, HP 26, 47, 69, 71, 93-94)

## SABBATH

Sabbaths, festivals, and feast days all model Agamben's third temporal figure, messianic time. On the Sabbath day, all projects are suspended. Work of various kinds may be performed,

but the work must be performed for its own sake rather than for the sake of some assigned end. Performed for its own sake, work becomes a kind of play and those participating in the seriousness of this play can enter into messianic rest. The Sabbath displays the remnant of time, the *arché*, that displaces humans in relation to themselves. It is a general name for the innermost disjointedness of time that, if occupied, allows one to grasp time.

(TR 96, N 104-106, 110, 112, KG 240)

## SAINT

Saints are messianic figures. They live a monastic life, a form-of-life, that models Agamben's third figure of subjectivity in the political schema. A saint is someone who fails to recognize things as "mine." They fail to recognize or identify with what is proper to them. Lacking this gesture of identification, failing to stake their identity on belonging to some particular class of predicates, they suspend the pursuit of an identity and build, instead, a community organized around the fact of belonging itself. Suspending the gesture of identification, saints avoid mistaking life for its masks.

(N 47, 54)

## SALVATION

If evil is a failure to witness the irreparability of things, then salvation depends on an ability to display the world's profanity. No longer running from our impotence, things will appear as they are. No longer running after achievement and completion, salvation arrives. Salvation comes for the world only when we no longer want to be saved from the world. Lives must be irreparably lost in order to be found. This art of losing is the messianic vocation. Rather than

contemplating the world as if it were already saved, messianic subjects contemplate salvation only to the extent that they lose themselves in what cannot be saved. This is what makes the messianic vocation so difficult: the saved world coincides with a world that is irretrievably lost. This applies even to God. The only way to save God is to refuse to disguise the irreparability of the world's being-without-God.

The task of salvation precedes the task of creation. Where the angelic work of creation involves a massive display of realized power, of potentiality passing over into concrete actuality, the prophetic work of salvation involves a tenuous display of impotence. The work of salvation depends on displaying the potentiality that anticipates and exceeds the act of creation, the potentiality that, held in reserve by impotentiality, is never exhausted by any passage into actuality. Salvation depends on the persistence of this remnant of potentiality that both gives creation and, persisting as a disjunction at the heart of it, prevents the created world from coinciding with itself. It depends on a potentiality to create that remains pending, a reserve of saved potential, that turns on itself and saves itself from becoming actual. This remnant of saved potential, of chronogenetic time, prevents the work of creation from ever being completed. It renders everything irreparable. It unfinishes and decreates. It opens and exposes. It sets the world in relation to itself and positions it as a witness to its own profane passing away. Here, salvation and creation coincide in the unsavable and salvation arrives only we no longer have any use for it.

(CC 6, 102, TR 56-57, N 3-8)

SIGNATURE

Signatures are another name for ciphers, figures, or types. Signatures refer to that element of a sign that exceeds the sign itself. Rather than referring to the predicative dimension of the sign, they refer to the performative dimension of that predication. Every sign bears a mark, a remnant, a signature, left by the performance that constituted it. That is, every sign or time-image bears a trace of the *arché* that delivered it. These signatures provide a secret index that, keyed to the *arché* rather than their content, connects terms across different times and fields. Signatures allow a sign to be displaced from one field to another without any semantic change. A classic example of such displacement is Paul's conception of typology. On Agamben's reading, Nietzsche's genealogy, Benjamin's theory of dialectical images, Foucault's archeology, and Derrida's deconstruction are all sciences of signatures.

(N 37-38, OD 87, KG 4)

## SINGULARITY

Singularity is a name for the third figure in the metaphysical schema. Where the first figure is universal and the second figure is particular, the third figure is singular. Singularity aligns with the messianic subject in the political schema, with glossolalia in the linguistic schema, and with *kairos* in the temporal schema. It is synonymous with being-such, being-thus, and whatever being. Singularities are structured as exclusive inclusions. They are exemplary and, thus, evade the antimony between the universal and the particular. An example is a particular member of a class but, as an example, it is a particular member that displays the characteristics that are universally shared by all members of that class. However, because it displays what it means to belong to the whole of the class, the example also fails to belong to that class. Normal, non-exemplary members of the class don't display the fact of their belonging. Normal members just

belong. In this way, singularities suspend the priority of the predicative content that allows them to belong to their class in order to exhibit instead the performative quality of their belonging.

(CC 1, 9-10, 17, 65, 67, 85, 93, 94, TR 51)

## SOVEREIGNTY

Sovereignty is the third element of the political schema, the element that, together with the law, constitutes a political apparatus. Sovereignty aligns with impotentiality in the metaphysical schema, with performativity in the linguistic schema, and with the *arché* in the temporal schema. Sovereignty is structured as an exception to the law. The sovereign, because he has power to both enforce and suspend the law, is legally placed outside of the law. The sovereign is included in the law as what is excluded from the law. In this way, sovereignty establishes a threshold between law and life, a zone of indistinction between right and nature. Both inside and outside the law, sovereignty makes possible the application of the law to life. It performs the law. Aligned with impotentiality, an act is sovereign when that act realizes itself simply by taking away its own power not to be. Such acts are immanently determined as a kind of letting be, a performative giving of itself to itself.

(HS 6, 8, 15, 19-21, 28, 32, 35-39, 41, 46, 51, 64, 84, SE 31, 35)

## SPIRITUALITY

Spirituality is a name for the irreparable disjunction at the heart of each thing. It names that remnant of potentiality that both gives a thing to itself and cannot be included in that thing. In this sense, spirituality is a name for the non-thingness of a thing. It names the non-thingness that haunts each thing and displaces it in relation to itself. To practice spirituality you must lose

yourself in things to the point that things are all that is left. You must consign yourself to the impossibility of anything other than things. Then, consigned to irreparable thingness, you may bump into the limit of things. This limit is the site of the messianic.

(CC 102-103)

## SPECTRALITY

Specters are made of ciphers, figures, types, and signatures. They are the mark left on each thing by the *arché* that originated it. Each thing, passing into time, is haunted by a temporal shadow, a remnant of time, that cannot be included in the image itself. Spectrality is a form of life that is keyed to the presence of these specters. This form of life can begin only when everything is finished and all *teloi* have become inoperative. Spectrality bears with it an incomparable grace, the kind of grace appropriate to a life that is finished, that no longer has anywhere to go or any goal to achieve. Laying down this burden, spectrality occupies a Sabbatical space, a space of ease.

(N 37-39)

## STATE OF EXCEPTION

The state of exception is key to understanding bare life. Bare life is the second figure of subjectivity in Agamben's political schema. The state of exception names a particular configuration of law, sovereignty, and life: the biopolitical configuration. Originally operative only in extreme situations, the state of exception is meant to guarantee political order and the application of the law to life through the temporary suspension of legal norms. In the state of exception, legal norms are suspended while life remains in thrall to sovereignty. The term ban

names this sovereign being in force without (normative) significance. Just as linguistic elements subsist in *langue* without the kind of real denotation that comes only from their application in actual discourse, so in the state of exception the legal elements remain in force but without any application to reality. The application of the law, as normative, is suspended in an attempt to secure the law's being in force. The state of exception, then, is the political equivalent of a linguistic scenario where there are semiotics without semantics. Just as grammar isolates language from discourse, the state of exception isolates norms from concrete custom and usage. Politically, this scenario describes the logic of biopolitics. In biopolitics, the state of exception, rather than being rare, becomes the new norm. The state of exception describes the biopolitical logic that structures the camp and reduces humans to the Muselmann. It positions humans as *homo sacer*.

(HS 59, 153, SL 56, SE 31, 35-37, 39, 88, HP 115)

## SUBJECTIVITY

Three figures of subjectivity populate the political schema: the normal subject, *homo sacer*, and the messianic subject. These figures of subjectivity align with parallel figures across the metaphysical, linguistic, and temporal schemas. Each of these schemas illuminates important aspects of what it means to be a human subject. Subjects result when substances are captured and overwritten by apparatuses. The structure of the subject depends on how the captured substance is configured in relation to the elements of the apparatus. In the political schema, the substance in question is life and the apparatus is jointly composed by law and sovereignty. But insofar as every apparatus (political or otherwise) is, formally, a kind of language, the basic issues at stake in human subjectivity always come back to the relationship of life to language.

Every subject is composed of two flows: the body's continuous flow of vital functions and the flow of language. Though these flows may be superimposed, a remnant always persists. The flows are intimate but intimacy is not identity. Intimacy requires both proximity and distance. The superposition of these flows makes it possible for a subject to say "I," but this same "I" is also the site of a disjunction between the body's vital functions and the predicative content of its inner history, between the living being's becoming a speaking being and the speaking being's sensation of itself as living. The "I" both places and displaces life and language in relation to each other such that the dream-state of the vital functions and the waking-state of personal consciousness never quite coincide.

With respect to subjectivity, the performative dimension of language is decisive. What matters most is not the predicative tools that language makes available in speaking but the performative place it prepares for the "I" that is the speaker. Language prepares within itself a position of enunciation, a hollowed-out form that the speaker must occupy in order to speak. In this way, language gives voice to life. But life, in order to speak, must fit itself to language. This passage is sufficiently difficult that, in order to succeed, life must lose itself in language. To become a human subject, life must subject itself to being overwritten by the linguistic apparatus. But, again, this fit, though pliable, is poor enough that every gesture of subjectification simultaneously invokes a gesture of desubjectification. Life can identify with the position of the speaker and claim that position as what is proper to it only by excepting what, in its own character, is improper to the work of language. Subjectivity is structured by these exceptions and improprieties.

These improprieties are both empowering and irreparable. Subjectification, by way of this impropriety, produces consciousness in the event of discourse. Human consciousness is woven

from this delicate, composite tissue of life and language. It has no foundation beyond the fragile acts of speech that perform not only the work of speaking but the work of constituting a speaker. This “I” that speaks, the “I” with which life strives to identify, is a linguistic property. The work of constituting a subject tends to be traumatic because the fragile text of consciousness constantly crumbles and erases itself, bringing to light the disjunction that founds it. The impossibility of completing this work, of exhausting potentiality in actuality, of reaching an end, of no longer needing to speak again, of no longer feeling compelled to repeat the gesture of identification once again—this is what makes humanity irreparable. Because being conscious means being consigned to identify with something that cannot be assumed, shame is the hidden structure of all subjectivity. To be conscious is to be ashamed. To be human is to be guilty of this perpetual, systemic failure to make life coincide with the demands of law and language. To be human is to perpetually recycle (both verbally and mentally) an endless stream of insubstantial chatter, not for the sake of what is spoken but for the sake of generating again and again the self, the subject, the “I” that speaks.

(TR 66-67, SL 70-71, RA 107-109, 112, 115-117, 119, 121-125, 128, 147, 152, WA 11, 20-22)

## SUBSTITUTION

Substitution is a name for the impropriety that disjoins every being from itself. It is synonymous with ease or exposure. It is a crucial characteristic of a thing’s being singular. Because every being is improper, it is impossible for any being to coincide with itself. It is impossible for a being to identify, without remainder, with the predicates and *teloi* assigned to define it. However, though this impropriety makes identity and self-coincidence impossible, it is also what puts beings in relation to themselves and to others. Substitution is possible because

every position is, at its heart, a vicarious position. This is why impropriety is crucial to love. Love is vicarious. Love, rather than suppressing impropriety, displays it. Love is an exiling of oneself, without remedy, to the impropriety of the other.

(CC 23-24, WA 35)

## TIME-IMAGE

Time-images are representations of time. They present time as though each moment were always already constructed. Presenting time as constituted, they ignore the sovereign work of constitution. However, despite this ignorance, every time-image bears the trace of a remnant of time for which it cannot account. This remnant of time is called operational time. This remnant cannot be included in the time-image itself because operational time names the time it takes for that image itself to be constructed. Time-images, because they occlude operational time, give the impression of temporal inevitability. They deliver the present moment as if it were the inevitable outcome of past events and governing *teloi*. They give the impression that the present holds no element of potentiality in reserve and, as a result, they forget that the origin, the *arché*, is located in the present rather than in the past.

(TR 65-66)

## TYPE or FIGURE

Types are synonymous with ciphers, figures, or signatures. Keyed to the *arché*, types make it possible for apostles and archeologists to read history typologically rather than chronologically. Typological readings make both the past and the future contemporary and restore potentiality to situations that, otherwise, appear to be inevitable and exhausted.

(TR 77, WA 53)

## USE

Use is a key messianic term. Profanity, as a counter-apparatus, makes things useful again. Where apparatuses work to sacralize and sequester substances in line with the predicates and *teloi* assigned to govern them, profanation works to suspend the priority of these proprietary gestures and, thus, make substances common and available again for use.

Use is another name for work that is sabbatical. It is exemplified by the kind of messianic vocation displayed in glossolalia, monastic poverty, and resurrected bodies. Use, though it suspends the governance of *teloi*, is not an insipid absence of purpose. Rather, use renders inoperative any activity directed toward an end in order to perform that same activity for its own sake. It disposes the activity toward a new use that doesn't abolish its old use but, instead, performs and exhibits that old use. Use takes the world's irreparability seriously. It owns the world's impropriety as what is most proper to it. It displays the world as inappropriable. It refashions laws into rules and behaviors into a form-of-life. This is the messianic age: the day when humanity will play with the law like a disused object, freed for what is useful and good.  
(CC 28-29, TR 26, SE 64, HP 71, 115, 123, 136, 138)

## WEREWOLF

Werewolves are a model for *homo sacer*. They are the figure of the human banned from the city. The werewolf does not align with life prior to the intervention of a political apparatus (*zoē*) or with life as it is lived in the city under the governance of a political apparatus (*bios*). Rather, the werewolf is the figure expelled from the city and included under the umbrella of legal norms

only in terms of its exclusion from the application of those norms. The werewolf is neither human nor beast but their zone of indistinction. In this way, the werewolf is an avatar of bare life. The figure of the werewolf also approximates the position occupied by the sovereign. If *homo sacer* is the werewolf wandering outside the city walls, the sovereign is the figure of the werewolf wandering inside the city walls.

(HS 105, 107)

## WHATEVER BEING

Whatever being is a name for the third figure in the metaphysical schema. It is synonymous with being-such, being-thus, and singularity. In the political schema, it aligns with the messianic subject and the coming community. In the linguistic schema it aligns with glossolalia. Whatever being is existence reclaimed from its belonging to this or that essence, this or that predicate, this or that class. It names a kind of existential solidarity that is not oriented by an essence but instead, depends on the performance of a thing's being whatever it is. Whatever being, like a singularity, is structured by its exemplarity. In the same way that singularities evade the difference between what is universal and what is particular by exemplifying what it means for an individual to belong to a class, whatever being evades the difference between what is common and what is proper. Evading this difference, whatever being takes its impropriety as what is most proper to it. It performs its predicates but it also suspends any attempt to identify with these predicates. In this way, whatever being is indifferent to the predicates it lovingly performs.

In whatever being, the common and the proper, the potential and actual, enter into a zone of indistinction. Whatever being functions as a kind of watershed that both joins and disjoins these disparate slopes. It is the point of passage between them. The manner in which something

accomplishes this passage and crosses this watershed is called use or *ethos*. Further, as the point of passage between potentiality and actuality, whatever being aligns with impotentiality.

Whatever being names a being's capacity to be whatever it is, rather than identifying its substance in a proprietary fashion with some particular predicates. It names a being's capacity to hold itself in reserve and, thus, *not-be* some particular predicate.

(CC 1, 17, 20, 50, 67)

#### WITNESS or TESTIMONY

Witness is a key messianic term. To witness is to performatively display the impropriety and irreparability that structure the world. It is to testify on behalf of what cannot speak for itself. It is to testify to the impossibility of life coinciding with language. Witnessing takes the form of glossolalia. Rather than foregrounding the predicative dimension of language in order to facilitate the referential identification of life with language, witnessing foregrounds the performative dimension of language in order to exhibit what is at stake in any passage between the two. In particular, witnessing exhibits the impossibility of rendering in language the remnants of time and life that, in the construction of time-images or acts of predication, are systematically produced and excluded. Witnessing is the ethos of the disjunction between life and language.

This is to say, the intimacy that betrays our noncoincidence with ourselves is the place of testimony. Where the archive designates the system of predication that governs relations between the said and the unsaid, testimony names the system of relations between the inside and outside of language, between what is sayable and unsayable in any language. As a result, witnessing may bear its most effective testimony by way of silence. This is not the silence characteristic of those who cannot speak. Rather, it is the glossolalic silence proper to impotentiality: the silence

characteristic of those who are capable of not speaking. In this silence, the human can bear witness to the inhuman. In order to witness, we must stop looking for an apocalyptic *telos* in which the living being and the speaking being can be reconciled in a realized identity. Rather than looking for an end, we must look for a remnant, a disjunction at the center of things, a site where testimony is possible.

(TR 40, RA 39, 120-121, 130, 133-135, 144-146, 157-158)

## ZOĒ

*Zoē* is the first element of the political schema. It aligns with prior actuality in the metaphysical schema, with *phonē* in the linguistic schema, and with the past in the temporal schema. *Zoē* only ever appears as the material that must be presupposed in relation to the work of an apparatus and never appears independent of that work. *Zoē* is the simple fact of living common to all living beings. It is simple, natural life, life in a “state of nature.” It is reproductive life. *Zoē* must be distinguished from *bios* (life captured and governed by law and language) and bare life (life directly exposed to sovereign violence without the protection of legal norms).

(HS 1, 2, 20, 21, 37)

## ZONE OF NONKNOWLEDGE

Nonknowledge is the epistemological equivalent of what, in a metaphysical register, is referred to as impotentiality. In the same way that impotentiality depends on a capacity to not be something—to not actualize a certain potential—nonknowledge involves a capacity to not know something. Nonknowledge depends on an ability to hold ourselves in relation to what escapes us. Only a capacity for nonknowledge can redeem what we know. Maintaining ourselves in right

relation with our ignorance, allowing an absence of knowledge to guide and accompany our gestures, a messianic silence distills. Nonknowledge, as the art of ignorance, neither exalts what escapes us (as in mysticism) nor fills it with phantasms (as in religion or psychoanalysis). Rather, the art of nonknowledge just keeps watch over this darkness as the ordinary thing it is. Practicing this art, life can manage its weakness and performs its impropriety with ease and grace. Here, life becomes capable of beauty because beauty is, at heart, a successful way of not knowing oneself.

(N 113-114, UG 12)

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