

# ○ LANGUAGE, EXCEPTION, MESSIANISM

## THE THEMATICS OF AGAMBEN ON DERRIDA

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This paper revisits Giorgio Agamben's text, *The Time That Remains*, and through a comparative analysis, contrasts the author's reading of St Paul's Romans to relevant Derridean thematics prevalent in the text. Specific themes include language, the law, and the subject. I illustrate how Agamben attempts to revitalise the idea of philosophical anthropology by breaking away from the deconstructive approach. Agamben argues that language is an experience but is currently in a state of nihilism. Consequently, the subject has become lost; or, more specifically, the subject and its object have not disappeared *in* language but *through* language. The resuscitation of experience is thus required to defeat this condition: only in language does the subject have its site and origin. Unlike deconstruction, which highlights an inherent paradox within a situation unearthing a questionable foundation, Agamben argues that, by investigating the 'exception,' one finds neither a norm nor an inherent truth of the situation, but the confusion which surrounds them both.

### INTRODUCTION

In this paper I present a critique of Giorgio Agamben's reading of St Paul's Romans, as it appears in his text *The Time That Remains*, and by way of comparative analysis, I aim to contrast Agamben's reading to relevant Derridean thematics in Romans. Why Jacques Derrida? Namely because deconstruction remains a modern and powerful branch of European thought; furthermore, I read Agamben, as a post-secular thinker along with, for example, Alain Badiou and Slavoj Žižek, as developing a position of philosophical investigation very much positioned against deconstruction.

It is important to note that Pauline scholarship exists within two disciplines: the biblical and the philosophical.<sup>1</sup> This paper is concerned with the latter. Interestingly, these two disciplines do not usually speak to one another: philosophers tend not to consult biblical scholars and vice versa. Philosophy therefore has its own tradition in Pauline scholarship. From Heidegger to Lacan, to Kristeva to Žižek, many philosophers have contributed to the interpretation of Paul's epistles, to the extent that philosophers eventually become labelled – or label themselves – as 'Jewish thinkers' (Taubes, Levinas), atheists (Derrida, Žižek, Badiou) or even 'nihilists' (Nietzsche).<sup>2</sup> Agamben cites a number of philosophers, from Aristotle to Benjamin, as well as the works of Weber and Émile Benveniste. My interest in Paul may be located within this philosophical context.

This paper thus has two dimensions of critique: first, I will illustrate how certain Pauline themes have a distinct resonance in the work of Derrida and how they compare to Agamben's readings of these themes in *The Time That Remains*; and two, to identify how Agamben, as a contemporary thinker, challenges the legacy of deconstruction. The Pauline themes I have chosen to focus on (law and justice, language and the subject) have been partly inspired by the work of biblical scholar, Theodore W. Jennings Jr., and by the fact that certain themes of Derrida have a distinct Pauline resonance.<sup>3</sup> In investigating how Agamben interprets the Derridean legacy, I will ask: to what extent does Agamben challenge deconstruction? Are his arguments original and

cogent? How does his approach to the themes of law and justice, language and the subject differ from Derrida's?

## **DERRIDA ON PAUL: DECONSTRUCTING LAW AND JUSTICE?**

In offering a brief description of Derrida's project and his creation of the philosophical concept of 'deconstruction,' I wish to focus on two particular aspects. First, in Derrida's early work he argues that deconstruction is not a method of analysis in the sense of a process or operation applied to a particular text; it is not something one does actively, but something that happens within a particular discourse, on the inside, and done out of its own resources. A paradox within the very architecture of the structure is revealed and this paradox allows deconstruction to exist. In 'Force of Law,' Derrida states: 'It is a deconstructive questioning that starts – as has been the case – by destabilizing, complicating, or recalling the paradoxes of values...' (Derrida, 2002a, 235).

Second, I believe that Derrida's later work – his so-called 'ethical turn' – elaborates the affirmative nature of deconstruction. Here, Derrida writes of hospitality, forgiveness, ethics and religion.<sup>4</sup> Crucial to these themes is the role of the other or, specifically, a welcoming of the other in its alterity. These two points – the paradox revealed within any structure and the acceptance of the alterity of the other – are both crucial to deconstruction. Deconstruction therefore seeks to create a new future through the revelation of paradox and the acceptance of the other. I have used these two points to inform my reading of Romans. I will bring out certain Pauline themes in Derrida, which I will later critique using Agamben.

Reading Romans through Derrida, one may focus on the themes of law and justice. For Derrida, justice is inextricably linked to law, its processes and its deconstructibility. Each has its own role whereby law is a system constructed, therefore – automatically – rendering it deconstructible, and justice is seen as the outcome of law. Justice is produced, created from law, rendering law the necessary calculation for justice. Derrida states: 'Law is the element of calculation, and it is just that there be law, but justice is incalculable, it demands that one calculate with the incalculable' (Derrida, 2002a, 244). Justice exceeds law and the enormity of its force lies in its ability to question, challenge, interrupt, and destabilise the operations of law. In 'Force of Law,' justice is a form of deconstruction: 'Justice in itself, if such a thing exist [sic], outside or beyond law, is not deconstructible. No more than deconstruction itself, if such a thing exist [sic]. *Deconstruction is justice*' (Derrida, 2002a, 243).

Deconstruction as justice is also concerned with the other, or, true justice is the arrival of the other: it is always *to come*. Similarly, Paul's justice is one that awaits the arrival of the divine justice *to come*. For Paul, the distinction between law and justice is equally important. Law stands in contrast to justice or, as Jennings states: 'that justice as such or the justice of God stands in fundamental tension with the law or bodies of laws' (Jennings Jr. 2006, 39). Paul clearly believes in divine justice and that 'human' justice is impossible. The human attempt at justice fails in light of divine justice to the point where the latter is brought to the fore. In Paul's view, there is only God's justice. Almost identically to the way Derrida sees deconstruction as justice, Paul sees the divine as justice: deconstruction equals justice (Derrida); God's justice is the only justice (Paul). If the arrival of the other is true justice (Derrida), then the true other is Paul's divine justice, i.e., God. According to this view, deconstruction is divine.

Despite the law's inability to produce justice for Paul, it is nevertheless integral to the coming of 'true' divine justice. Adherence to law is of key importance to Paul: the insistence that law be adhered to as a social reality enforces the articulation of justice as law. It serves as a disciplinary or guardian force, as a promise of what is to come beyond the law. Without law, there is no recognition of injustice. It is indispensable to the goal of justice due to the reality that law itself alerts us to a violation of the other – that is, to injustice. Paul writes: 'I would not have known what it is to covet if the law had not said, "You shall not covet"' (Romans 7:7).<sup>5</sup> He goes on to argue that the law serves as: 'the embodiment of knowledge and truth' (Romans 2:20) in order to know of injustice. Justice is what is testified to and through the law. Paul's argument is that law does not produce justice, but rather injustice; hence confirming Derrida's position on the impossibility of law to create justice.

In 'Force of Law,' Derrida asks how one can speak of justice: How does one do justice to the act of speaking about justice, so to speak? For Derrida, this is an ethical situation, one he treats with great care to avoid 'nihilistic' or 'destructive' criticism. He claims that to speak of justice directly would betray the very purpose of justice: 'one cannot speak *directly* about justice, thematize or objectivize justice, say 'this is just,' and even less 'I am just,' without immediately betraying justice, if not law' (Derrida, 2002a, 237). This approach is exercised by what Derrida labels deconstructive questioning: a destabilizing and complicating, recalling of paradoxes of values within a deconstructible system. Such systems are what he labels 'oblique' discourses on justice because they operate before the creation of justice: 'discourses on double affirmation, the gift beyond exchange and distribution, the undecidable, the incommensurable or the incalculable, on singularity, difference and heterogeneity are also, through and through, at least oblique discourses on justice' (Derrida, 2002a, 235). Justice operates beyond the limits of law and for this reason Derrida views deconstruction as justice. In an earlier text, *Spectres of Marx*, Derrida insists that 'justice is the undeconstructable condition of any deconstruction' (Derrida, 1994, 28). This means that through justice one is able to see the finitude of law and hence the infinite power of deconstruction: justice exceeds deconstruction by virtue of being its condition. It is an infinite, incalculable, rebellious force and at the same time the exercise of justice as law is a legitimate and legal force, and a calculable apparatus [*dispositif*] of a ghostly, ungraspable nature.

Despite the same outcome in Derrida and Paul – that justice is beyond law – Paul has his own reasons, but not too different from deconstruction. Justice, for Paul, is *to come*. The call or claim for justice is an act severed from compliance with the law. Since for Paul the only justice is divine justice, then no 'human' law can decree that one is just. But this is precisely the part-function of law: to create rules that one must obey to create a positive sense of self, to view oneself as just. One's compliance with the law – combined with the inability to be labelled just since only God is justice – highlights the 'deconstructibility' of the law. But compliance with the law eventually leads to the divine: 'For Christ is the end of the law so that there may be righteousness for everyone who believes' (Romans 10:4). 'Everyone' for Paul means both Jews and gentiles and thus all of humanity.<sup>6</sup> Paul sees faith as the requirement for (divine) justice: 'to everyone who believes.' Faith is what makes the idea of justice possible and actual.

The deconstructibility of law makes deconstruction possible, as does the undeconstructibility of justice, which is indeed inseparable from it. As a consequence, Derrida states that deconstruction takes place in the space between the undeconstructibility of justice and the deconstructibility of

law. As a temporal, suspended process – always-already at work – it strikes a chord with the theme of temporality in Paul’s Epistle. For Paul, the distinction between law and justice is also temporal: it entails the coming of a future that is more than a prolongation of the present. There is an importance of living in anticipation of the accomplishment of that justice which is to come: ‘But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience’ (Romans 8:25). The theme of hope displaces the new justice from that which is present, that which is ‘visible.’

Now I will contrast my Derridean reading of law and justice in Romans to Agamben’s reading of Paul.

## AGAMBEN ON PAUL (AND A NEW REALITY)

Agamben’s mission as a contemporary philosopher is to revitalise the idea of philosophical anthropology. Influenced by the work of Heidegger, Foucault and Benjamin, he critically explores the metaphysical presuppositions that inform this mode of thought and its claim that the defining essence of the human is that of having language. Agamben’s argument is that language is an experience itself but is currently in a state of nihilism.<sup>7</sup> Consequently, the subject has become lost through language. The resuscitation of experience is thus required to defeat this condition: only in language does the subject have its site and origin. Unlike deconstruction, which highlights an inherent paradox within a situation unearthing a questionable foundation, Agamben argues that by investigating the ‘exception,’ one finds neither a norm nor an inherent truth of the situation, but the confusion which surrounds them both. Crucial to this reading is the theme of messianism in Romans, which grounds Agamben’s position against Derrida. Agamben even argues that: ‘Deconstruction is a thwarted messianism, a suspension of the messianic’ (Agamben, 2005, 103).

Agamben reads Paul’s dealings with the law as problematic. Paul attempts to affirm the authority and goodness of the law, but at times fuses this with a more varied approach – the goodness of law merged with faith and the promise. Agamben reads Paul as attempting to combine upholding the law and a belief in faith, which sees the messianic influence as ‘a time in which the law would not be destroyed but deactivated and rendered inoperative – that is, used in a different way’ (De Boever, 2008, 93). Agamben reads the importance of deactivation as ‘inoperative, not-at-work (*a-ergos*), inactive’ as the verb *katargeō*. He also acknowledges Paul’s difficulty in articulating faith and the law and, in light of this, Agamben’s messianism becomes a struggle *within* the law whereby ‘promise’ or faith (*diathēkē*) and ‘commandment’ or law (*entolē, nomos tōn entolōn*) are elements messianism abandons in the attempt at emancipation from the commandment of law, *entolē*. He also argues that the very notion of overturning law is ‘itself symptomatic of an inability to escape the thought structures of the law and the state’ (Kaufman, 2008, 43). Agamben’s messianism is an historical process which illuminates the link between law and faith as it reaches crisis point resulting in *pistis*, faith, and frees itself from obligatory conduct and positive law.

Agamben approaches Paul’s treatment of promise and faith through a critique of the Greek *nomos*, law. The relation between *euaggelion* (reward) and *pistis* is read in Romans: ‘it is the power [*dynamis*] of God for salvation to everyone who has faith’ (Romans 1:16). Importantly, *dynamis* signifies *power* and *possibility*. Agamben reads Paul’s themes here as faith and the act with regards to potentiality which is the moment of suspension in the space of actuality. He reads in Paul the division of salvation as promise and faith (*epaggelia* and *pistis*) on one side, and

*nomos* (law) on the other: 'For 'no human being will be justified in his sight' by deeds prescribed by the law, for through the law comes the knowledge of sin' (Romans 3:20). But Agamben points out that law is given not for salvation but for knowledge of sin, that the promise may also be opposed to the law.<sup>8</sup>

Crucial to Agamben's reading of law is 'prelaw': the prejudicial sphere that existed before the development of law, a time when religion (faith) and law were one, a time of no difference. For Agamben, prelaw is necessary when considering grace. He acknowledges Paul's split between law and faith, the former as necessary for the salvation to come, the latter as operative without the law. But the paradox is shattered when this split is acknowledged as derivative of prelaw and it is this rupture that creates gratuitousness [*gratuita*], or grace. Grace is what keeps faith and law from splitting completely apart. This is why Agamben sees grace and law as of such importance for Paul. Grace illuminates in faith the fulfilment of the justice of the law.<sup>9</sup>

He turns to Paul's attention to grace and its consistent mentioning with faith. Law and grace are expressed as oppositions and derivative of their clash as an aporia. On the one hand, there is a law that is holy and of true integrity; on the other, a faith that can make salvation a real possibility 'without law' [*senze legge*]. Faith and law – beyond their marriage in prelaw – now split and yield to grace [*gratuita*]. For Agamben, grace is this 'excess,' which prevents law and faith (*pré-driot*) from completely breaking apart and joining. The spheres of grace and law in Paul are further complicated because this rupture between law and faith is precisely the force that sustains faith and fulfilment, justice and the law. What Agamben reads in Paul is the theme of disconnection.

On the theme of messianism, Agamben gestures towards a politics and even an ethics which is mostly to be *thought*. Differing greatly from Derrida's position of a politics or justice intertwined with alterity to come, Agamben emphasises that what is 'to come' is instead to be *thought* and that humanity must 'engage in experimental thinking, especially in the face of a situation where the traditional semantic and syntactic rules for connecting life and death, for narrating their connection, have been destroyed' (Vogt, 2005, 81). For Agamben, the theme of the messianic and its potential to fuse the concepts of history and temporality (thus, the present), creates the potential to focus on a new reality yet to be created. Messianism is therefore, for Agamben, a suspension and deactivation of the law, 'rendering the law inexecutable' (Agamben, 2005, 98).

Agamben sees messianism in Romans as revealing a 'form of life' only possible through including *zoē* (the natural) and *bios* (the political) within the creation of the biopolitical subject<sup>10</sup>, thus creating a politico-philosophical idea of *life*.<sup>11</sup> Agamben's aim with messianism, or the 'form of life' it creates, is to overturn contemporary nihilism by redefining the themes of the subject, life and biopower.<sup>12</sup>

He acknowledges that the messianic event is the resurrection of Jesus (Agamben, 2005, 63) which is also related to messianic time.<sup>13</sup> He figures messianic time as a suspension and inversion of time, neither 'complete nor incomplete,' neither the 'past nor the future,' but the inversion of both. Paul's expression, 'the time of the now,' is read by Agamben as a contracted time stretching from the moment of the event to the full presence of the Messiah (the return of Christ, the second coming). For Agamben, messianic time is: 'not *the end of time, but the time of the end...*it is the time that contracts itself and begins to finish – or, if you prefer, the time that is left between time and its ending' (Agamben, 2002, 2). In contrast to the linear beginning-middle-end of chronolo-

gical time, messianic time is an active ‘operational’ time at work within chronological time and is the time needed for time to end: ‘*the time that is left us [il tempo che ci resta]*’ (Agamben, 2005, 68). It is the time humankind has to achieve its own representations of time, the only time humankind actually has.

Agamben’s work on messianism in *The Time That Remains* is more generally a model of his theory of potentiality, which he posits as a re-thinking central to overcoming contemporary nihilism. The ‘in-between’ or ‘suspension’ is a moment of temporality in the space of actuality. Moreover, Paul combines law with faith which creates a messianic vision, and creates the suspension characteristic of Agamben’s potentiality. Messianism is the suspension that may lead to the fulfilment of potentiality, to turn potentiality to itself. Agamben reads this notion of potentiality in Romans through the word *katargēsis*, meaning a condition of potential fulfilment: ‘Our knowledge is imperfect and our prophesying is imperfect. When the perfect comes, the imperfect will be rendered inoperative [*katargēthēsai*]’ (Agamben, 2005, 99).

For Agamben, exception is dependent on what is excluded from a norm precisely because the law maintains itself in relation to the exception in the form of its own self-suspension.<sup>14</sup> The law is applied without having to apply itself. The exception is not an exclusion, but an ‘*inclusive exclusion...in the literal sense of the term: a seizing of the outside*’ (Agamben, 2005, 105). What he calls ‘the state of exception’ comes after the suspension of order: it is ‘not the chaos that precedes order but rather the situation that results from its suspension’ (Agamben, 1998, 18).

I have explained that the messianic represents a simultaneous suspension and fulfilment of the law. On the state of exception, Agamben argues that the law is maintained as an authority and as a structure through its own self-suspension. He draws the analogy of the exception beyond the law, outside of it, but absolutely necessary to the sustainability of law. Here we see a similarity to Derrida’s approach: law as constructible and deconstructible; an operation that occurs within the system with the aim of externalising its core attributes with the intent of contradiction. Agamben’s state of exception represents the potential for expression by means of its metamorphosis to become something other than what it is by way of the exception. In *Homo Sacer*, Agamben states: ‘The exception does not subtract itself from the rule; rather, the rule, suspending itself, gives rise to the exception and, maintaining itself in relation to the exception, first constitutes itself as a rule’ (Agamben, 1998, 18).

## **AGAMBEN ON LANGUAGE AND SIGNIFICATION: THE CHALLENGE TO DECONSTRUCTION**

In *The Time That Remains*, Agamben turns to Derrida’s analyses of semiotic theory. Derrida has argued that the primacy of presence in the Western metaphysical tradition presupposes non-presence, that the notion of the origin is produced by non-origin. But Agamben questions the notion of presence/absence through the zero-degree – Roland Barthes’ concept of ‘writing degree zero’ as a style developed to reject politically committed writings that value writing which is blank, impersonal, and attempts to be asocial and ahistorical.<sup>15</sup> This would hold that deconstruction is an attempted form of non-ideological writing. Zero-degree thus becomes an allusion to absence. For Agamben (and presumably Barthes), this is precisely what deconstruction does. Witness Agamben’s attack on deconstruction in his text *Potentialities*:

For Derrida, there is certainly a philosophical terminology; but the status of this terminology has wholly changed, or more exactly revealed the abyss on which it always rested...Derrida enters into the Paradise of language, where terms touch their limits. And...he ‘cuts the branches’; he experiences the exile of terminology, its paradoxical subsistence in the isolation of all univocal reference (Agamben, 1999, 209).

Agamben argues that in order for deconstruction to function, ‘presence’ and ‘absence’ are not necessarily lacking, but *insignificant*. Agamben’s core rebuttal of Derrida is that Western metaphysics focuses on the foundation and origin, along with the messianic concept, which focuses on the moment of fulfilment. This fulfilment is only possible by revisiting and revoking that foundation (the messianic and historic idea). If this idea is eliminated – and one only focuses on the foundation and origin, as Derrida does – then the outcome is nihilism: ‘[an] empty ‘zero degree’ signification and with history as its infinite deferment’ (Agamben, 2005, 104). Hence Agamben’s view that deconstruction is a thwarted messianism, or moreover, that Derrida ‘has remained within the metaphysical tradition that he thought to have identified and escaped’ (Thurschwell, 2005, 175).

## THE SUBJECT VERSUS THE SUBJECTILE

A central theme to deconstruction, particularly in Derrida’s early work, is the idea of transience: from every discourse to every culture, from every text to every subject, nothing is fixed, nothing is finite. As a result of this flux, Derrida labels the subject a ‘subjectile’, that which is neither subject nor object.<sup>16</sup> As a result, the ‘unitary’ subject falters thus:

The relation to self...can only be *différance*, that is to say alterity, or trace. Not only is the obligation not lessened in this situation, but, on the contrary, it finds in it its only possibility, which is neither subjective nor human. Which doesn’t mean that it is inhuman or without subject, but that it is out of this dislocated *affirmation* (thus without ‘firmness’ or ‘closedness’) that something like the subject, man, or whoever it might be can take shape (Derrida, 1991, 100).

While this suggests that the subject is also part of the deconstructive ‘process,’ Derrida espouses a logic of recognition that sees the subject as a necessity that must be retained: ‘In addition to what we have just named (...trace, *différance* from self, destinerrance, etc.), I would add something that remains required by both the definition of the classical subject and by these latter nonclassical motifs, namely, a certain *responsibility*’ (Derrida, 1991, 100). Despite the subject’s form as *différance* or trace, Derrida nonetheless maintains an essential part in its relationship to the other: ‘The singularity of the “who” is not the individuality of a thing that would be identical to itself, it is not an atom. It is a singularity that dislocates or divides itself in gathering itself together to answer to the other, whose call somehow precedes its own identification with itself, for to this call I can *only* answer, have already answered, even if I think I am answering “no”’ (Derrida, 1991, 100–01).

For Agamben, however, the subject is a sovereign entity created through law: life without law is impossible.<sup>17</sup> Whilst Agamben acknowledges a certain paradox inherent in sovereignty,

it is not Derridean. For Agamben, the sovereign is both inside and outside the juridical order, thus, the law is outside itself. Hence, the paradox: ‘the sovereign is internal to a law that is self-animating, yet...for Agamben the sovereign is also external to law and, as so positioned, animates it’ (Fitzpatrick, 2005, 63). As mentioned, the paradox of inversion – ‘inside’ and ‘outside’ – plagues both Derrida and Agamben, but the latter’s criticism of Derrida is related to the errors of deconstruction and its play on signification. Agamben argues that law shows its ‘essential proximity to that of language’ whereby ‘a word acquires its ability to denote a segment of reality only insofar as it is also meaningful in its own not-denoting...’ (Agamben, 1998, 20) – hence, Agamben’s criticism of Derrida’s take on signification, that it ‘cuts its branches,’ resulting in an experience of exile and isolation of reference.<sup>18</sup>

## DEFERRAL AND INFINITY: WAITING FOR THE NEW REALITY?

Agamben’s position on the concept of infinity places him in clear opposition to Derrida. Agamben reads the theme of deferral in Derrida through what he refers to as deconstruction’s relentless awaiting of the other. Agamben uses his theory of potentiality as a form of temporal suspension, and Derrida also uses the notion of infinity. Derrida never says *when* the other will arrive. But Agamben is troubled by the role that the infinite has in his approach. Agamben argues that the sovereign subject must create a life through the experience of language and law. However, deconstruction threatens the very thinking made possible through language whereby ‘thinking might find itself condemned to infinite negotiations’ (Agamben, 1998, 54).

The sovereign subject for Agamben is partly defined through its position of exception, whereby the sovereign exception is the figure in which singularity is represented insofar as it is unrepresentable: ‘*The exception is what cannot be included in the whole of which it is a member and cannot be a member of the whole in which it is always already included*’ (Agamben, 1998, 25). Agamben thus recognises the existence of a suspension, but it is not eternal: the politics to come is something invented and does not simply *come*; it is thus not the arrival of an ‘other.’

## CONCLUSION

For Derrida, deconstruction is inextricably tied up with the relentless destabilisation of thought, discourse and ideas. He also stresses the importance of welcoming the other for the intention of creating a new reality. Derrida’s work is therefore remorselessly textual; that is, he stresses the importance of deconstructing texts and systems of thought at work in the world today with the intention of accepting the alterity of the other: ‘For me, [deconstruction] always accompanies an affirmative exigency. I would even say that it never proceeds without love’ (Derrida & Weber, 1995, 83).

Agamben’s intention in *The Time That Remains* is to restore Paul’s messianic texts to their respected position. In so doing, he considers the historical context in which Romans was written – a time he reads Paul describing as *ho nyn kairos*, ‘the time of the now’. Agamben’s project is also concerned with the subject, with the *life* of the subject. This subject is a political figure who exists within the law. He asks in *Homo Sacer*: ‘What is the relation between politics and life, if life presents itself as what is included by means of an exclusion?’ (Agamben, 1998, 7).

Agamben highlights the importance of the subject in the Pauline corpus by virtue of its relation to law. And, in contrast to Derrida, Agamben cares less for the play of language within politics



or law, but instead writes of the possibility of a new politics, a new reality to be lived by the sovereign subject. Agamben's version of the messianic has the potential to create the present as a fusion of history and time, enabling greater focus on a new reality. This is only possible when messianic time is interpreted as an active force working within chronological time. Moreover, Agamben's ultimate criticism of Derrida is that Western metaphysics focuses on the foundation and origin, which for Derrida are infinitely displaced, along with the messianic concept as the moment of fulfilment, which again for Derrida is the arrival of the other. But, for Agamben, this fulfilment is only possible by revisiting and revoking that foundation (the messianic and historic idea). What for Derrida is the arrival of the other is for Agamben the potential to create a new reality and is only possible through positive action and thought through the law. Agamben's sovereignty is 'an expression of the inner dynamics of the logic of politics' (Norris, 2000, 46) and is only possible within the law.

On Agamben's understanding of the other, there is no 'one' other – there is only the self and positive action to create a new reality. Agamben is an historical thinker with a radical conception of the subject as a sovereign, political subject existing as a reality in the world. Central to Agamben, then, is the *self*. But since there is no other as a *separate being*, or simply *another*, in the work of Agamben, then the pursuit of the self for the sake of a new reality is a central characteristic to his enterprise. This is the most crucial difference between Agamben as against Derrida: the idea of the self will always intrigue philosophers because the very conditions of philosophy reflect the state of human being. This applies to the differences between theories of language and signification, and approaches to historicism.

Agamben's philosophical anthropology is a noble mission that seeks to rescue human life from the clutches of a nihilism inflicted by deconstruction as means of an experience in language. He seeks to radically alter our understandings of the subject, law and even God (as potentiality) in order to stimulate changes within our own cultures which house all that humans (and even non-humans) have to live for in this world.

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## ENDNOTES

- 1 For a discussion of Paul in philosophy and theology see Fuggle (2008), Blanton (2007) and Caputo (2006).
- 2 See Heidegger (1992), Lacan (1992), Kristeva (1991) and Žižek (2003a).
- 3 Theodore W. Jennings Jr. has published a similar approach in *Reading Derrida/Thinking Paul*. (2006). My critique extends this research through highlighting the challenge to deconstruction in light of newer interpretations.
- 4 See Derrida (2000), (2001) and (2002).
- 5 All biblical quotations cited from the Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version, 1989.
- 6 For Jennings, 'there is no third form of humanity alongside Jews and gentiles for Paul' (Jennings Jr., 2006, pp. 42–43).
- 7 See Agamben's critique of Derrida on language and metaphysics in Agamben (1991).
- 8 Now we know that whatever the law says, it speaks to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be silenced, and the whole world may be held accountable to God. For 'no human being will be justified in his sight' by deeds prescribed by the law, for through the law comes the knowledge of sin' (Romans 3:19-20).

9 See Romans 5:15-21.

10 Agamben argues against Foucault's theory that the rise of biopower marks the threshold of modernity. Instead, biopower and sovereignty are intertwined whereby 'the production of a biopolitical body is the original activity of sovereign power' (Agamben, 1998, p. 6).

11 In a broader context, 'the condition of 'happy life' is life lived beyond differentiation and distinction, and particularly the fracturing of life into component parts – biological, political, intellectual, and so on – such that an integrated happy life, or form-of-life, is said to provide the 'unitary centre' of the coming politics' (Mills, 2008, p. 16).

12 'Agamben takes Foucault's account of biopolitics away from history and relocates it back in the centre of these key determinants of political philosophy' (Dillon, 2005, p. 38).

13 'Messianic time, the time between the resurrection of Christ and the eschaton, corresponds, for Agamben, to the state of exception evoked by secular states during a time of war or in 'warlike' circumstances' (Fuggle, 2008, p. 366). For a discussion of Messianic time and Agamben's notion of the state of exception see Fuggle (2008).

14 Agamben cites Carl Schmitt in his discussion of the exception, law and force.

15 See Roland Barthes' work, particularly: *Elements of Semiology* (1968) and *Mythologies* (1973).

16 See 'To Unsense the Subjectile' in Derrida & Thévenin (1998: pp. 59–148).

17 Agamben's notion of life extends beyond *The Time That Remains*. Most notably in *Homo Sacer*, his theory of 'bare life' extends the Foucauldian concept of biopower. Ross (2008, p. 2) defines bare life as a 'human life that is completely exhausted in its status as the correlate of sovereign action. [Agamben] argues that the two separate spheres of naked life [zo] and politics [bios] defined by Aristotle have become fused in the modern period. Politics is now increasingly defined as an era of biopolitics, in which power is exercised as rule over life.' For a discussion of Agamben on life and biopower in relation to race, ethnicity, migration, globalisation and gender see Arnold (2008).

18 Agamben also argues that the idea of the subject in language results in it having no other content other than its own desubjectification, as bearing witness to its own deletion as a subject. He argues this through an analysis of pronouns, in particular "I": 'pronouns operate as grammatical shifters, or 'indicators of enunciation,' that is, as linguistic signs that have no substantive reference outside of themselves' (Mills, 2005, p. 204).

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