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The Logos of God and the End of Man: Giorgio Agamben and the Gospel of John on Animality As Light and Life.

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**THE LOGOS OF GOD AND THE END OF HUMANITY:  
GIORGIO AGAMBEN AND THE GOSPEL OF JOHN ON ANIMALITY AS  
LIGHT AND LIFE**

*The light came unto its own; but its own did not receive it.*  
— John 1:11

The Gospel of John begins with a *Logos*, a Word sounding out the earliest origins of creation and measuring up even to God. After asserting that everything in existence resonates with echoes of the *Logos*, having come into being through it, John narrows his view and writes that this *Logos* is *life* (*zōē*), and that this life is the light of human beings (*anthrōpōn*). Human life (*zōē*) radiates as light from the *Logos* of God. But John's text is not all light and life. John quickly modulates into a minor key and writes of a darkness that refuses the light. The world of humanity, the *kosmos*, is the site of this darkness; humanity fails to recognize the *Logos* as its very life.

Despite John's ominous tone, *logos* actually does pretty well in the world of humanity. Whether *logos* is rendered Reason, Speech, Argument, Thought, Logic, or Discourse, it is hardly a marginal and under-valued aspect of human existence. *Logos* frequently appears as the criterion to distinguish humans from other creatures. Humans

are rational; animals are irrational. Humans communicate articulately; animals are mute and lack speech. Human subjects are formed in language; animals interact with the world directly without language's mediation. So contrary to John, *logos* has not historically lacked for recognition, prestige, and honor. But perhaps there are two radically different *logoi* in play here?

Still, the remainder of John's gospel goes on to describe a deep antagonism between the *Logos* of God and the Reason, Speech, or Discourse of humanity. Humanity's own *logos* stands in some form of opposition to the *zōē* with which the *Logos* illuminates human life. The luminous *zōē* of John's text cuts between *Logos* and *logos*. Humanity bends around an abyssal *zōē* which it can never understand but which nevertheless animates it. Humanity lives out of a light and a life which never quite seems to fall into words.

What I would like to offer, what I have already started to offer, is a rereading of the prologue of John with an eye toward theological anthropology and "the question of the animal."<sup>1</sup> This is not an effort to retrieve the hidden splendor of John's "original meaning." Rather, inasmuch as John's prologue functions as a *locus classicus* for the doctrine of the Incarnation, the text haunts every Christian who seeks to narrate what happens when God becomes flesh. The whole Christian theological tradition labors under the weight of John's first chapter without much regard for John's original intentions. This exploratory essay inverts a number of the assumptions underlying the traditional theological reading of the text in order to shift the burden and attempt to carry the text forward differently. In short, this essay reckons with the theological reception of John's prologue as it has informed Christian teaching at the intersection of the incarnation and theological anthropology. The goal is to sketch a counter-reception or alternate reception that would refigure the place of animals and animality at this critical intersection.

John does not employ *logos* primarily as an *anthropological* category. Nevertheless, very early in Christian history *logos* became an indispensable anthropological term that determined the angle from which John's prologue was read.<sup>2</sup> For reasons historical and philosophical, John's Christian readers have overwhelmingly presumed that human *logos* and divine *Logos* are commensurate, if not contiguous. The presumption is that the Divine Word is specially aligned with human discourse; whatever the *quantitative* excess of divine *Logos* over human *logos*, a *qualitative* continuity remains.

My proposed re-reading calls into question this continuity of *logos*, taking with utmost seriousness the fundamental difference in John's prologue—on the scale of light and dark—between the operations of human *logos* and the work of the *Logos* incarnate. Furthermore, rather than read John's *zōē* abstractly as a supplement added to

humanity alone, John's "life" may be understood as the *zōē* of the *zōon* (the animal). That "life" which is the light of human beings might be understood as "bare life" or as "animality," as *zoological* rather than ethereal, in which case John traces a *zoological* division between the *logos* of humanity and the living, illuminating *Logos*-in-flesh.

The stakes emerge in this question: Should God's incarnation be understood as a celestial endorsement of the exceptional status of humanity over-against all other creatures, or as the deconstruction of humanity from within, a salvifically subversive maneuver undertaken for the sake of all God's beloved creatures? My essay labors to provide a plausible framework for the latter option.

The essay proceeds in three sections. First, I begin with several traditional readings that assume fundamental continuity between divine and human *logos*. Second, I lay out some theoretical distinctions from the work of Giorgio Agamben and Jacques Derrida which underlie my re-reading of John's prologue. Finally, I sketch an understanding of the Incarnation in which *Logos* theology does not affirm humanity's high rank in a cosmic hierarchy, but portends a fundamental restructuring of human identity and a radically different ecological politics.

#### THE DIVINE-HUMAN COMMUNITY OF LOGOS IN ATHANASIUS OF ALEXANDRIA AND GREGORY OF NAZIANZUS

*Theology is very strict on the following point: there are no werewolves, human beings cannot become animal.*  
— Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*

Though the traditional continuity assumed between divine and human *logos* is likely familiar to most theologically-attuned readers, two examples will illustrate its pervasiveness. Athanasius' treatise *De Incarnatione verbi dei* is not only a foundational text for trinitarian theology and teaching on the incarnation, it also explains God's rationale for becoming incarnate in terms of a familial bond between human *logos* and the divine *Logos* that sets humanity apart from other animals.

Out of what did not exist God has made all things [*ta panta*] through God's very own *Logos*, our Lord Jesus Christ. And God created human beings [*anthrōpous*], showing mercy to the human species [*to anthrōpōn genos*] among all the creatures on earth, having seen that they would not be sufficient to persist forever according to their own special discourse [*logos*], God showed kindness to them in particular (not generally as with all the non-discursive animals [*aloga zōa*]). God made them according to God's own image, sharing with them even the power of God's very own *Logos*, so that possessing some kind of shadow of the *Logos* and becoming discursive [*logikoi*], they might be empowered to persist in happiness, living [*zōntes*] the true and genuine life [*bion*] of the saints in paradise. . . . Since we set out at some point to speak of the becoming-human [*enanthrōpēseōs*] of the *Logos*, you may justly wonder why we are describing the origin of human beings. But indeed, this is not outside the purview of the narrative. For speaking about the manifestation of the Savior to us, it is necessary for us also to speak of the origin of human beings [*tēs tōn anthrōpōn archēs*] in order that you should know that our blame became the motive for his descent, and our deviation required the magnanimous love [*philanthrōpian*] of the *Logos*, that he might overtake us and be manifest, the Lord among human beings [*en anthrōpōis*].<sup>3</sup>

Among all creatures, humanity uniquely reflects the *Logos* by being *logikos* (discursive, rational), possessing its own derivative and participatory *logos*. This unique connection is also the implied reason for the incarnation.

Gregory of Nazianzus traces a more subtle connection between divine and human *logos*, but Gregory's presumption of continuity is all the more pervasive, being integral to baptism, spirituality, and salvation in his teaching. Gregory frames his thirty-ninth oration, "On the Holy Lights," with John's prologue. The discourse was delivered at Epiphany on the occasion of some significant baptisms in Constantinople, and his choice of John is notable because at Epiphany one would rather expect to hear one of the synoptic texts on Jesus' baptism in the Jordan.<sup>4</sup> Gregory uses John's pervasive light metaphors to describe baptism as illumination, invoking Christ as "the true light [*phōs*] which illumines [*phōtizei*] every human being" within the first few sentences.<sup>5</sup> Gregory's appropriation of the Johannine vocabulary, however, also executes a subtle displacement within it. Within John's prologue, the effect of the *light* [*phōs*] of the divine *Logos* is *animation* [*zōē*]; the *Logos* radiates *life*. "What came about through this one [the *Logos*] was life [*zōē*] and that life was the light [*phōs*] of human beings [*anthrōpōn*]" (John 1:4).<sup>6</sup> Within Gregory's oration, however, light becomes a metaphor for *enlightenment* rather than animation; the light of the *Logos* bears *knowledge*. "Let us light within ourselves [*phōtisōmen*] the light of knowledge [*phōs gnōseōs*]"<sup>7</sup> The *Logos* which illumines the world is contiguous with human thought and speech. In this way greater proximity to God's radiance accentuates human uniqueness in relation to other animals (measured for Gregory by the possession of a mind [*nous*] and the exercise of *logos*), rather than multiplying the life (*zōē*) shared with all other animals (*zōa*). Gregory buries the Johannine connection between *phōs* and *zōē* in order to undergird human uniqueness and reinforce a continuity between human and divine *logos*.

Gregory's discourse on baptism enjoins a spirituality of purification (*katharsis*) as an ongoing preparation for full illumination (*ellampsis*). Impurities within human life (which Gregory repeatedly describes with animal imagery) must be purged in order to render the human being more receptive to the knowledge of God.<sup>8</sup> Gregory's own discourse (*logos*) leads the way in purification:

By discourse [*tō logō*] we have thoroughly purified [*anekathēramen*] this assembly hall. So come! Now let us do a bit of philosophizing about the holiday; let us celebrate together with those souls who love holidays and love God! And since the whole point of a holiday is the memory of God, let us remember.<sup>9</sup>

The process of this purification removes the obscurities that would prevent a full and complete knowledge of God through illumination:

By fear they are rectified, purified [*kathairomenous*], and (so to speak) rarified in order to rise up to the heights. For where fear is, there is heeding of commands. Where heeding of commands is, there is

purification of flesh [*sarkos katharsis*]*—*that cloud eclipsing the soul, not allowing it to see the beam of divine light in purity [*katharōs*]. But where purification [*katharsis*] is, there is illumination [*ellampsis*].<sup>10</sup>

Finally, Gregory encourages his hearers to seek for themselves the purification that leads, through the light of the *Logos*, to greater knowledge of God:

The same *Logos* is *both* naturally fearsome for the unworthy *and* attainable out of benevolence [*philanthrōpian*] for those who are well-prepared—that is, as many as have purged the impure [*akatharton*] and material spirit from their souls and swept clean and ordered their souls with knowledge [*epignōsei*]. . . . Let us light within ourselves [*phōtisōmen*] the light of knowledge [*phōs gnōseōs*]. At that time we should speak of God’s wisdom, which has been hidden in a mystery and we should shine out to others. But until then, we should purify [*kathairōmetha*] and initiate ourselves in the *Logos* in order that we might do exceedingly good things for ourselves, working ourselves into godlikeness [*theoideis*] and welcoming the coming *Logos**—*not only that, but seizing and showing forth [the *Logos*] to others.<sup>11</sup>

The light of the divine *Logos* bears fruit within the human mind, transforming humanity through an ever-deepening knowledge.

Gregory is manifestly at home in the Johannine vocabulary as he expounds the theology and spirituality of baptism. Quite clearly, however, Gregory’s particular inhabitation of John’s terminology presumes an affinity or continuity between human and divine *logos*. Rather than bearing life (*zōē*) as in John, for Gregory the illumination of the *Logos* bears *knowledge*, a subtle shift that aligns the operation of the divine *Logos* with human *logos*. Whether intentional or not, Gregory’s shift signals his presumption of a categorical difference between human beings and other animals on the basis of an intrinsic connection between humanity and God in *logos*.

## LOGOS AND LIFE

*Politics* supposes livestock.

— Jacques Derrida, *The Animal That Therefore I Am*, summarizing Immanuel Kant

In addition to featuring prominently in John’s prologue, *zōē* is also the “protagonist” of Giorgio Agamben’s 1995 text *Homo Sacer*.<sup>12</sup> Agamben quotes a famous distinction in Aristotle’s *Metaphysics* between bare, pre-political, undirected life (*zēn*) and life that is politically ordered toward higher goods like justice and friendship (*eu zēn*).<sup>13</sup> In a maneuver that has led to some confusion, Agamben maintains Aristotle’s basic conceptual distinction but replaces Aristotle’s specific terms (*zēn* / *eu zēn*), arguing that the tensive relationship between *zōē* (bare life) and *bios* (a way of life, a politically ordered life) represents the “fundamental categorical pair of Western politics.”<sup>14</sup> The goal of political life (*bios*) in the city is to provide a setting where the bare life (*zōē*) of eating, sleeping, breathing, and procreation may be arranged for deeper flourishing. Bare life (*zōē*) is dissolute, concerned only with basic material

urges, it must be ordered, organized into *bios* in order to attain the “good life” with its higher goods—justice, friendship, and true happiness.

For Agamben, it is not the case that one finds *zōē* out in the world in order to organize it and found a city. Agamben inverts the commonsense political myth of origins, arguing that the *production* of the category *zōē* is the fundamental task of political life. So *bios* is not so much an improvement upon a *zōē* that was already there, but an operation which is suspended over *zōē* as a rhetorically necessary category. Western politics operates as a superstructure that claims to be making life better than “bare life,” *zōē*, but actually consolidates power precisely by perpetuating the distinction between *zōē* and *bios*. “The fundamental activity of sovereign power is the production of bare life as originary political element and as threshold of articulation between nature and culture, *zōē* and *bios*.”<sup>15</sup> Suspending *bios* over *zōē* generates an interminable, indistinct threat: If one is excluded from the city, from the law, from the protection of the political arrangement, one “returns” to a state of bare life. Political life (*bios*) produces bare life (*zōē*), then, in two ways: First, bare life functions as a mythical Ur-concept which marks political life as “better than” the brute life that “preceded” it, even if no concrete memory of such a life exists. Second, political life *produces* bare life by exclusion, occasionally denuding someone of the protection of the law and exposing him to whatever death or misfortune might befall him. Political life actualizes bare life by “baring” lives and exposing them to harm, an operation which also reinforces the legitimating effect of the founding myth.

The fundamental political *relation*, then, is the “ban” in which someone faces exile from the subjecthood, subjection, and subjectivity offered by the protection of the law—whether the ban operates as a threat or is actually enacted.<sup>16</sup> Conceptually, *zōē* is both *excluded* from the city (because city life *is not* uncivilized brute life) and *incorporated* into the city as the “raw stuff” that is felicitously arranged. This productive “zone of indistinction”—where *zōē* is both excluded from the city and presumed as its foundation—represents a constitutive ambiguity that holds the city together.

Agamben moves on to show how the distinction between *zōē* and *bios* operates both in the twentieth-century’s market-driven democracies and its totalitarian regimes: in German and Soviet death camps that reduced unimaginable numbers of people to “bare life,”<sup>17</sup> but also in liberal “human rights” that attach to the “sacredness” of life as such.<sup>18</sup> My purpose, however, does not require that we follow Agamben’s argument in that direction. Instead, I want to consider the preceding analysis from *Homo Sacer* in relation to Agamben’s other texts, and specifically, *The Open*.

Pressing questions have been raised about *Homo Sacer*. How can Agamben locate the “origin” of Western politics in a distinction between bare life and political life, yet fail to analyze the ways that this distinction is conceptually bound up with human relations to animals?<sup>19</sup> It is hard not to regard the “ban” of animals from human societies as a more original political relation than Agamben’s originary intra-human ban—and a model for it. The person exiled from the city must contend with the animals who have already been excluded, be devoured by them or live like them. “Bare life” is first of all the life of animals, it is animality. To equate bare life and animality is not at all to retreat from Agamben’s assertion that *zōē* is *produced* by the political discourse of the city rather than “discovered” and modulated. The notion of a disordered natural world devoid of higher goods in which bare animal life barely survives amidst chaos is as much a construct when applied to the lives of trout, elk, wolves, hyenas, and sloths as it is when applied to human beings stripped of citizenship. The work of Jacques Derrida in *The Animal that Therefore I Am* and *The Beast and the Sovereign* might helpfully supplement Agamben’s thought here, inasmuch as he analyzes the political uses of the abstract catch-all category “animal”—which supposedly captures and tames the difference between earthworms and elephants in one breath.<sup>20</sup>

One need not turn to Derrida, however, for the necessary supplement. Although Agamben never makes the connection explicit, *The Open*—a text published seven years later—both frames and completes the argument of *Homo Sacer*.<sup>21</sup> The tight parallel in the structure and content of the arguments justifies reading the two texts together. I would like to add several terms to the “fundamental categorical pair of Western politics” in order to link *Homo Sacer* and *The Open*. On the one hand we may align “humanity” with *bios* and the project of political life; on the other we may align “human beings” with *zōē* and “bare life.” A human being is a bare living animal, a creature conceptually embedded in humanity, a discursive superstructure that promulgates and celebrates the norms, boundaries, and expectations of civilized subjectivity. Human beings, almost without exception, participate in humanity from birth simply because it is inseparable from language acquisition, enculturation, and identity formation. To borrow language from Louis Althusser, humanity is an ideological regime in which all human beings are subjectivized, interpellated, a regime which all human beings support. We hail each other and make demands on each other in ways that continually reinscribe the *logos* of humanity in the patterns of life that we animals perform.<sup>22</sup> In keeping with Agamben’s analysis, sovereign power retains the capacity to strip a human being of his or her place in humanity so that someone is perceived *formally* as human, but treated *morally* and *politically* “like an animal.” Most of Agamben’s own examples of *homines sacri* have been “dehumanized” in this way.

*The Open* argues that humanity is not a stable entity with a readily discoverable “nature,” but is instead the ongoing operation of what Agamben calls an “anthropological machine.”<sup>23</sup> Just like the political function of the distinction between *zōē* and *bios* in *Homo Sacer*, the operation of the anthropological machine establishes a “zone of indistinction” between human and animal, in which animality is both *included* as the “raw stuff” of humanity, and *excluded* inasmuch as humanity is supposed to rise above the “brutes.”<sup>24</sup> The machine safeguards the conceptual integrity of the category “humanity” by discerning and disavowing an inner-animality. Distinguishing an “animal part” within (mute desire, passion, irrationality, bodily functions, etc.) from a kernel of true humanity (rationality, language, self-awareness, openness to a transcendent horizon, etc.) stabilizes the identity of humanity by “recognizing” animals as categorically-other:

It is possible to oppose man to other living things, and at the same time to organize the complex—and not always edifying—economy of relations between men and animals, only because something like an animal life has been separated within man, only because his distance and proximity to the animal have been measured and recognized first of all in the closest and most intimate place. . . . What is man, if he is always the place—and at the same time, the result—of ceaseless divisions and caesurae? It is more urgent to work on these divisions, to ask in what way—within man—has man been separated from non-man, and the animal from the human, than it is to take positions on the great issues, on so-called human rights and values. And perhaps even the most luminous sphere of our relations with the divine depends, in some way, on that darker one which separates us from the animal.<sup>25</sup>

Agamben’s analysis in *The Open* repeats the analytical maneuvers of *Homo Sacer*, but does so with regard to the conceptual difference between humanity and animality. “Humanity” is produced as a pure category by means of the discernment of a second category “animality,” which lies at the foundation of human life (the human is a kind of animal) but must be disavowed in order to live an “authentically” human life.

There are three mutually-involved distinctions within Agamben’s corpus, then, which should be aligned as coterminous. First the distinction in *Homo Sacer* between bare life and the “good life” of citizenship; second, from *The Open*, the distinction between the animality of non-human creatures and the humanity of human beings; and third, an inner distinction between the animality of the human being and the kernel of true humanity. In both the mechanisms of politics and the anthropological machine a *logos* of humanity safeguards its exceptional status by positing something “lower” from which authentic humanity rises. In each case, this *logos* suppresses and excludes *zōē* as a wildness or disorder that threatens to consume the fragile arrangements of humanity.

Read through the perspective of *The Open*, several of the problems most frequently noted in *Homo Sacer* diminish considerably. Most importantly, it reduces the pressure on Agamben’s somewhat tenuous attempt to locate the origin of Western politics in a distinction between *bios/zōē* found in Aristotle’s text. In the twelfth session of “The Beast and the Sovereign,” Derrida is highly critical of Agamben’s claim to “discover” Foucaultian biopolitics

in a germinal form within Aristotle's *Metaphysics*.<sup>26</sup> Rooting the tension between *bios* and *zōē* "further back" (as it were) in the production of humanity over-against animality takes the weight off of Aristotle as an origin-point for Western biopolitics. Framing *Homo Sacer* with *The Open* would also significantly align Agamben's analysis of sovereignty with Derrida's—inasmuch as an adequate understanding of sovereignty for both thinkers would require an analysis of the relation of animality to politics. If authentic humanity (*bios*) is defined by efforts to modulate and control animality (*zōē*) both internally and externally, then not only is it the case that "all politics is biopolitics" as Agamben claims, but biopolitics is conceptually and historically coterminous with hominization.<sup>27</sup>

Derrida claims that the distinction between *zōē* and *bios* is too clumsy a tool to execute the analysis that Agamben undertakes, yet Agamben's and Derrida's analyses are, perhaps, closer than Derrida acknowledges.<sup>28</sup> Something like the anthropological machine which produces and inculcates the concept "humanity" in relation to "animality" is also described in Derrida's *The Animal That Therefore I Am*, which pays attention to the stabilizing function of the term "animal" in relation to human identity and subjectivity as it provides a (falsely) homogenous point of contrast. His neologism "*animot*" is meant to displace and expose the word (*mot*) which masks the plurality of actual animals (*animaux*) summed up with the single term "animal." The larger argumentative arc of *The Beast and the Sovereign* resists any thinking about politics as control over animality (human animality or the animals of nature) by some sovereignty conceptually separable from animality. Human beings, he argues, are political precisely *in* their animality, and not as a means of rising above it. To summarize (all too briefly), for Derrida the foundations of human thought and language—what we might again call the *logos* of humanity—rest on the supposition of a break between human life and the lives of animals, a break repeatedly enacted in disavowals of animals and animality.<sup>29</sup> Derrida recognizes that for human beings there is no way out of the *logos* of humanity. Nevertheless, he deconstructs its conceptual integrity from within and seeks the threshold of a different mode of speech and thought (a different mode of subjectivity) in "following an animal," being identified in and by the gaze of an animal—even fleetingly—rather than through the human *logos*.

Despite their differences, Derrida and Agamben converge in thinking about the relation of animality to human politics. Both Derrida and Agamben explore (and to some degree assume) the rhetorical and conceptual distinction between humans and animals—precisely in order to destabilize it from within. Both thinkers describe the constitution of humanity (as we understand and live into it) as an operation of human *logos* upon *zōē*, a discourse that carves out a space of privilege and uniqueness by positing *zōē* as something to be managed and studied,

something ultimately pliable under humanity's sovereign discretion.<sup>30</sup> Agamben's anthropological machine strategically maps a "zone of indistinction" where humanity is both animal and not-animal; humanity lives out "bare life" and makes life something categorically other than "bare." Similarly, for Derrida, human subjectivity is founded on a self-recognition denied to animals in one way or another. Taking Descartes, Kant, Levinas, Lacan, and Heidegger at their word, that human subjectivity is something other-than-animal, Derrida perceives the *logos* of humanity as neither a living creature, nor something inert and innocent. Humanity speaks its *logos* from the realm of the undead.<sup>31</sup>

#### THE *LOGOS* OF GOD AND THE END OF HUMANITY: DIVINANIMALITY

*It is not just that animals, like nature according to Heraclitus, "love to hide"; it is also that they have to hide, and that since the dawn of time, over and above their own conflicts, they have identified man not only as a predator but also as a strange, unpredictable, lawless being.*

— Jean-Christophe Bailly, *The Animal Side*

Characteristically, Derrida avoids speculative leaps and political commitments; nevertheless, *The Animal that Therefore I Am* does trace out a positive movement. Repeatedly, Derrida exempts himself from those who naïvely refer to "the animal" as a coherent category.<sup>32</sup> His tentative silence at "the bordercrossing" between humanity and animality enables him to encounter a discomfiting solidarity in the eyes of fellow animals and opens up within himself what he calls "the abyssal limit of the human: the inhuman or the ahuman, the ends of man."<sup>33</sup> Derrida abandons the anthropological function of the category "animal" in exchange for a finer-grained attention to difference.<sup>34</sup> Agamben does not exude any more political optimism than Derrida, but nevertheless invokes the "jamming of the anthropological machine" as a messianic opening. To find the point of inoperativity and cease distinguishing between animality and humanity (which is *not* to deny the many distinctions) would "show the central emptiness, the hiatus that –within man—separates man and animal, and [would] risk ourselves in this emptiness: the suspension of the suspension, Shabbat of both animal and man."<sup>35</sup> The remainder of this essay takes the positive momentum of these suggestions in a theological direction.

Gregory and Athanasius certainly represent the overwhelming norm within the Christian tradition in their investment, not only in anthropocentrism, but also in anthropological exceptionalism. That is, humanity is not only God's most treasured creature, but humanity is *a qualitatively different kind* of creature from all the others. Traditionally, the incarnation has been employed as a linchpin of anthropological exceptionalism, validating the

assumption that God redeems humanity because of something like a familial obligation.<sup>36</sup> Everyone acknowledges that no necessity compels God to act redemptively, but the work of the divine *Logos* is nevertheless imagined to honor a continuity between human and divine *logos*, like caring for like. I would like to resist the tradition's anthropological exceptionalism by exploring an understanding of the incarnation rooted in a basic discontinuity between human and divine *logos*, in which the work of the *Logos* is evidenced more in *zōē* than in human thought and speech.

It will be helpful to locate the divine *Logos* within each of the three aligned distinctions from Agamben's texts. First, with regard to the distinction between bare life and political life, it is commonplace to recognize Jesus as the figure of the outcast, the scapegoat, the refugee, whose life cannot be assimilated to the "order" of his society. Jesus is not far from the figure of the *homo sacer*, exposed to death outside the city (not murdered) for the sake of the political order. In this regard, Jesus the *Logos* clearly stands on the side of *zōē* rather than citizenship. Second, with regard to the human-animal distinction, the *Logos* obviously bears *human* flesh, but his alignment with humanity rather than animality is less secure than it might first appear. The *Logos* seems to impart life (*zōē*) at the particular places to which humanity relegates animals. God's *Logos* appears as the flesh-meal around which humanity unites, the sacrificial lamb slaughtered for ritual purity, the scapegoat cast out by the fury of human sin, and the symbolic lion whose ferocity lends courage to the disheartened. One might ask whether the *Logos* of God appears in the place of the animal to endorse eating, slaughter, and experimentation, or to loose the knots holding these cultural structures together? Third, where is the *Logos* situated with regard to the interior distinction between humanity-proper and human animality? Does the incarnation of the *Logos* as a human being underwrite or undermine the workings of the anthropological machine? Does the *Logos* further the conceptual transcendence of humanity over animality by participating in it, or does the *Logos* subvert that transcendence as a false pretension? I suggest that the *Logos*—as the very *zōē* of human beings—is aligned with human animality *against* humanity's proprietary *logos* as it disavows animality through the anthropological machine. The becoming-flesh of the *Logos* is not the endorsement of the present structure of human subjectivity and self-understanding, but an effort to knock loose the gears of the destructive machine that produces it. The *Logos*, then, from the closest proximity to humanity's own *logos*, opposes it for the sake of *zōē*.

If these three "placements" are correct, then they can be correlated with a fourth division, namely, what John describes as the inability of humanity to recognize and receive the light of the divine *Logos*. In all four

divisions, an autonomous, self-reflective, self-constituting human *logos* maneuvers to transcend and disavow a *zōē* that nevertheless remains internal to it. In contrast to the traditional interpretation, however, God now appears on the side of *zōē* rather than as the transcendent anchor of human uniqueness.

God is present as the incarnate *zōē-Logos* of creation, but the human form of the *Logos* does not validate humanity's ideological projects, but presents God's most personal judgment upon them. In Barthian terms, the *Logos* of God sounds out a thundering "*Nein!*" to humanity precisely by taking on human flesh.<sup>37</sup> In order to redeem the groaning creation, God became a human being so that human beings might become *zōē*, become-animal with God.<sup>38</sup> The incarnation is the inspirited dismantling of humanity from within, a divine deconstruction-in-flesh, the advent of the messiah as the divinanimal *zōē* that humanity's self-conception is bent upon excluding.

If the *Logos* is indeed the *zōē* of creation, and if the *logos* of human subjectivity systematically differentiates itself from this *zōē*, then the redemption of the *Logos* cannot but entail a fundamental personal transformation.<sup>39</sup> The messianic horizon of redemption into the *zōē* of the *Logos* unshackles human beings from the interpellation and subjectivization of humanity, not as the effect of a "dehumanizing" sovereign power, but as the suspension or cessation of the human *logos*'s self-differentiation from *zōē*. Nor is such a radical conversion foreign to Christian rhetoric and spirituality. Jesus enjoins his followers to bear crosses and "deny themselves"—though this "self" denied is rarely understood as the self that differentiates humanity from animality.

On this understanding, the *Logos* of God is no longer the Master Signifier, the keystone that anchors the *logos* of self-reflective human thought and speech in a stable economy of meaning. Instead, relative to the *logos* of humanity, the *Logos* of God is *negatively* transcendent. God's *Logos* is the charged silence over which humanity finds itself interminably babbling. The *logos* of humanity can find no entryway into the *Logos* of God; it tries to speak its way over a communicative abyss rather than being immersed in the silence of divinanimality. The unsettling eyes of animals—whose gazes have so little regard for human discourse—are unsettling not because they *lack* meaning but because they convey an *excess* of meaning that cannot be borne in language; they are icons of the mystery of the *zōē* of God. The living silence of the divinanimal *Logos* offers (or threatens) to swallow whole the *logos* of humanity—and no one can guess what kind of new *zōē* might emerge from this end.

The *zōē aiōnios* (eternal life) of the *Logos* is not an abstract quality added to one isolated creature (the human) upon the extraction of that creature from the whole network of living relations in the world.<sup>40</sup> Rather the *zōē aiōnios* is the embedding-into-created-immanence of an alienated creature—what Colossians calls the reconciliation

of all things (*ta panta* [Colossians 1:15-19]). The redemption of the *Logos* cannot be attained or preserved within any Wilderness or romantic ecological utopia. Instead, it must be anticipated expectantly as a messianic kingdom “not of this world” that breaks out transformatively *within* the relations among living creatures, rather than as the conflagration which wipes clean the face of the earth. Rather than *zōē aiōnios* being the distilled, extracted, and rarified body of one resurrected (but hardly animal) species, the *zōē* of the divine *Logos* may be understood as the rhizomatic multiplication of life in diversity. It is still possible to cling to the parochial *logos* whose mechanized superiority over every other creature cannot be questioned, but on this re-reading of John, the question of life and death looms in the haunted silences where the *logos* of humanity pauses, ever so briefly, for breath.

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<sup>1</sup> See the formulation of “the question of the animal” in Matthew Calarco, *Zoographies: The Question of the Animal From Heidegger to Derrida* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008), 1-6.

<sup>2</sup> Consider Justin Martyr’s *Apologies*, for example, or Clement of Alexandria’s *Paedagogos*.

<sup>3</sup> Athanasius of Alexandria, *De Incarnatione verbi dei*, §3-4, see also §5; this and all subsequent translations are my own. Text: *Contra Gentes and De Incarnatione*, ed. Robert Thomson (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971).

<sup>4</sup> John McGuckin, *Saint Gregory of Nazianzus: An Intellectual Biography* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 2001), 337-343.

<sup>5</sup> John 1:9; Gregory of Nazianzus, *Orat.* 39.1. Text: *Grégoire de Nazianze: Discours 38-41*, ed. Claudio Moreschini, trans. Paul Gallay, *Sources Chrétiennes*, vol. 358 (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1990).

<sup>6</sup> John 1:4.

<sup>7</sup> Gregory of Nazianzus, *Orat.* 39.10.

<sup>8</sup> See Gregory of Nazianzus, *Orat.* 28.2 for a particularly poignant example.

<sup>9</sup> Gregory of Nazianzus, *Orat.* 39.11.

<sup>10</sup> Gregory of Nazianzus, *Orat.* 39.8.

<sup>11</sup> Gregory of Nazianzus, *Orat.* 39.10.

<sup>12</sup> Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1998), 8.

<sup>13</sup> Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, 2, 7-8.

<sup>14</sup> Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, 1, 8-9, cf. 66. In particular, Agamben seems to have utterly confused James Gordon Finlayson, who finds Agamben’s distinction “abstract” and labors to understand “what it amounts to concretely” (“‘Bare Life’ and Politics in Agamben’s Reading of Aristotle,” *The Review of Politics* 72 [2010]: 99). Finlayson mistakenly believes that Agamben posits an unambiguously oppositional and exclusive relationship between *zōē* and *bios* when in fact, Agamben is precisely interested in the ways in which bare life is concretely included in the operations of political life, while being simultaneously distinguished (and thus “excluded”). When Finlayson finally offers the “correct” reading of Aristotle, which Agamben has bungled so badly, his reading exactly corroborates Agamben’s understanding. Finlayson’s own distinction between “natural life” and “political life” (111) is *exactly* the distinction between *zōē* and *bios* that Agamben analyzes. A similar misunderstanding of the function of the *zōē/bios* distinction within Agamben’s text underlies a significant portion of Derrida’s biting critique of *Homo Sacer*. Derrida suggests that Agamben is laboring toward an “absolutely rigorous” distinction and that he “puts his money on the concept of ‘bare life,’ which he identifies with *zōē*, in opposition to *bios*.” Jacques Derrida, *The Beast and the Sovereign*, vol. 1, trans. Geoffrey Bennington (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009), 325-26. Conceding that Agamben’s reading of Aristotle is tenuous, Derrida uncharacteristically

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misreads Agamben's larger aims. Agamben is overwhelmingly concerned with the constitutive co-implication of *zōē* and *bios*—and the way that Western politics relies on the *appearance* of an oppositional relation between the two. Agamben does not endorse *zōē* over *bios*; his argument calls for a suspension of the operation in which the two are distinguished. Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, 90, 181-82, 188. Andrew Norris correctly parses Agamben's terminological shift and, as Norris notes, the careful and charitable reader does indeed find that the tension is "superficial" rather than ultimately detrimental to Agamben's project. "Giorgio Agamben and the Politics of the Living Dead," *Diacritics* 30, no. 4 (2000): 45n.17

<sup>15</sup> Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, 182; see also 83.

<sup>16</sup> Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, 28-29, 83, 109, 181.

<sup>17</sup> Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, 102, 126-135; cf. Hannah Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil* (New York: Penguin Books, 1994), 150-205, esp. 157-58.

<sup>18</sup> Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, 122-23, 127, 133; see also Norris, "Politics of the Living Dead," 51.

<sup>19</sup> Matthew Calarco is exactly correct to note that every figure Agamben uses to represent the new politics he seeks is essentially human, whether the refugee, the "whatever singularity," or the Musselmann. Calarco, "On the Borders of Language and Death: Agamben and the Question of the Animal," *Philosophy Today* 44 (2000): 96-97. Calarco's criticism is only overcome, I believe, by reading Agamben's oeuvre in light of *The Open*. Calarco himself recognizes this broadening in Agamben's work in *Zoographies*, 90-103.

<sup>20</sup> Jacques Derrida, *The Animal That Therefore I Am*, ed. Marie Louise Mallet, trans. David Wills (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008); idem., *The Beast and the Sovereign*, vol. 1.

<sup>21</sup> Giorgio Agamben, *The Open: Man and Animal*, trans. Kevin Attell (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2004). I am not the first to read *The Open* as the completion of the logic of *Homo Sacer*. See Martin Puchner, "Performing the Open: Actors, Animals, Philosophers," *The Drama Review* 51, no. 1 (2007): 24.

<sup>22</sup> Strikingly, Althusser himself refers to ideology as a *logos* in which "we live and move and have our being." Louis Althusser, *On Ideology*. New York: Verso, 2008), 44-51, see also 34-35.

<sup>23</sup> Agamben, *The Open*, 21, 26, 37-8, 78-80.

<sup>24</sup> Agamben, *The Open*, 37-8. Leland de la Durantaye marks this fine parsing of the inner logic of distinctions as Agamben's "signature gesture." Leland de la Durantaye, "The Suspended Substantive: On Animals and Men in Giorgio Agamben's *The Open*," *Diacritics* 33, no. 2 (2003): 7.

<sup>25</sup> Agamben, *The Open*, 15-16. Emphasis added.

<sup>26</sup> Derrida, *The Beast and the Sovereign*, vol. 1, 324-34.

<sup>27</sup> Agamben claims as much in *The Open*; see Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, 6, 88-90 with *The Open*, 80.

<sup>28</sup> Derrida, *The Beast and the Sovereign*, vol. 1, 326. It seems that Derrida never commented publicly on *The Open*, the text of Agamben's in which I see the greatest affinity between their treatments of animals/animality. There is no mention of Agamben in *The Beast and the Sovereign*, vol. 2, trans. Geoffrey Bennington (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011).

<sup>29</sup> Session thirteen of the seminar on "The Beast and the Sovereign" offers an extended discussion on the inseparability of human *logos* from political sovereignty; *The Beast and the Sovereign*, vol. 1, 346-49.

<sup>30</sup> Agamben, *The Open*, 76-77. Aaron Bell also reads Agamben and Derrida as converging on the production of "humanity" and human subjectivity. "The Dialectic of Anthropocentrism," in *Critical Theory and Animal Liberation*, ed. John Sanbonmatsu (Lanham MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2011), 166-67.

<sup>31</sup> Derrida, *Animal*, 87, 102, 138-39.

<sup>32</sup> For example, Derrida, *Animal*, 33, 62.

<sup>33</sup> Derrida, *Animal*, 12.

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<sup>34</sup> Calarco criticizes Derrida for maintaining the human-animal distinction *at all*, arguing that the human-animal distinction in any form underwrites inexcusable regimes of experimentation, eradication, encroachment, confinement, display, slaughter, and consumption (*Zoographies*, 137). However, to deny outright the human-animal distinction would be impossible for Derrida, for two reasons: First, as Calarco recognizes, such a denial would flatten and obscure real differences among many species, including humans, rather than multiplying those differences along a thousand different frontiers (see Derrida, *Animal*, 31, 92). Second, and more importantly, Calarco overestimates the degree to which it is possible to leave behind the human-animal distinction in an act of the will or as a concerted program of thought. If Derrida's analysis is correct (and Calarco relies heavily upon it), then the human-animal distinction structures human subjectivity, will, and consciousness. There is, as it were, no exit—especially not as a matter of personal choice. Calarco's dismissal of Agamben's religious categories similarly leaves him in a voluntaristic optimism. Both the gaze of the animal in Derrida and Agamben's invocation of a messianic Shabbat function as sites of transcendence which signal the end of humanity as we currently inhabit it, not a latent potentiality which we might choose to actualize (see Derrida, *Animal*, 132).

<sup>35</sup> Agamben, *Open*, 92. Krzysztof Ziarek's thesis that Agamben remains mired in anthropocentrism and humanism (traps which Heidegger purportedly eludes) rests on a misunderstanding of Agamben's notion of *inoperativity* ("After Humanism: Agamben and Heidegger," *South Atlantic Quarterly* 107, no. 1 [2008]: 189-90). Inoperativity is more than not-knowing or refraining from entering the order of knowledge with regard to differences between human beings and animals (see Agamben's development of the concept in *The Coming Community*, trans. Michael Hardt [Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1993], or idem., *Nudities*, trans. David Kishik and Stefan Pedatella [Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2011], esp. 43-5). Inoperativity is a different mode of subjectivity and agency altogether, dependent on Agamben's immanent messianism and linked to his reliance on Benjamin. See Lorenzo Chiesa and Frank Ruda, "The Event of Language As Force of Life: Agamben's Linguistic Vitalism," *Angelaki: Journal of the Theoretical Humanities* 16, no. 3 (2011): 171-73 for a more accurately nuanced understanding of Agamben's notion of inoperativity.

<sup>36</sup> The *imago dei* is the other linchpin of anthropological exceptionalism. Of course, this essay cannot delve into a discussion of the *imago dei*, but were it to do so, the Christological (and pneumatological) understanding of the *imago dei* ventured in the first chapter of Kathryn Tanner's *Christ the Key* ([Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010], 1-57) would be the starting point.

<sup>37</sup> I mean to invoke the form of Barth's understanding of election more than the precise substance.

<sup>38</sup> Of course, I mean to invert the hierarchy implied in Athanasius' famous dictum in *De Incarnatione*, §54.

<sup>39</sup> The thirteenth-century manuscript miniature with which Agamben frames *The Open* is a helpful illustration of what I mean to invoke here. In it, a number of figures are seated at the Messianic banquet, the long-awaited "Day of the LORD." All the figures at the table are human in form except that on their shoulders they bear the heads of various animals—an eagle, an ass, an ox, a lion, a leopard. Whatever unimaginable mode of subjectivity belongs to such blessed creatures, it signals a profound difference from our own current self-understanding. Agamben, *The Open*, 1-3, 92.

<sup>40</sup> Giorgio Agamben, *The Kingdom and the Glory: For a Theological Genealogy of Economy and Government*, trans. Lorenzo Chiesa and Matteo Mandarini (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2011), xiii, 259.