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**Introduction**

Agamben’s goal in the book is to investigate the ways that power in the West has tended to take the form of an *oikonomia*. This aligns his project with Foucault’s, though Agamben hopes to show that there were internal reasons that Foucault’s project remained unfinished. His angle will be an investigation of the initial attempts to formulate the doctrine of the Trinity in terms of a divine economy and to show “how the apparatus of the trinitarian *oikonomia* can constitute a privileged laboratory for observing the functioning and articulation — both internal and external — of the governmental machine.”

Agamben says that this book will go beyond the contrast between power and authority in *State of Exception*, here termed the kingdom (Regno) and government (Governo) by investigation the contrast between *oikonomia* and glory (presumably this is the immanent trinity). The key question, missed by previous scholars of royal pomp and liturgy, is why power needs glory. Though this question has been neglected for the most part, Agamben believes it points toward the relation between *oikonomia* and glory as “the ultimate structure of the governmental machine of the West.” Glory is “the secret center of power.” In the face of Agamben’s investigation, previous research into popular sovereignty, the public sphere, etc., will be shown to be missing the point.
The book will reach its limit at the “empty throne” of modernity, which demands that we make room for the notion of “eternal life.” That’s what Agamben will be talking about in the fourth part of *Homo Sacer*, dedicated to “forms of life.”

So just to clarify, this is what the structure of the overall *Homo Sacer* project seems to be:

I. *Homo Sacer*
II.1. *State of Exception*
II.2. *Il Regno e la Gloria*
III. *Remnants of Auschwitz*
IV. Forthcoming volume on “forms of life”

Of course, part IV was what everyone was expecting the next book to be.

**Ch. 1: The two paradigms**

The chapter begins by claiming that the doctrine of the Trinity has bequeathed two political paradigms to the West: monotheistic political theology that culminates in the theory of sovereignty, and the divine oikonomia that ultimately underwrites modern biopolitics (the eclipse of the political by economy and governmentality). Agamben believes that the oikonomia has not been adequately addressed, in fact spending about a page going through the bibliography and complaining about it, and — like all things that Agamben believes have not been adequately addressed — oikonomia is in fact the absolute key to all political questions ever, etc.

Interestingly, though he opposes the oikonomia to sovereignty, he starts with Schmitt. The famous thesis that all modern political concepts are secularized theological concepts has to be stretched to the breaking point by the notion of oikonomia. It’s not simply a matter of extending the thesis to include economic concepts as well — it’s the more radical move of claiming that the theological concepts already were economic concepts, all along. Here he again brings up the notion of eternal life found in the intro, making a big deal about the fact that the Greek phrase uses zoe and not bios. He also has a long note about the concept of secularization, contending that it’s not really a concept at all but rather a “signature” in the sense of a certain turning of terms without redefining them. “Secularization,” in short, keeps pulling modernity back to its theological roots.

Agamben refers to a debate in Germany between Schmitt and others on the question of secularization, in which Blumenberg claims that the concept of “secularization” is completely illegitimate as a way of explaining modernity. This produced an alliance among Schmitt and some unlikely bedfellows, but the real point at issue was in fact oikonomia, particularly as it had been taken up in the form of German idealist adaptations of Heilsgeschichte, etc. Here he quotes Schelling approvingly and claims that the neglect of oikonomia and the decadence of philosophy in general has unfortunately made his statements incomprehensible. Agamben will make them readable again.

The rest of the chapter is given over to a debate between Schmitt and Erich Peterson, to whom *Politische Theologie II* is a belated response. Agamben finds the key difference between the two on the question of the katechon who, according to 2 Thessalonians, holds back the parousia. For
Peterson, it’s the refusal of the Jews to convert — once the synagogue is emptied into the church, both will disappear in the kingdom. For Schmitt, it’s the Christian empire. (Here Agamben breaks out a note claiming that Benjamin already knew all about eschatology and didn’t need Moltmann to tell him about it — kind of a weird thing to say.)

Agamben seems to be taking Peterson’s side over Schmitt’s, which is kind of refreshing given the onslaught of Schmitt in the Homo Sacer series. Peterson sees the doctrine of the Trinity as a refusal of a political theology based on one God, one empire, one monarch — that kind of political theology can only appear within a pagan or Jewish [sic] framework. Though Christian apologists followed Philo in thinking God in monarchical terms, the development of the doctrine of the Trinity ultimately undoes that. Agamben agrees, but notes that Peterson ignores the absolutely crucial concept of oikonomia, even though it appears in passages from which he takes citations (esp. in Gregory of Nazianzen and Tertullian). He’s not really positively developing oikonomia here, though, so much as pointing out it’s crucial yet neglected place in the debates he’s discussing.

(Sidenote: Agamben claims that the Cappadoccians were against both the Arians and the “homoousians” — it’s a compressed passage, but I think that one can give Agamben something of the benefit of the doubt, since Basil and others opposed the term “homousia” before it was stolen from the heretics and enshrined in orthodoxy. The familiar one-substance-three-hypostases scheme is indeed different from what the original “homoousians” thought. Still, I wish he would be more precise.)

The “threshold” (this book has thresholds between all the chapters) discusses the difference between Schmitt’s “political theology” and Peterson’s “Christian political action” — which he will be examining in more detail — and notes that ultimately for Peterson, almost every historico-political event is theologically indifferent. Yet since he believes that only the conversion of the Jews stands between us and the parousia, one event can’t be indifferent: the Shoah. Agamben (perhaps over-generously) wonders if Peterson, on hearing of the deportation of Jews from Rome to the extermination camps, felt at all ambivalent about a theological scheme that both fuels anti-Semitism and yet absolutely needs there to be Jews. Agamben hopes that restoring oikonomia to its rightful place will allow that terrible ambiguity to be resolved.

Ch. 2: The mystery of the economy

In this chapter, Agamben traces the history of the word oikonomia (which I will render as “economy” from here on out) from its original sense of the management of a home to its incorporation into Christian theology in the pre-Nicene period — a pregnant moment for Agamben’s purposes because the now-standard bifurcation between economy and theology had not yet taken hold. This chapter is somewhat difficult to summarize because of the high number of blockquotes and arguments with conventional wisdom, but I will try to give the general thrust of his argument.

His main goal throughout is to demonstrate that “economy,” when used in early Christian theology, does not mean “divine plan of salvation” and is in no way a technical term with a solely theological meaning. Rather, it extends the basic semantic nucleus of “economy” into the
theological realm, as indeed that semantic nucleus had already been extended into other areas. To
locate the semantic core, Agamben turns to the classic texts of Aristotle and Xenophon. What
emerges is a sense that economy is distinguished from politics in not being law-governed.
Rather, it is a series of *ad hoc* measures suited to each particular situation, and so economy can
never be the object of a science properly-so-called. Xenophon uses the analogy of a ship on a
voyage, where there is a captain and yet everyone is immediately responsible for everything,
shifting their strategies according to ever-changing conditions.

Agamben maintains that this notion of ad hoc, non-rule-governed management is the semantic
core of the term, which is then reflected in the metaphorical usage — for example, in rhetoric it
comes to mean the skillful organization of a treatise or speech to match the occasion. Thus it
would be curious if Christians took up the term to mean a foreordained divine plan, since that
would seem to turn it into its very opposite. After a little excursus on the linguistics behind his
claim that “economy” has a semantic core that underlies its metaphorical usage, he turns to
various passages from Paul and pseudo-Paul in which “economy” appears. Common opinion
holds that it is Paul who turned “economy” into a technical theological term, but Agamben
argues, to my mind convincingly, that it is impossible to deduce from context that Paul is ever
using the term in anything but a metaphorical sense — indeed, to import the notion of a fixed
“divine plan” into many of the passages clearly won’t work. (Sidenote: this is similar to Ted
Jenning’s claim that Paul cannot be using the Greek term for “justice” to denote some
completely separate notion of “righteousness” — when he says “justice,” he means what people
mean when they say “justice.”) Instead, Paul is talking about his own free, ad hoc management
of the task that God has assigned to him. Particularly important here is the phrase “economy of
the mystery” (Eph 3:9), which would be redundant if economy only referred to the (presumably
mysterious) divine plan. When Paul talks about the “economy of God,” he’s similarly talking
about God’s ad hoc management (to me, this provides a good frame for understanding Paul’s
argument in Romans 9-11). He ends his consideration of Paul with some less convincing claims
that Paul is *never* using political language — particularly problematic is his notion that *ekklesia*
is used in a novel, non-political way — but in any case, he underlines the importance of the fact
that the messianic community was initially conceived as an economy.

He goes through several other fathers, showing that the term “economy” is increasingly used to
describe what we would call the intra-trinitarian relations as well as the management of the
church community or the divine actions taken for the sake of redemption. He also argues that
Irenaeus twists the term so as to contradict Gnostic claims that the true God is uninvolved in
creation. Hyppolytus and especially Tertullian are where his real focus lands, though. Both
reverse the Pauline phrase to be “mystery of the economy” rather than “economy of the
mystery.” This reversal further highlights the difference between the two terms and for Agamben
reinforces the notion that we *must* understand economy as retaining its metaphorical significance
— what both fathers are saying is that it is the ad hoc divine action *itself* that is the mystery.
There is no antecedent mysterious plan that is carried out in some particularly effective way, but
the mystery directly is the economy. This reversal also underwrites the increasing use of
“economy” to describe the relationship between the Father and the Son. In a particularly
interesting formulation, Tertullian says that the Trinity doesn’t divide the divine substance, but
manages it: “The Father and the Son are two, but *non ex separatione substantiae sed ex
dispositione,* disposition being one of the standard Latin translations of economy (I find this
whole line of thought very exciting theologically in light of some work that I’ve done on Augustine’s doctrine of the trinity). Agamben points out that Tertullian is explicit about connecting his use of the term economy with its original domestic implications and quotes and analyzes several very long passages to that effect.

Using Origen, Agamben argues that we need to retain this original nucleus of the term economy if we are to understand the specifically Christian concept of history. Origen brings together providence and economy, and for Agamben, that means that he is completely divorcing himself from the pagan notion of an antecedent fate and instead positing that freedom is at the heart of history — and I will note here that when Agamben was talking about Schelling in chapter 1, he was talking specifically about Schelling’s linkage of economy and freedom, which is what he promised his investigation would make intelligible. In a footnote, Agamben points out that when the left-Hegelians rejected the theological framework of Hegel and Schelling, they nevertheless “put at the center of the historical process the economy in the modern sense, that is, the historical self-production of humanity.” Agamben also traces Origen’s usage of economy back to Clement of Alexandria, pointing out that Clement believes that the notion of economy is the only thing that can keep the story of the incarnation, etc., from appearing to be either myths or allegories.

The chapter concludes with the development in Byzantine canon law of an exception to the law based on “economy” — leading Agamben immediately to gesture enigmatically at the essential connection between economy and the state of exception, etc. (That’s something frustrating about this book so far — there’s so much that’s surprising and exciting, to the point where I’m suspecting that it may turn out to be his magnum opus, but every so often something comes up that rather flat-footedly returns everything to a predetermined scheme.) The threshold reiterates the importance of the patristic reversal of the Pauline “economy of the mystery” into “mystery of the economy,” which allows the same concept to describe the divine life and the creator’s relationship to creation and ultimately allows Christian theology to make sense of a transcendent God who nonetheless manages creation. Later theology will separate the two, reserving “economy” only for the relationship to creation, but Agamben claims that even then, the separation never really becomes complete.

Ch. 3: Being and Act

In this brief chapter, Agamben traces the separation between theology and economy, that is, between the divine nature and the economy of salvation. Agamben sees the division between the divine being and divine action as one of the most decisive innovations of Christianity. Whereas classical antiquity, as illustrated by Aristotle’s theology, had identified being and act in the divine — i.e., God qua unmoved mover doesn’t decide to move the celestial field; doing so directly springs from God’s nature — Christianity separates the divine nature from his actions, which are understood as the product of will. The concept of economy will be the way of bringing together what Christianity itself had separated.

A key issue for theology is how to found the divine economy in being. Agamben argues that just as in Pascal’s famous saying about the mystical foundation of authority, the divine economy is truly foundationless and anarchic. The concept of “will” comes to be the privileged way of attempting to connect the foundationless economy to the divine nature, and the increasing
centrality of will in theology comes to fruition in modern philosophy, which shares with Christianity the division between being and action, ontology and ethics. The doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo* is simply one illustration among many of the more fundamental division between being and act.

Agamben detects in the Arian controversy a privileged symptom of theology’s struggle to reconcile being and act. Going against the traditional presentations of the controversy, Agamben emphasizes the similarities between the Arian and orthodox positions — most fundamentally, both agree that the Son is in some sense generated, and indeed generated before time. The real point of contention is whether the Son has a foundation, an *arche*. The Nicene fathers declared that the Son as well as the Father exists absolutely, without *arche*, that the Son “pantote, anarchōs kai ateleutētōs reigns together with the Father.” Although this issue is debated on the level of what will later be called theology rather than economy, Agamben sees here the continuing influence of the more originary notion of economy (my wording), insofar as the Son represents in a privileged way the divine economy in the restricted sense. Economy (again, in the more originary sense) and Christology are inseparable, and if we don’t understand this “originary ‘anarchic’ vocation of Christology, it is not possible to understand either the successive historical development of Christian theology, with its latent atheological tendency, nor the history of Western philosophy, with its ethical break between ontology and practice.”

The break between being and act is, as already said, shown in the break between theology and economy, which theologians increasingly understand to be two separate discourses, each with its own particular logic. Yet in a very satisfying passage (to me at least), Agamben argues that the distinction between the two logics breaks down in the controversy over monothelitism — I apologize for not summarizing in more detail, because capturing it would basically require me to translate the whole thing — and that this demonstrates that (the more originary concept of) economy is ultimately the controlling concept in the relationship between theology and economy. In a final footnote, Agamben connects the anarchic character of economy with the relationship between anarchy and governance in Western politics: “The governmental paradigm, of which we are here reconstructing the genealogy, is, in reality, always already ‘anarchic-governmental.’”

The threshold seems to me to cover very little new ground, other than to clarify that Agamben is arguing *against* Schmitt that Christianity implies not a politics, but an economy — but this makes Christianity all the more relevant to the political development of the West and means that we need to make a fresh investigation of that development with Agamben’s theses in mind.

**Ch. 4: Reign and Governance**

Agamben begins by discussing the figure of the *Roi mehaignié*, that is, the do-nothing king, found primarily in Arthurian legends. Understanding this figure requires understanding the shift in the notion of sovereignty from the ancient world to the Christian middle ages. In the course of tracing this shift, Agamben jumps around a lot from Peterson and Schmitt to Augustine, Aquinas, canon law, etc., making this one of the most difficult chapters to follow thus far.
In *Monotheism as a Political Problem*, Peterson cites the pseudo-Aristotelian text *On the World* as a way of indicating the passage between the Aristotelian and Judaic concept of the monarchy of God. This text views God as working through various intermediaries arranged into a hierarchy, which Peterson (and apparently Agamben as well) views as establishing the difference between *potestas* and *auctoritas*—thus bringing us back into contact with one of the key distinctions from *State of Exception*. In this scheme, God ultimately causes everything, but the intermediaries are the more direct causes. The text explicitly uses the analogy of what we would now call a bureaucracy—the king wills something, but his ministers actually carry it out. Agamben sees this as closely connected with the Christian notion of economy, and notes that the text includes a form of the word *oikonomia*.

Although Peterson’s goal is to prove the impossibility of a Christian “political theology,” Schmitt seizes on his reference to the phrase *Le roi règne mais ne gouverne pas* in this context as proof that the liberal regime really is based on a certain type of theology. Peterson denies that the split between kingship and government actually comes from Christianity, and Agamben diagnoses this as a product of Peterson’s (apparently quite crude) anti-Semitism, which basically consists in claiming that the Jews refused to see the light and turned instead to a worship of economy in the modern sense, etc. Schmitt rejects the split because it posits an impossible “neutral power,” while for Schmitt all political power must be mobilized by the friend/enemy distinction. In a long footnote, Agamben argues that Schmitt’s Nazism leads him to politicize even what in his own account should be outside the political realm—namely, to make the bodily reproduction of the people a directly political question through official racism. Both are united, then, in avoiding the theological question of economy.

For most of the chapter, though, Agamben seems to put the investigation of economy on hold in order to trace the theological genealogy of the distinction between kingship and government—the possibility, that is, of a king who reigns without governing. The initial root is the Gnostic distinction between the good God (styled a king) and the evil demiurge. This isn’t just a dualism of good and evil. More importantly, the good God/King doesn’t do anything. The image of the transcendent God as a king appears to come from Platonism and also comes back in the very influential text of Numenius. Numenius’s attempt to keep kingship and government distinct yet coordinated was, in Agamben’s view, naturally very interesting to Christian theorists of the divine economy.

Agamben then turns to an investigation of Aristotle’s *Metaphysics*, which he believes provides the philosophical paradigm for the distinction in question. I was not able to follow Agamben’s commentary in every detail, but he goes against many commentators who claim that Aristotle is trying to reconcile transcendence and immanence by saying that instead, Aristotle is trying to coordinate two types of orders—one by which all things are ordered to God and the other by which all things are ordered to each other. Tellingly, Aristotle uses a domestic analogy to explain the coordination between these two types of order. Agamben then proceeds to claim that even though it is never explicitly defined, *taxis* (order) is a technical term in Aristotle and in fact a key to understanding his thought in general, because it is his way of bringing together the two questions of ontology: separate being and being as such (presumably the same as Heideggerian *seiende* and *Sein*).
Medieval thought latched onto the Aristotelian concept of order to explain the relationship between God and the world. Here Aristotle’s *Metaphysics* provided a paradigm at the same time convincing and aporetic. Aquinas in particular took up the twofold notion of order as referring to the creatures’ relationship to God and their mutual relationships as well, claiming that the two are necessarily coordinated. The relationship between God and the order of creation had also come up earlier in Augustine’s *De genesi ad litteram*, where Augustine ultimately comes to the conclusion not only that all creatures depend continually on the action/ordering of God but that God himself is thought primarily as an ordering *dispositio* (the Latin translation for *oikonomia*). Ultimately, God even orders himself in the Trinitarian processions, where the Son serves as the archetype for creation: “Trinitarian *oikonomia, ordo* and *gubernatio* constitute an inseparable triad, whose terms pass into one another, and in this way name the new figure of ontology that Christian theology will consign to modernity” (loose translation). (In a footnote to this passage, Agamben claims that the early Marx simply replaced God with humanity in this basic paradigm, such that humanity continually produces itself through labor.)

Agamben then turns to the theological distinction between creation and conservation, which he analogizes to constitutive and constituted power.

Another pseudo-Aristotelian text, the *Liber de causis* or *Liber Aristotelis de expositione bonitatis purae* provided another crucial point of reference for medieval thinkers, particularly Aquinas, who tries to establish the relationship between primary and secondary causes. It might appear that the secondary cause is more the cause and is therefore more important — and if I’m reading Agamben correctly, that seems to be what the text in question actually says — but Aquinas argues that the primary cause is actually more truly the cause insofar as the secondary cause has from the primary cause its very being as cause. (That is to say, I think, that the primary cause sets up the very order of causality.)

Later, in the tractate *De gubernatione mundi* in the *Summa*, Aquinas tries to establish the necessity of the primary cause working through secondary causes, which proves to have important political implications. The useless king was not simply a legend — there was a case in which a pope deprived an incompetent king of the execution of his office while not depriving him of his royal dignity. This was a very practical illustration of the difference between *dignitas* and *administratio*. The more important question, however, was the meaning of the pope’s supposed *plentudo potestatis*, a fullness of both spiritual and temporal power, of which he delegated the temporal part to human rulers.

The scriptural basis for the division of power into “two swords” is found in the passage in the Gospel where Jesus’ disciples tell him they have two swords and he says, “That is enough.” One, the spiritual, remains always in its sheath, while the temporal is actually used (to cut off that one guy’s ear). Agamben goes through the various arguments in favor of there being two and only two swords, only one of which can be used. He then relates it to the late medieval controversy over the divine *potentia ordinata* and *potentia absoluta*. Agamben sees the *potentia absoluta* as being ultimately the reserve of things that God is unable to do — and concludes the chapter proper with a long quote arguing that only this divine impotence allows for the world to be properly ordered.
The threshold to this chapter takes the argument step further by claiming that those (such as Ockham) who argued for an irreducible distinction between the potestas ordinata and potentia absoluta, and therefore a kind of “reserve” of potential that never becomes actual, were in Agamben’s mind defending a distinctively Christian political theology against the ancient pagan view where political authority and political activity are simply one and the same. Agamben views the Christian position as the more “democratic” one, but at the same time, he notes that this very reserve is what opens up the space for a “state of exception,” as when Scotus argues that God can in fact act legitimately beyond the limits of his potentia ordinata.

At this point, a question I have is what we’re supposed to do with all the stuff in State of Exception about the ancient distinction between auctoritas and potestas — surely that didn’t come from Christianity, right? Indeed, what are we to do with Homo Sacer, which traces the current political paradigm directly back to Roman law? Maybe he will address this seeming contradiction in later chapters.

Ch. 5: The providential machine

I’ll begin by noting that it’s not clear to me what is motivating the use of the term “machine” in the title of this chapter, aside from Agamben’s general penchant for using it to refer to Western political arrangements.

This chapter finally includes a head-on discussion of Foucault, specifically the lecture course Security, Territory, Population (1977-78). Agamben agrees with Foucault that the paradigm of the modern state is governmentality rather than sovereignty. He also agrees with the connection that Foucault draws between governmentality and medieval pastoral care, or “governing of souls.” However, he believes that Foucault’s genealogy is inaccurate insofar as it focuses on explicitly “political” texts. Agamben hopes to correct this error through his own theological genealogy, but he believes Foucault’s broad conclusions are nonetheless correct. A footnote explains that a proper genealogy must be willing to look in unexpected places — in the current case, the explicitly political medieval texts don’t seem to have much relevance to modern political arrangements, whereas the theological texts provide the paradigm for the modern state.

The bulk of the chapter is given over to a selective survey of the long-running debate on divine providence, particularly on the question of whether God directs the world on a general level (general providence) or controls particulars (special providence). The latter must be reconciled with the free will of human beings, and though that aspect of the debate has been the focus of the most attention, Agamben believes that the real point of contention is actually the possibility of a divine governance of the world.

Agamben begins his investigation with Chrisippus’s Peri pronoias [note: I sometimes have difficulty recognizing who the Italian versions of proper names are referring to -- in this case, it's "Crisippo"]'). Crissipus provides the paradigm by bringing together “two apparently distinct questions: that of the origin and justification of evil, and that of the governance of the world.” Evil becomes a kind of “collateral damage” [my term at this point, though Agamben does bring it up later] in the generally good governance of the world. He then turns to Alexander of Aphrodisia, a commentator on Aristotle. Alexander opposes the Stoic idea that nothing can
happen in the world without divine intervention, claiming that it is actually unworthy of God to be involved in every single detail — someone who has to manage every aspect of a task is “beneath” that task (by which I think he means submitted to the task), whereas God must be above it. To make sense of this, Alexander needs to establish a kind of “third realm” between volitional intervention by God and sheer chance — a realm of collateral but still calculated effects. The governance of the world emerges in a contingent, yet conscious way from the universal providence of God, which acts according to the nature of things. Christianity will take up and develop Alexander’s basic scheme. (Agamben also mentions in passing the islamic philosopher Jabir ibn Hayyan and Philo of Alexandria as responding to Alexander.) A footnote explains that modern government follows this scheme exactly — government has a particular goal, yet collateral effects emerge and must be accounted for.

Agamben then discusses the origin of the term “providence” in Stoicism, where it is coordinated with fate. By means of a very long and detailed analysis of Plutarch that I don’t want to reproduce here, he concludes that fate is the specificity of providence, basically equivalent to “special providence,” and that fate operates in a “collateral” or “effectual” way. Agamben believes that these last two notions introduce a significant novelty into classical ontology, substituting contingent “effects” for Aristotelian ends. By creating a bipolar system of providence and fate, this ontology also produces a “zone of indistinction between primary and secondary, general and particular, final cause and effects.” This zone of indistinction is the condition of possibility of governance, which “is not directed, in the last analysis, either to the general or the particular, either to the primary or the consequent, either to ends or means, but to their functional correlation.” A footnote claims that in light of what has been said, the theological concept of the governance of the world and the modern scientific worldview are actually deeply similar, contrary to common perceptions.

Alexander rejects the initial Stoic formulation of the relationship between providence and fate, first of all because of the sheer number of details providence would have to consciously coordinate — many of which, such as facial tics or deformities in plants and animals, seem to have no purpose whatsoever. The deeper reason, however, is that if governance didn’t experience some “push-back” from the world, especially from human action, then there simply wouldn’t be governance and there wouldn’t be a world in the sense of an ordered totality. So Alexander articulates general providence, contingency, and human free agency in a way that, again, is passed on to Christianity and thereby to modernity. In a medieval text attributed to Proclus, called Questions on Providence, the same division of reality into the planes of the general and the particular, which must then be coordinated, holds (the analysis of this text is much longer than my notes indicate).

The direct Christian connection to this basic scheme comes from Boethius’s Consolation of Philosophy — providence is the general, fate is the particular. The governance of the world emerges from the interaction between a transcendent good and an immanent oikonomia. (Boethius makes the political implications clear by using an explicit political analogy.) The two levels are intertwined in such a way as to produce a spontaneous theodicy — what appears incomprehensible at the lower level must be referred to the superior level. A footnote discusses a bishop named Salvianus who divides the governance of the world into three levels that seem to Agamben to echo the modern division of government into three powers.
The longest analysis is given over to Thomas Aquinas’s *De gubernatione mundi*. The big addition for Agamben seems to be the fact that the governance of the world is not coercive or violent, but acts according to the nature of the things governed. Thus the governance of God and the self-governance of things correspond, and it might seem that the concept of governance is empty. Aquinas rejects two extremes, namely that God directly acts in everything (this would make creation useless) and that God doesn’t directly act in anything (this would expose creation to a return to the nothing from which it came). To resolve this aporia, Aquinas argues that the proper sphere of governance is not in the realm of primary causes, but of secondary causes — in a miracle, for instance, God can introduce a new element into the causal chain that accomplishes his greater ends in a way that would otherwise be impossible. But on the level of the primary cause or general providence, Agamben claims, God is “impotent” and unable to act in a way contrary to the nature of things as he had already established them. This distinction between the two levels is essentially the division between being and act in the intra-divine economy, which then becomes a “machine of governance” for creation. It also creates a distinction between deliberation and execution, which Agamben traces forward to the division of powers in modern states.

Later in *De gubernatione mundi*, Aquinas will repeat Boethius’s use of the terms providence and fate, defining fate as the “economy [dispositio -- Agamben often repeats that this is the Latin translation for oikonomia]” of secondary causes. Thus fate is not a matter of substance, but rather of relation. In addition, not all creatures are governed in the same way. God created rational creatures for an end that surpasses their natural capacity, and so the method of governance most appropriate to their nature is supernatural grace. From this point on, the debate over providence is increasingly dominated by the question of the efficacy of grace. But grace remains governance and therefore must correspond to the nature of the governed, meaning that God’s grace must act in us in such a way as to leave us free — as Suarez will later say, free will and grace necessarily imply each other. Thus “the providential paradigm of the governance of human beings is not tyrannical, but democratic.”

Agamben concludes the chapter with what seems to me to be a somewhat compressed analysis of the necessarily vicarious nature of providential governance. The pope claims to be ruling vicariously for Christ, but that is only because Christ himself acts vicariously on behalf of the Father. Agamben interprets the intratrinitarian relationship between Father and Son as essentially vicarious: “The trinitarian economy is, thus, the expression of an anarchical power and being, which circulates among the three persons according to an essentially vicarious paradigm.” It’s not surprising, therefore, that when Thomas discusses earthly rulers, he understands them as ruling vicariously as well. In fact, Agamben believes that the operation of sovereign power is always vicarious: “Governance certainly acts vicariously with respect to Reign [Kingdom]; but this latter has its sense only within an economy of alternations, in which no power can do anything without the other.”

Final paragraph of the chapter proper: “Vicariousness implies, therefore, an ontology — or, better, the substitution for the classical ontology of an ‘economic’ paradigm, in which no figure of being is, as such, in the position of arche, but the very trinitarian relationship is originary, where each of the figure gerit vices, acts in the other’s place. The mystery of being and of
divinity coincide without remainder with their ‘economic’ mystery. There is not a substance of power, but only an ‘economy,’ only ‘governance.’”

[Question: what about the divine substance in the Trinity?]

**Threshold (full translation)**

We can now try to list in the form of theses the essential characteristics that our analysis of the providential paradigm have brought to light. These define something like an ontology of acts of governance:

1. Providence (governance) is that through which theology and philosophy attempted to confront the division of classical ontology into two separate realities: being and praxis, transcendent good and immanent good, theology and *oikonomia*. It appears as a machine directed toward rearticulating the two fragments into the *gubernatio dei*, into the divine governance of the world.

2. It represents, in the same sense and in the same measure, the attempt to reconcile the Gnostic division between a God foreign to the world and a God who governs, which Christian theology had inherited, through the “economic” articulation of the Father and the Son. In the Christian *oikonomia*, the creator God confronts a corrupted and foreign nature, which the savior God, to whom the governance of the world has been given, must redeem and save, through a kingdom that is not, however, “of this world.” The price that the trinitarian overcoming of the Gnostic division between two divinities must pay is the substantial foreignness of the world. The Christian governance of the world has, consequently, the paradoxical figure of the immanent governance of a world that is and must remain foreign.

\* This “Gnostic” structure, which the theological *oikonomia* has transmitted to modern governmentality, reaches its extreme point in the paradigm of governance that the great Western powers (in particular the US) always try to realize on both a local and global scale. Whether it is a matter of the breaking down of preexisting constitutional forms or the imposition, through military occupation, of constitutional models considered democratic on peoples to whom these models appear to be impracticable, in every case the essential thing is that a region — and, at the limit, the entire globe — is governed while remaining completely foreign.

The tourist, that is, the final reincarnation of the Christian *peregrinus in terra*, is the planetary figure of this irreducible foreignness to the world. It is, in this sense, a figure whose “political” significance is consubstantial with the dominant governmental paradigm, just as the *peregrinus* was the figure corresponding to the providential paradigm. The pilgrim and the tourist are, that is, the collateral effects of one and the same “economy” (in its theological or secularized version).

3. The providential machine, while being unitary, is articulated, for this reason, on two distinct planes or levels: transcendence/immanence, general providence/special providence (or fate), primary cause/secondary cause, intellectual knowledge/praxis. The
two levels are strictly correlated, in such a way that the first founds, legitimates, and renders possible the second and the second realizes concretely in the chain of causes and effects the general decisions of the divine mind. The governance of the world is what results from this functional correlation.

4. The paradigm of the act of governance, in its pure form, is, consequently, the collateral effect. Insofar as it is not directed to a particular end but derives, as a concomitant effect, from a general law and economy, the act of governance represents a zone of undecidability between the general and the particular, between the calculated and the non-willed. This is its “economy.”

5. In the providential machine transcendence is never given by itself and separate from the world, as in Gnosticism, but is always in relation to immanence; this latter, on the other hand, is never truly such, because it is thought always as an image or reflection of the transcendent order. Correspondingly, the second level appears as execution (executio) of what was arranged and ordained (ordinatio) on the first. The division of powers is consubstantial with the machine.

6. The ontology of acts of governance is a vicarious ontology, in the sense that, within the economic paradigm, every power has a vicarious character, acts in another’s place. This means that there is not a “substance,” but only an “economy” of power.

7. It is precisely the distinction and correlation of the two levels, of the primary and secondary causes, of the general economy and the particular economy, that guarantees that governance is not a despotic power, which does violence to the liberty of the creature; it presupposes, to the contrary, the liberty of the governed, which is demonstrated through the operation of the secondary causes.

It should already be clear in what sense it can be said that the providential apparatus (which is itself only a reformulation and development of the theological oikonomia) contains something like the epistemological paradigm of modern governance. It is known that, in the history of law [diritto], a doctrine of governance and public administration (not to speak of administrative law which, as such, is a typically modern creation) takes a long time to take form. But well before the jurists began to develop its first elements, the philosophers and theologians had already developed its model in the doctrine of the providential gubernatio of the world. Providence and fate, with the train of notions and concepts in which they are articulated (ordinatio / executio; reign and governance; immediate and mediated governance; primi agentes / agentes inferiores; primary act / collateral effects, etc.) are not only, in this sense, theologico-philosophical concepts, but categories of law and politics.

The modern State inherits, in fact, both aspects of the theological machine of the governance of the world, and presents itself equally as providence-State and as destiny-State. Through the distinction between legislative or sovereign power and executive or governance power, the modern State assumes on itself the double structure of the governmental machine. It puts on by turns the regal vestments of providence, which legislates in a transcendent or universal way, but leaves the creature it takes care of free, and the suspicious and ministerial vestments of fate, which carries out in detail the providential dictates and forces reluctant individuals into the implacable connection of immanent causes and effects that their own nature has contributed to determining. The economico-providential paradigm is, in this sense, the paradigm of democratic governance, just as the theologico-political is the paradigm of absolutism.
It’s not surprising, in this sense, that the collateral effect appears ever more frequently to be consubstantial with every act of governance. What the government aims at can be, by its very nature, reached only as a collateral effect, in a zone in which general and particular, positive and negative, calculated and unforeseen tend to be superimposed onto each other. To govern means to allow to be produced the concomitant particular effects of a general “economy” that would remain in itself entirely ineffective, but without which no governance would be possible. It is not so much that the effects (Governance) depend on being (Reign), but being consists rather in its effects: such is the vicarious and effectual ontology that defines acts of governance. And when the providential paradigm, at least in its transcendent aspect, begins to decline, providence-State and destiny-State tend progressively to become identified in the figure of the State of modern law, in which the law regulates administration and the administrative apparatus applies and carries out the law. But, even in this case, the decisive element remains that to which, from the very beginning, the machine as a whole has been destined: the oikonomia, that is, the governance of human beings and of things. The economico-governmental vocation of contemporary democracies is not an incident along the way, but is an integral part of the theological inheritance of which they are trustees.

Ch. 6: Angelology and Bureaucracy

If State of Exception is a book about Schmitt, then Il regno e la gloria is a book about Peterson. Agamben begins the chapter by noting that in the very year in which he published his argument against the possibility of a Christian political theology, Peterson also published a book in which he claimed that the heavenly city and the church are both “public” and “political” in character — and he establishes this by means of angelology. Peterson defines the church as the ekklesia (a term, we must note, that Agamben hastily dismissed as non-political in Paul’s usage) of citizens of the heavenly city, meaning that the church is necessarily in relation with what we might call the native-born citizens, the angels. This relationship is one of mutual participation in each other’s liturgies, which for Peterson represents a directly political act of expressing the “publicity [Öffentlichkeit -- clearly Agamben's setting the stage to engage with Habermas in a future chapter]” of Christ’s dominion. So Peterson’s exclusion of the possibility of a Christian political theology is meant only in terms of this world, because the only possible politics of Christianity relates to the heavenly city.

Agamben seems to accept Peterson’s thesis that angelology is the key to Christian politics, but he objects to his limiting of the angelic function to the liturgy (“publicity”) only — in the tradition, the angels also have a significant “administrative” role. (Agamben devotes a couple pages here to more closely analyzing what Peterson says about the angelic liturgy, for reasons that are unclear to me.) Over time, angels came to represent the division of the Christian life into the contemplative and active spheres, with the latter attracting much more attention in the medieval period especially. In fact, Aquinas devotes more space to angels in De gubernatione mundi than in questions about angelology proper. He first founds the necessity of the use of angelic ministers in an argument that has come up many times — having intermediaries increases God’s glory rather than detracting from it. He then hits on many of the points that Agamben has already mentioned — the division between the contemplative and administrative angels being the most important. In a footnote, Agamben points out that there are supposed to be more contemplative
than administrative angels, meaning that role is more important — but the administrative angels are given more attention and analysis.

The basis for the hierarchy of angels — as indeed the very term hierarchy itself — of course stems from Pseudo-Dionysius. Agamben is very up front about reading Dionysius’s strategy as one of sacralizing both the ecclesiastical hierarchy and all political hierarchies in general through his baroque analysis of the angelic hierarchy. The almost obsessive focus on triads shows for Agamben that this angelic hierarchy is directly related to the divine oikonomia. (There are no real surprises in Agamben’s reading of Pseudo-Dionysius — he (most likely rightly) assumes that his audience is not familiar, but I’m going to go out on a limb and assume my audience is.) But the basic idea of the angelic bureaucracy is found as early as Athenagoras and Tertullian, as Agamben already pointed out in earlier chapters. An interesting footnote cites an article that claims that there was a persistent tendency among scribes to mix up ministerium and mysterium, particularly in texts dealing with administration, angelic or otherwise. Agamben believes that the basis for this error is ultimately the shift from “economy of the mystery” to “mystery of the economy,” which again was discussed in earlier chapters.

The next question Aquinas addresses is what happens to the angelic hierarchy after the last judgment. In the cases of the angels called “principalities, authorities, and powers” [not sure on this translation], he entertains the possibility that they will simply cease to exist — but in general, they will be rendered inoperative. This is because in the Christian frame, governance, or the divine economy, is specifically temporal and comes to an end once it is fulfilled in the divine judgment. At that point, it becomes a matter of trying to envision a “Regno” deprived of “Governo.” Insofar as the hierarchical divisions among angels are based in the angels’ nature, they will persist after the judgment, but will have no function. For Agamben, this is a point where Aquinas is coming up against the inherent limit of Christian theology — since the Trinity is thought so much in economic, active terms, how are we to think of God as inactive? In any case, it is clear that what the angels and saints will do is simply sing God’s praises — the liturgy will remain only in its doxological form once its economic role is completed.

A long footnote at this point addresses the question of what God was doing before creation, a question that is only an embarrassment for Christian theology, precisely because its concept of God is so focussed on the economy. Gnostics had no problem conceiving of an idle God, and rabbinic Judaism came up with some things to keep God busy — but the persistent answer to the question in Christian theology is the (only seemingly) sarcastic one: “Creating hell for the curious.” This is actually a brilliant setup for the end of the chapter, which for me is the most satisfying part of the book so far. Aquinas comes to the question of whether the demons carry out the punishments in hell, and he answers in the affirmative — meaning that eternal governance is found only in hell. For Agamben, this shows that within the frame of Christian theology, the model of contemporary politics — namely, an indefinite, eternal governance — is (rightly) thought to be hellish. (And I would say that this is the deeper reason why God can only be “creating hell for the curious” before the divine economy — because that too projects an essentially historical concept of God into eternity). Aquinas also claims that the saved will be able to watch the punishment of the damned, but it will inspire not pity, but only praise for God’s righteousness — meaning that eternity is a theater of torture. (To me, this conclusion was very helpful because the “affect” of the discussion of economy and governance has seemed so
positive throughout — to the point where I was starting to wonder if Agamben had abandoned his “messianic nihilism.”

The threshold discusses the fact that already in Paul, the names of the angelic hosts are political names and it is not always easy to distinguish between the two in his discourse. This is because for Paul, the angels ultimately are the “rulers of this world” — and it’s in this context that we need to understand Romans 13. The authorities do come from God and they are his way of governing us, but they will ultimately be overcome — the members of Paul’s community are told that they will judge angels in the end. This is really the key to Paul’s ambivalence over the law, over political authority, etc. — they do represent God, but under the sign of his wrath. (I don’t know if this is really right.) The properly messianic end of the law and of all political authority is — as in Kafka’s notion of a law that is no longer in effect, but only studied — to be rendered inoperative.

Ch. 7: The power and the glory

(Before beginning, I should note that I found the chapter difficult to follow. In some places, my eyes really glazed over. The final proper chapter, “Archeology of glory,” is much longer than previous chapters and appears to be something of a “payoff,” so perhaps the present chapter will turn out to be mainly a collection of evidence, like previous chapters going through where all the church fathers used the term oikonomia. In fact, now coming back to this parenthetical, I see that he was mainly trying to establish that previous scholarship on political pomp — which hasn’t even been very extensive, apparently — has never gotten at the core issue: Why does power need glory?)

In the relationship between glory and governance, the articulation between Reign and Governance reaches a point of maximum intelligibility and maximum opacity — on the one hand, it clarifies the difference between the two moments, but on the other hand, it leaves unclear what a purely “glorious,” liturgical politics really would be. In order to get at this question, we must of course look yet again to Peterson, in this case to his dissertation, Heis Theos: Epigraphische, formgeschichtliche un religionsgeschichtliche Untersuchungen, which seeks to understand the relationship between political ceremonial and ecclesiastical liturgy — the liturgy being, as we have seen, the only truly “political” significance of the church. The key to Peterson’s argument is to see the formula heis theos not a confession of faith, but an example of acclamation, which played a major, but seemingly undefined, role in Roman politics throughout its history. Sometimes acclamation could take on a recognized juridical power beyond simply that of endorsing an already determined action — and Schmitt later argued, citing Peterson, that acclamation was essentially the “constitutive power” of the people. Schmitt turned this point into a criticism of liberal democracy — where ancient republics had seen the people express themselves publicly as a unit, liberal democracy completely atomizes the people through the secret ballot, such that it does not count as real democracy anymore.

Agamben then turns, for reasons that are unclear to me, to the primitive Christian liturgy, about which the scholarly consensus is that it unites the Eucharistic celebration with a psalmic/doxological celebration — two elements that the scholars seem to think can be distinguished, but Agamben points out are complexly interwoven. Viewing the doxological
aspect as the more strictly “liturgical” part, while the Eucharist is the “economic” part, he notes that even the Eucharistic prayer itself begins with the common Roman acclamation, *Vere aequum et iustum est* (in the modern rite, this is the part where the priest says, “We do well always and everywhere to give you praise…”). This element of acclamation clarifies not only the link between secular and ecclesiastical liturgy, but the properly “public” character of the mass. Following up on this point, he reviews Peterson’s somewhat tortured attempt to distinguish between the terms *laos* and *ochlos* in the NT, in order to make them map out in some predetermined way that will show that one of them is totally unpolitical — the interest here comes in a note, where Agamben points out that Paul uses neither to refer to his communities, but only the generic “we”: “The messianic community as such is, in Paul, anonymous and seems to be situated in a threshold of indifference between public and private.”

Agamben’s next subject is the work of Andreas Alföldi, who in 1934-35 published a work debunking the widespread scholarly consensus that the Roman Empire borrowed ceremonies, etc., from Eastern empires and demonstrating the continuity between the imperial cult and previous Roman ceremonial — including extremely detailed analysis of all extant evidence of said ceremonial. Alföldi ironically dedicated this book to Theodor Mommsen, implying that Mommsen’s book *Staatsrecht* had omitted a necessary part, namely the analysis of ceremony. (I have no idea who any of these people are.) There follows an analysis of the performative power of certain objects in imperial ceremonies — chairs, types of garments, etc.

Our next obscure scholar is Ernst Percy Schramm, who tried — somewhat futilely — to give more precision to the notion of political symbolism by creating compound technical terms (*Herrschaftszeichen* and *Staatssymbolik*). The point here seems to be that even scholars who have attempted to comprehend the role of ceremonial symbolism in politics never really get very far, perhaps because of the very term “symbol” — it never becomes clear why the symbol is necessary. Agamben then turns to Karl von Amira, who talks about gestures and their performative qualities, leading to a pretty standard discussion of performativity that culminates by claiming that the constantive preceded by a performative is a “signature” (a kind of subterranean key term for the book, it seems).

It then turns out that there is a crucial Roman symbolic object that previous scholars have neglected, etc., namely the *fasci littori*. I had a hard time figuring out what this was even referring to, and I basically spaced out for a few pages while he was discussing it. I apologize to everyone if this turns out to be the key to the whole book. Yet another space-out occurred during his analysis of a text by a late-Byzantine emperor, who described in loving detail how insanely Byzantine imperial ceremonial had become by that point — the take-away here seems to be that acclamation remains important. After further analysis of acclamation, including dismissing all theories offered by previous scholars, Agamben decides that the element of “glory” is something akin to the figure of *homo sacer*, insofar as it is a kind of zone of indistinction that emerges from a seemingly “prepolitical” level underlying the normal run of things.

The next scholar up for examination is Kantorowicz, who had played a key role in *Homo Sacer* (I need to review that section in particular after finishing this book). In question here is his study *Laudes regiae*, which focuses on the liturgical formula “Christus vincit, Christus regnat, Christus imperat,” which seems to originate in what is now France around the 8th century and spreads
from there. The formula is followed by an acclamation wishing *vita* to the pope and the emperor. Then a litany of angels and saints is followed by an acclamation of ecclesiastical and political functionaries, after which the formula is repeated, along with some “military” acclamations of Christ. Kantorowicz shows that the formula has origins in the pagan imperial court and that it played a decisive role in the increasing intertwining of imperial and church power in the middle ages — for instance, in the papal crowning of kings. Kantorowicz believes, however, that the role of acclamation is only one of endorsement, never a constitutive role, and for support of this he points out that it is increasingly the clergy rather than the people who pronounce acclamations.

Agamben claims that the real point in question in Kantorowicz’s analysis in *Laudes Regiae* is political theology, as illustrated by the subtitle of the follow-up book *The King’s Two Bodies: A Study of Medieval Political Theology*. In fact, the political-theological significance overshadows the attempt to specify the juridical status of acclamations — as shown by Kantorowicz’s use of the tension between Pope Pius XI and Mussolini. Just when the Fascist government was restoring apparently “theological” styles of acclamation that had fallen into disuse through most of the modern period, the pope instituted the feast of Christ the King, which reinstated the formula “Christus vincit, Christus regnat, Christus imperat,” in apparent protest against Mousolini. Kantorowicz goes on to cite Peterson in connection with the Nazi acclamation *Ein Reich, ein Volk, ein Führer*, saying that its origins can be found in Peterson’s analysis of the acclamation *Heis theos*. The point here is that Peterson’s attempt to exclude a Christian political theology brings him into close contact with totalitarianism.

The final scholar to come under scrutiny in this chapter is Jan Assmann, the famous Egyptologist who reverses Schmitt’s famous formula to say that “the most meaningful concepts in theology are theologized political concepts.” Agamben thinks that this kind of reversal doesn’t accomplish much — but the fact that it can be so easily done points to the solidarity between the two. Agamben proposes that “glory” names a phenomenon more originary than either politics or theology, spiritual or profane, which is to say it is the place where the two meet and become indistinguishable. Citing Thomas Mann’s saying that religion and politics are always trading clothing, Agamben claims that in fact the religio-political is *nothing but the clothing* — there is no body or substance underlying it. “The theological and the political are what result from the continual shifting and movement of something like an absolute clothing which, as such, however, has decisive juridico-political implications.” Glory is a signature rather than a symbol, therefore.

The threshold sets up the question that will dominate the final chapter: what is the relationship that links power to glory? Rather than follow the traditional instrumental interpretation, where glory “shows forth” power, Agamben proposes to ask about the connection and operation between the two — not about glory as such, but about glorification.

**Ch. 8: Archeology of Glory**

Agamben begins by castigating Hans Urs von Balthasar, who has led astray all theologians by confining glory to the aesthetic realm rather than its properly political place — and this despite the obvious clue provided by the German word *Herrlichkeit*. By contrast, Agamben sets out to
prove that the terms kabod and doxa (glory) are actually never used in an aesthetic sense in scripture, but only in a political one. He starts with kabod, using Maimonides’ three-part definition from Guide for the Perplexed: the glory of the Lord is something that God gives off (in the sense of a separate created thing, like the reflected glory that hangs around Moses for a time), something inherent to God (his glory in itself), and something that humanity and indeed all creation gives to God (praise, etc.). This last Agamben terms glorification, and Maimonides’ strategy — followed by subsequent interpreters of all stripes — is to base glorification in a preexisting glory. Agamben holds the question of priority in suspense for the moment, but notes the tension between “objective” and “subjective” kabod, kabod as glory and glorification. (Two footnotes discuss the relationship between kabod and Shekinah and the eschatological significance of kabod in the OT and rabbinc Judaism.)

Doxa is used as the LXX translation of kabod and in the NT as well. This translation, however, represents a significant transformation in the meaning of the term, because in Christianity it is put in a dialectical relationship with oikonomia — the doxa theou is first of all the reciprocal glorification of Father and Son: “The trinitarian economy is constitutively an economy of glory.” Agamben demonstrates that this is the case through an analysis of key passages in the Gospel of John, where, significantly, the mutual glorification of Father and Son also includes the glorification of humanity. (A footnote contrasts the NT doxa with the Homeric term for glory, kleos, which only the poet can truly create — it’s only glorification, with no antecedent glory. This becomes significant further on.) Turning to the passage in 2 Corinthians where Paul claims that the glory Moses saw in Exodus was only a foretaste, Agamben notes that the accent in Paul has shifted away from the mutual glorification of Father and Son (though it’s still present) and toward the glorification of humanity. (Does he think the Gospel of John is from before Paul?) The center of Paul’s message isn’t the trinitarian economy, but messianic redemption — this is a key distinction that is kind of a subterranean force throughout this chapter.

Common scholarly opinion has it that the early church fathers don’t continue the theory of glory, but Agamben claims that their elaboration of the economy always necessarily includes an elaboration of glory — he demonstrates this through an extensive quotation of Ireanaeus. A footnote indicates that Tertullian was up to a similar thing. The most significant contribution to the theory of glory, however, comes in a digression in Origen’s commentary on John. Agamben had pointed out before that Paul’s discussion of glory is couched in optical terms, whereas Origen puts it in terms of knowledge. The mutual glorification of the Father and the Son is God’s self-knowledge.

Agamben then returns to the distinction between the immanent and economic trinity, saying that the book up to this point could be understood as an attempt to understand how various other polarities developed out of this one — Reign and Governance, general and special providence, etc. He quotes Rahner’s famous statement (as though it stemmed from Moltmann, however) that “the economic trinity is the immanent trinity and vice versa” and then goes through Moltmann’s elaboration of the meaning of this claim. The two are inseparable, yet they must not dissolve into one another — glory is where the two meet, and therefore doxology is the most dialectical point in theology. In the liturgy, we can see this because of the way that acclamation and eucharistic mimesis are inseparably interwoven. (A note says that this dialectical moment is also a risky moment, because it can lead to subordination of the economy trinity — hence it’s not surprising
that Origen is often seen as a precursor to Arius. Such a heresy is so harmful because it completely undercuts the Christian apparatus, which depends on a continued mutual circulation among the persons of the Trinity and between the economic and immanent Trinity: “The economy of glory can function only if it is perfectly symmetrical and reciprocal. The whole of economy must become glory and the whole of glory economy.”

After the Last Judgement, however, the economy Trinity will be finished and reabsorbed back into the immanent Trinity (this is still based on Moltmann) — all that will remain is the endless song of praise. Despite the attempt at symmetry, glory ultimately points toward that time when the economy will be over with and just as in the profane sphere, glory as such belongs only to Reign, not Governance. Yet glorification is necessarily mutual. The center of this mutual glorification of Reign and Governance is just a void — “glory is only the splendor that emanates from that void, the unexhausted kabod that both reveals and veils the central vacuity of the machine [of mutual glorification].” Agamben shows that this same logic is at work in Protestant theology with reference to Barth’s section on glory in Church Dogmatics II/1 — which also transfers glory out of the political realm and into the aesthetic.

Agamben sees this aestheticization of glory serves a crucial role in the debate over the relationship between God’s inherent glory and the glory human worshippers give him. Agamben notes that wherever there is glory, there is also glorification. But why? The traditional answer is because God is worthy of praise — a circular answer in which “glorification is owed to glory because, in some way, it derives from it.” (A footnote relates this to the distinction between creation’s internal order and its ordering according to God.) Agamben claims that Barth attempts to escape from this vicious circle and in so doing actually brings it to its most extreme point, completely overturning the Lutheran warning against a theology of glory — human glorification is to be understood ultimately as the work of God, yet the only freedom of humanity is found in this very act of divine self-glorification. Thus the life of the creature is ultimately obedience. Despite Barth’s activism against Nazism, Agamben sees this logic as identical to that of earthly power — the sovereign deserves glorification inherently, without needing it.

This is the paradox of glory: the goal of all God’s action is solely his glory, which nevertheless is always already at a point of absolute fullness. The Jesuit motto is illustrative of this paradox. Ad majorem Dei gloriam — but God’s glory is already at the highest possible point! The concrete result is a flurry of activity meant to glorify God, activity that can never be enough. Post-tridentine theology in general tends to place the same accent on human glorification, which corresponds to an increasing interweaving between church and secular power and to an image of God as a kind of “eternal Caesar” who uses humanity as an instrument of his glory. (A footnote shows that Leibniz also holds to the concept of a God who is greedy for glory.) Among other sources, Agamben quotes the Oxford theologian Eric Mascall, who claims that neither the knowledge nor the love of God can be the ultimate end of humanity after the last judgment, because both necessarily include self-regard — only the pure glorification of God can truly fit the bill, and this is because it does neither God nor humans any good!

There follows an analysis of several liturgical acclamations like the Gloria or Te Deum, which he argues (along with other scholars) have secular origins — and which have also been used on “secular” occasions, normally when people were overwhelmed by an unexpected victory. It’s
unclear to me what the role of these sections in the present context is, since he’s already established that the liturgy includes a ton of acclamations in the previous chapter.

From here, he turns to some unfinished works of Mauss on prayer, which falls into a kind of negative sweet spot — anthropologists don’t want to analyse it because it’s not a “primitive” enough form of religion, but theologians obviously don’t have the same goals as scientific analysts. What emerges is a kind of zone of indistinction between magic (using words to directly effect the desired results) and religion (using words to get the gods to do something for you) — i.e., the idea that prayer and sacrifice directly produce the gods. This is a real turning point in Agamben’s argument, lending credence to the idea that, contrary to traditional theology, glorification is actually more originary than glory. The initial context of Mauss’s research is in Hinduism, but such a notion is also found in rabbinic Judaism and Kabbalah, where the point isn’t the creation of God ex nihilo but rather that God actually needs worship in order to maintain his strength and keep from decaying.

At this point, Agamben says that his point here is not to demonstrate that religion originates in the attempt to create Gods, etc. — nor in fact is his point to prove definitively the Schmittian thesis that political concepts are secularized theological concepts, because his readers should be sufficiently convinced that political problems are at least clarified to some extent by the reference to theology. With this in mind, it should be clear that glorification isn’t an ornament of power, but is absolutely required. Yet the question now is how liturgy “makes” power, that is to say, to specify exactly what role it plays in the governmental machine constituted by the poles of Reign and Governance.

Further confusing me, Agamben then immediately decides to analyze the term “amen,” the ultimate acclamation in the Judeo-Christian tradition. The analysis is interesting in itself, but more interesting is his footnote on Jesus’ reverse usage in the Gospels — rather than respond to something with “amen,” Jesus will say, “Amen amen I say to you…..” Agamben believes it is possible that this is a conscious messianic reversal of the acclamation into an affirmation, “of the doxology that approves and repeats into a position that, at least in appearance, innovates and transgresses.”

We then return to some Mauss stuff, specifically his analysis of Hindu theories of divine nutrition. All of this Hindu material is very interesting and makes me want to do some research into it, but my lack of background knowledge makes it difficult for me to summarize. The “take-away” seems to be, yet again, that the gods actually require worship, that glorification makes the gods, etc. Jumping around still more, a section and the following footnote juxtapose Rilke’s putting the elegy in the form of a hymn and Hölderlin’s putting hymns into the form of elegies — yet another area where you the blog-reader are put at a disadvantage by my lack of knowledge. Here the “take-away” is that the hymn is the suspension of linguistic meaning, rendering it inoperative. (Hölderlin’s elegiac hymns are a kind of mourning for the loss of meaning — Rilke’s hymnic elegies simply testify to his loss of meaning. I guess.)

Agamben then begins his focus on the theme of inoperativity [inoperosità], which takes up the whole rest of the chapter. Throughout, we have seen that glory and inoperativity are connected — the end of the divine economy of salvation corresponds with a situation in which there is
nothing but glory left, for instance. In Judaism, the Sabbath shows that inoperativity is the “dimension most proper as much to God as to humanity.” It’s not the work of creation, but the rest that is commemorated and called holy — and the sabbath-rest is the eschatological end as well. The letter to the Hebrews shows the same logic, binding together glory, inoperativity, and eschatology even more closely. (Here he annoyingly attributes it to Paul, though with a parenthetical “or whoever wrote it.” He puts great importance on Paul as the chapter goes on — doesn’t it make a difference if he didn’t really write this?) Augustine also struggles with the problem of inoperativity at the end of City of God.

The last problem remaining is the intimate relationship between glory and Sabbath. Beyond the fact that the post-Judgment, glory-only condition of humanity and divinity is defined as a Sabbath, Agamben sees the maintenance of the void of glory as a crucial part of the governmental machine of Reign and Governance. This is graphically illustrated by the motif of the empty throne, which occurs in both secular and ecclesiastical contexts — in the latter, it has a distinctively eschatological edge to it. In any case, Agamben sees it as a symbol of glory as such, rather than of royalty. Inoperativity, after the last Judgment, is shown to “constitute the ultimate mystery of divinity. And glory is just as much objective glory, which the divine inoperativity exhibits, as glorification, in which human inoperativity also celebrates its eternal sabbath. The theological apparatus of glory coincides here with the profane and, according to the intention that has guided our research, we can now make use of it as an epistemological paradigm that can permit us to penetrate the central secret of power.” (I guess this would be a compressed statement of his methodology.)

The upshot: glory as inoperativity is necessary to the exercise of power because of the constitutive inoperativity of humanity. It is because humans don’t have a “use” or “job” that we are enabled to be so incredibly active. Just as the theological apparatus needs the central void of glory to function, so also “the governmental apparatus functions because it has captured in its central void the inoperativity of the human essence.” (A footnote finds this notion of the inoperativity of humanity in Aristotle’s Nicomachean Ethics.)

Okay, so: problem solved. What remains, though, is whether it is possible to think this inoperativity outside “the apparatus of glory.” Agamben believes that the key to this is the idea found as much in Judaism as in the New Testament: eternal life, or in Greek, zōē aiōnios. [Sorry for all these literalistic paraphrases/translations of "tanto... che..." expressions.] Agamben sees in the term aiōnios not so much a temporal as a qualitative significance — and he believes that for Paul, “eternal life” is not only a future condition, but “the special quality of life in messianic time,” the now-time. The messianic life is marked by the inoperativity denoted by the Pauline ὕση μὴ, as if not. Since the messiah has fulfilled the law and rendered it inoperative, all juridical relations are marked by the ὕση μὴ for members of the messianic community. This amounts to the revocation of every ἔθος, every determined form of life, in favor of the zōē tou Iesou — inoperativity is actually the messianic operation par excellence. [This part of my notes borders on paraphrase moreso than most.] Paul’s description of the eschatological status of the body is a key point illustrating where the Christian tradition betrays his messianism and turns it into glory — what he leaves completely open, they begin to define, prescribing a determined form to the “glorious body.”
Using Spinoza, Agamben refines the notion of inoperativity. The contemplation of one’s own pure possibility is the essence of inoperativity, and the “self” or “subject” is the void of inoperativity at the heart of all action. In inoperativity, “bios corresponds without residue with zōē.” Thus we can understand the importance of contemplation in the Western tradition — it is “the metaphysical operator of anthropogenesis, which, liberating the living man from his biological and social destiny, assigns him to that indefinable dimension what we are accustomed to call political…. Zōē aïōnios, eternal life, is the name of that inoperative center of the human, of that political ‘substance’ of the West that the machine of economy and glory seeks incessantly to capture within itself.” (One footnote connects this inoperativity to poetry, and another says that the failure of Heidegger’s analysis of technology stems from his failure to think the properly political stakes of economy.)

**Threshold**

Agamben believes that his inquiry can, at least provisionally, come to a stop here, because he has exposed “the machine that glory covers over with its splendor and its songs.” Yet it seems as though glory is in decline — public ceremonials still exist, but they are increasingly simplified and irrelevant. Though it was only within the last hundred years that “glory” made a major comeback in Nazism and Fascism — he asks whether any acclamation had ever been made as sincerely as the “Heil Hitler” or “Duce duce” — even that seems to be a distant world that is irrevocably gone.

*Or is it?* Carl Schmitt, in his *Constitutional Theory*, discusses the constitutive role of acclamation in democracy, a role that is present already in Rousseau. The classic public assemblies of yore no longer happen, of course, so Schmitt proposes that “public opinion” is the modern equivalent of acclamation. Though he admits that there is always the danger of a manipulation of public opinion, he believes that even a corrupted public opinion fulfills the acclamatory role that is necessary for the state to have legitimacy — especially in light of the fact that the state is founded on the friend/enemy distinction and not on accuracy in reporting. Agamben notes that the inclusion of acclamation in the democratic tradition seems bizarre initially, but in light of his genealogy, it appears that glory has not disappeared from modern democracy but simply escaped into another realm, that of public opinion.

If this is the case, then the question of the media becomes even more urgent than before. Agamben of course refers here to Guy Debord’s *Society of the Spectacle*, which he says now seems more accurate than ever. When we combine Debord with Schmitt, we see that what was once confined to ceremonies and liturgies is now proliferating everywhere. (He notes that perhaps it’s not an accident that one term for public opinion is *doxa*.) Just as was the case with previous political systems, the supposedly democratic moment of acclamation is captured by the governmental machine. This is illustrated by a debate between Habermas and the constitutional scholar Dieter Grimm about the question of a European constitution. Grimm maintains that the lack of a common language doesn’t allow for the emergence of a common political culture and thus a European constitution cannot be established because it would lack the element of acclamation. Habermas argues on the contrary that Grimm is stuck in an outdated model and that popular sovereignty has now liberated itself and become public opinion (I think that’s what Agamben’s saying here).
In both cases, there’s the element of glory, though differently conceived — meaning that both ultimately run the risk of winding up agreeing with Schmitt and Peterson, completely against their intentions. (Agamben claims that this is illustrative of the risk people run by not doing the necessary genealogical work.) The term “government by consent” is interesting, too, because the first time the term appears as a technical political term is in the *Res gestae Augusti*, in Augustus’s account of being proclaimed emperor — consensus names the acclamation. It all points toward the notion of contemporary democracy — by consensus, of the spectacle — as a “glorious democracy, in which the *oikonomia* has been completely dissolved into glory, and the doxological function, emancipating itself from liturgy and ceremonial, is absolutized to an unheard-of degree and penetrates into every area of social life.” In our democracy, “the people” ultimately amounts to acclamation or glory, under whatever form.

What remains, then, is an investigation of the “eternal life” that glory covers over, which is to say a thinking of the political “starting from an inoperative disarticulation as much of *bios* as of *zôê***.”

**Appendix: The economy of the moderns**

1. **Law and miracle**

Reading the first appendix, my impression is that this is actually a very important part of his genealogical argument, but he was not able to find a way to incorporate it smoothly into the structure of the book overall -- a structure that is in any case pretty weird. Rereading Negri’s review once I am finished should be interesting.

Based on Pascal’s acerbic remarks about it, Agamben outlines the early modern controversy among Jesuits, Molinists, Thomists, and Jansenists about grace, which was based on the distinction between sufficient grace (which gives us “enough” grace to act correctly without forcing us to) and efficacious grace (which does force us to do what God wants). For Agamben, this is really a question of the divine governance of the world rather than of salvation as such, and it is in this context that Malebranche’s *Tractate on Nature and Grace* must be understood. He analyzes the text at great length, including super-long blockquotes, but the main point is that Malebranche is directly continuing the tradition of thought Agamben has been tracing throughout. A particular point of interest is Malebranche’s desire to keep the number of miracles to the absolute minimum, in the interests of elegance and order — he proposes that apparent violations of God’s general law/will are actually in the service of the will of God that put angels in charge of governing the world. That is to say, miracles are really interventions of angels and as such part of the overarching order, and Agamben sees in this a perfect foreshadowing of Schmitt’s theory of the exception that is still somehow within the legal order. The continuation of the tradition of theological economy is especially clear in the role Malebranche gives to Christ, which is basically that of administration. Agamben then traces the same ideas in the debate between Leibniz and Bayle, in what seems to be a further attempt to show that this stuff was pretty pervasive during the period.

The real payoff of the chapter is that it provides the “point of contact” where the theological paradigm was explicitly carried over into the political: namely, Rousseau’s *Social Contract*,

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specifically his distinction between the general will and the particular will, sovereignty and governance, which is parallel with the distinction between general providence and particular providence. Agamben notes that Foucault, in *Security, Territory, Population*, interprets Rousseau’s text as a key transformation in the notion of sovereignty and argues that his (Agamben’s) genealogical work allows us to see the stakes much more clearly. It is through Rousseau that “the economico-providential apparatus (with its polarities ordination / execution, providence / fate, Reign / Governance) … is transmitted as an inheritance to modern politics, without benefit of an inventory” [a loose paraphrase]. The unconsciousness of this genealogy has left modern politics unable to think the real relation between governance and economy (and in fact to think of them as distinct things in the first place when they’re actually not). Modern political thought consistently repeats the mistake of Christian theology, which made glory the foundation of glorification: “What our research has, in fact, shown is that the true problem, the central secret of the political is not sovereignty, but governance, is not God, but the angel, is not the king, but the minister, is not the law, but the police — or, the governmental machine that these form and keep in movement.”

[I will note here that in a forthcoming essay in *Telos*, I argue that in *Homo Sacer* and *State of Exception*, Agamben was busy making the very mistake he now castigates and that a more attentive reading of "Critique of Violence" in its own terms, rather than an attempt to shoehorn it into Schmitt's, would've resulted in a more elegant and convincing argument in those two books. The question now is whether this book really represents a change in position on Agamben's part - - and I think it does, at least on the face of it.]

One footnote clarifies that popular sovereignty comes from the theological-economic paradigm and dynastic sovereignty comes from the theological-political paradigm. Another shows that Rousseau was conscious of his religious borrowings.

2. The invisible hand

This brief appendix points toward ways in which the modern concept of economy can be linked to the theological concept, though Agamben leaves the full genealogy to other scholars.

At first glance, it appears that the modern term “economy” does not come from any of the sources Agamben has been investigating, but rather to have emerged *ex novo* from the texts of philosophers and economists. Nevertheless, Agamben believes there are subterranean connections that can be brought to light. His genealogy basically goes from Linnaeus, to the physiocrats, to Adam Smith. Linnaeus used the term “economy of nature” to mean essentially what the providential apparatus was getting at — the correlation of general laws with specific cases in a harmonious way. In a later work, Linnaeus uses *politia naturae* in a parallel sense. In all cases, he refers specifically to the creator who has established this order. The physiocrats bring this logic into what we now consider the “economic” realm — notably, one of the main physiocrats, Quesnay, was actually a physician. So in addition to being clearly influenced by Malebranche, he carries Linnaeus’s concept of economy into his work. Another physiocrat, Le Trosne, uses the term “social order” in much the same way — Agamben makes much of his use of “the government of order,” which he takes to be a double genetive reflecting the logic of “order” in Aquinas. The final step is Adam Smith’s “invisible hand,” which again plays the same
role of coordinating individual contingent choices into a harmonious totality — and it has clear theological roots traceable from the Bible to Augustine, Aquains, and Luther, all the way to Bousset.

The difference from the explicitly theological apparatus of providence is that liberalism denigrates Regno more and more in favor of Governo. However, “the economy that derives from it has not thereby been liberated from its providential paradigm” — it just emphasizes one half of the apparatus over against the other. “In the same sense, in modern Christian theology forces are at work that push Christology into an almost atheological element: but, even in that case, the theological model is not surpassed.”

Agamben concludes by claiming that the advent of modernity resembles a cabalistic account of the fall, wherein Adam first abstracts Reign from all the other divine attributes, then seizes that truncated divinity for himself. That is what makes messianic redemption necessary. Modernity — secularism, popular consent, etc. — does not make sense from the perspective of theology, but Agamben’s archeological operation is able to show what’s going on and thereby render the entire apparatus inoperative. Finally, he quotes at great length the theologian who he believes has pushed the theological apparatus to a point where it is almost identical with modernity, Bousset. The result of Bousset’s operation is that “God has made the world as if it were without God and governs it as if it governed itself.” In this sense, then, modernity is actually the fulfillment of the providential oikonomia.